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ART HISTORY
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
ARTS

Modern in the Making

MoMA and the Modern Experiment,
1929–1949

Austin Porter and Sandra Zalman

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Remediating the Body: Performance, Photography, and the Dance Archives at MoMA

Swagato Chakravorty

In her introduction to the inaugural 2016 volume in the Museum of Modern Art's *Modern Dance* series,¹ the museum's associate director, Kathy Halbreich, presents a brief survey of the "long, if discontinuous" history of performance art—specifically, dance—at the museum. Although she underscores the affiliation between performance and the museum, she acknowledges the irregular and sparsely documented nature of that relationship before concluding with a hopeful gesture toward the future: the museum's plans for further expansion will, for the first time in the institution's ninety-year history, provide a space specifically designed to support the demands of performance art. Halbreich notes that this "space will be located in the middle of a sequence of galleries containing contemporary painting, sculpture, works on paper, photography, design, architecture, video, and film," before reaffirming her view that "the history of modern dance, music, and theater will be intimately and routinely connected to that of other art forms."²

While the new space will dramatically expand the possibilities for performance and other forms of "live" art at the museum, in this chapter I look at how MoMA negotiated the challenges issued by performance art in the 1930s and 1940s, before there existed any coherent critical discourse on the subject. The extant critical literature on the subject of performance at MoMA in the institution's early years remains sparse.³ My own research in this area takes as its guiding principle a definition of performance proposed in 2016 by a cross-departmental group of MoMA Collection Specialists that understood performance as "an event [or events] that could include a diverse range of actions, movements, gestures, and choreography occurring in real time, often later represented through various forms of video, photo, objects, or written documentation."⁴ Based on this categorization, the history of performance and live art at the museum, when more thoroughly documented and historicized, holds significant potential for radically revising both critical and vernacular accounts of the institution's participation in, and contributions to, discourses on the histories of modern art.

I focus here on one exhibition from 1942: *Dancers in Movement: Photographs by Gjon Mili* (January 13–April 9), which exemplifies competing disciplinary discourses, intermediality, and at its most expansive offers an opportunity to understand how

performance came to be itself through mediation and remediation, rather than disappearance.⁵ Such connections between performance and the plastic arts emerge clearly in *Dancers in Movement*, a relatively small installation of photographs that, like no other MoMA exhibition before, emphasized the centrality of the performing body to the fact of performance. In its radical visualization of bodies in movement—achievable through recent photographic technological advancements—this exhibition succeeded in making performance legible within the space of the art museum beyond performance-as-spectacle. Specifically, I argue that the exhibition was more than just a photographic survey of performance; it marked a crucial point in the history of the museum that inaugurated a new horizon in the institutional acknowledgment of performance as art.

Imaging Performance/Performance as Image

The photographs by Gjon Mili that comprised the *Dancers in Movement* exhibition brought together several questions crucial to making performance visible—tangible even—within the institutional space of an art museum that, until then, mostly observed performance as ancillary to the other arts: how might an art museum ordinarily concerned with objects acknowledge an object-less art? What if this art, despite its objectless-ness, is remediated through documentation into object forms? And what of the spectator's encounter with the artwork, which traditionally has taken the form of sustained attention granted to specific objects? Examining *Dancers in Movement* against its broader institutional context (particularly the founding of the Dance Archives in 1939), we can see how the exhibition, fugitively perhaps, foregrounded performance within the museum's purview. Understanding the remediating function of documentation further offers some indications on how performance might continue to be addressed today not just by MoMA, but by art museums in general.

"Exhibition of Ultra-speed Photographs of Dance Movements ..." so runs the title of the press release announcing the opening of Mili's exhibition in MoMA's Auditorium Gallery on January 13, 1942.⁶ The sentence is striking, drawing within its orbit an intersection of art, technology, and the latest developments in science, as well as elements of performance. Curated by Paul Magriel, who until 1942 oversaw the Dance Archives at the museum, the installation surveyed Mili's photographic work from 1938 through 1941 by organizing the images into three general groups. The individual photographs that made up the exhibition, thirty-five in all, are not dated in the checklist, which provides brief descriptive titles ("Group #2 12. Alicia Markova I; Down Beat—Franziska Boas," etc.). The lack of specificity and didactic material concerning individual photographs (and individuals photographed) is suggestive. The emphasis appears to have been on the photographic documentation of performances, on the aesthetic appeal of these innovative photographs themselves. This exhibition, built around photographs that each documented some musical or dance performance, and curated under the auspices of the Dance Archives, adroitly triangulated key elements of liveness, documentation, and spectatorship. At a time when dance and performance were simply not acknowledged—formally—by the museum as belonging

within its galleries, by the terms of *Dancers in Movement*, spectators encountered performance as art, within the space of the gallery.

The photographs were complimented by just three introductory placards (Figure 7.1). No wall text accompanied individual images, and no mention appears to have been made of details including which specific performances were represented, much less the dates of their production. Overall, the exhibition spanned Mili's photographs of noted dancers and performers of the day: Martha Graham, Irina Baronova, Franziska Boas, as well as brief excursions beyond the Western context (i.e., "Group #1 5. Hindu Dance—Bhupesh Guha"). From the exhibition press release, we know that the photographs included "all phases of the dance: folk, social, and theatrical."⁷ Following the exhibition's tenure at MoMA through April 9, 1942, the Department of Circulating Exhibitions sent the exhibition on tour across the United States. An unsigned memo (likely written on behalf of Magriel) addressed to Mili gives an indication of how widely the exhibition traveled: museums and galleries in Seattle, San Francisco, Chicago, Columbus, and other cities.⁸

The exhibition's uniqueness was further advanced by the relatively unknown (within fine art circles) identity of the photographer whose work formed the basis of the installation. Gjon Mili was born in Albania and had come to the United States



Figure 7.1 Installation view of the exhibition *Dancers in Movement: Photographs by Gjon Mili* (January 13–April 9, 1942). Photographic Archive, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.

in 1923 at the age of nineteen, training as a photographer under Harold Edgerton at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Edgerton, though a specialist in electrical engineering, had already received popular attention for photographs such as *Milk-drop Coronet* (1936; Figure 7.2), which relied on a stroboscopic lighting technique and modifications to the photographic apparatus to capture the crown-like splash of a falling milk drop. His technological innovations had reduced photographic exposure times to less than one-millionth of a second. At MIT, Mili helped develop

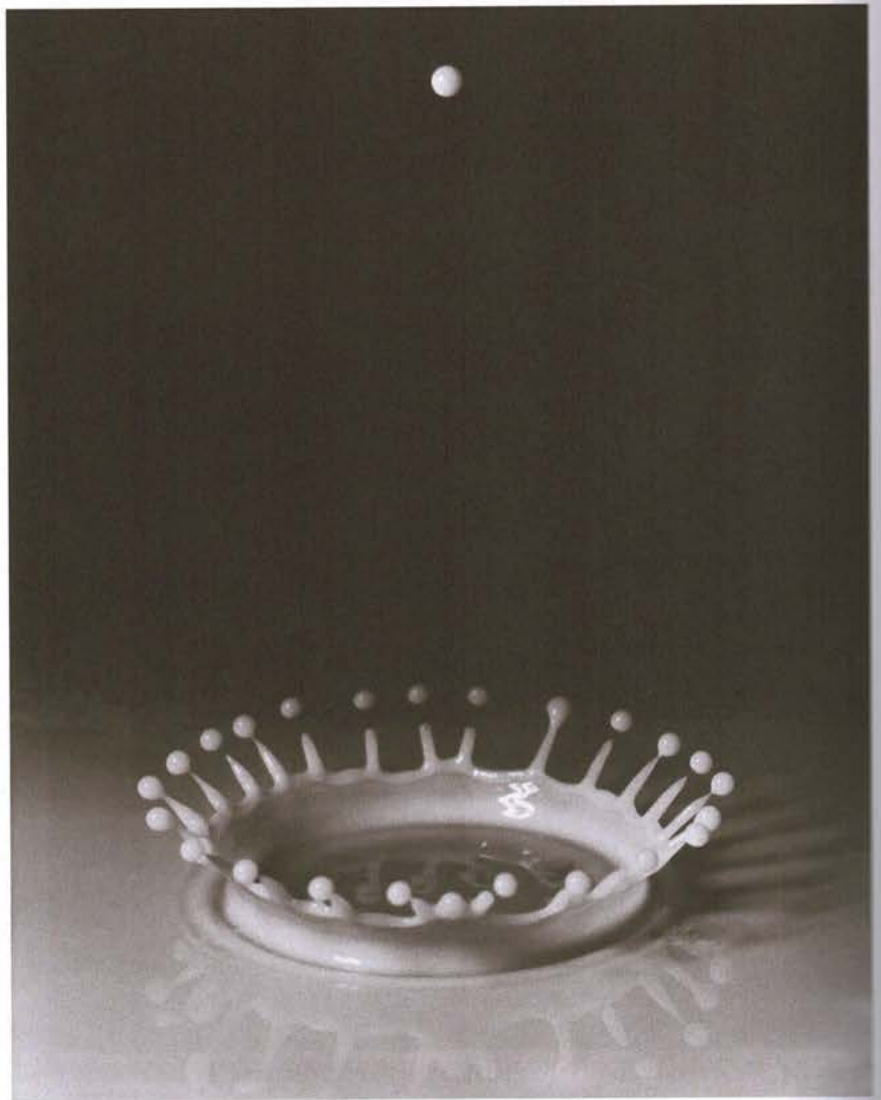


Figure 7.2 Harold Edgerton (1903–1990). *Milk-Drop Coronet*, 1936, photographic print / © MIT, courtesy Palm Press, Inc.

Edgerton's research, focusing particularly on artificial lighting and its applications in ultra-high-speed photography. Following his training with Edgerton, and for most of his professional life, Mili worked as a freelance photographer for *Life* magazine. His subjects varied widely and included artists, athletes, musicians, actors, and dancers. Although his work often captured movement, Mili's approach does not merely recall the chronophotographic work of Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge from the turn of the century. Rather, Mili's photographs—whether they freeze movement into a singular, crystal-clear image or whether they (more characteristically) convey a tremendous rush of motion—seem to magnify time itself.⁹

We can see how this plays out in two photographs from *Dancers in Movement*. First, consider Mili's photograph of the dancers José Limon and Charles Weidman (Figure 7.3).¹⁰ The two figures are caught midair, arms and legs extended

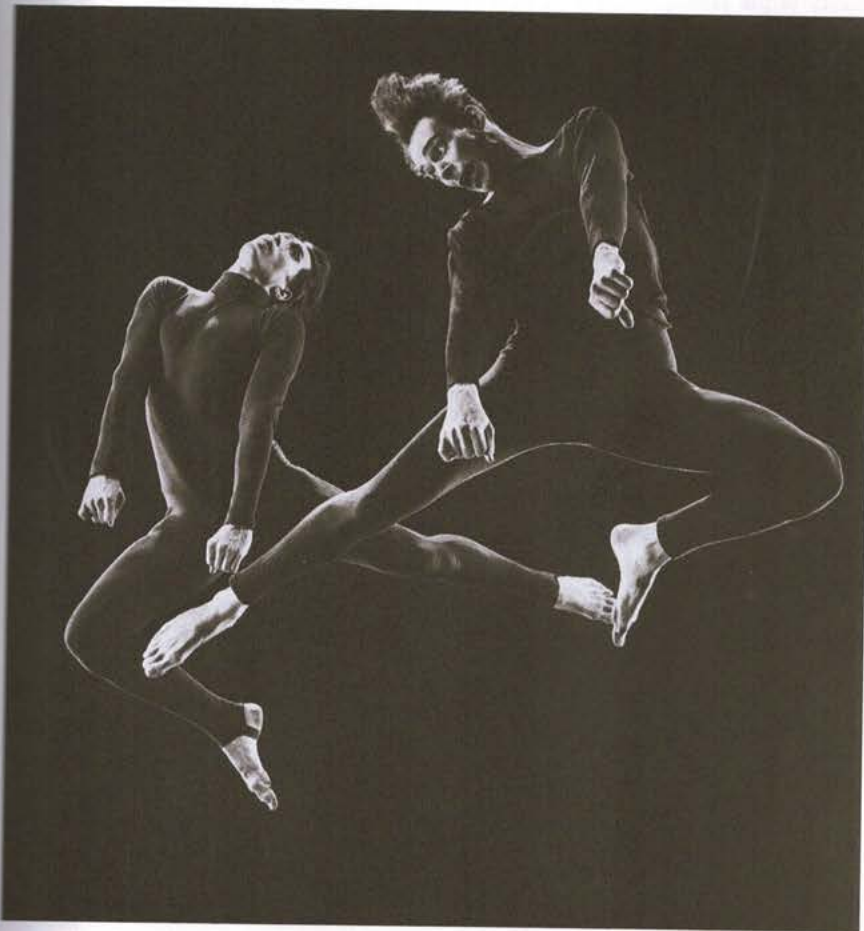


Figure 7.3 Gjon Mili (1904–1984). *José Limon and Charles Weidman*, c 1939, photograph. Getty Images / Bettmann / Gjon Mili.

in near-identical but mirrored poses. Their arrangement in three-dimensional space suggests a clockwise rotation, left to right: each dancer has one leg extended and the other bent inward such that the contraction of the one seems to meet the extension of the other in space. Spread across the frame of a two-dimensional photograph, the dancers' bodies echo each other: Limon's right knee juts out toward the left edge of the frame, and Weidman's left knee likewise gestures to the right edge. Their dark costumes mostly blend into the black background (always featureless in Mili's photographs and thus ever suggestive of an uncanny absence or void that, in turn, emphasizes the obdurate physicality of the performing body or bodies before it). Strobe lighting illuminates the dancers' bodies along the edges, lending them a kind of cut-out quality. Were it not for the beholder's intimate, almost haptic, understanding of how fleeting such a pose—body stretched in midair, probably two or three feet off the floor—would be in reality, it would be easy to imagine these bodies in repose. The sharp overall clarity of the photograph with its stark lighting, those edge-lit forms, and the pure flatness of the background together produce an impression not merely of stillness, but

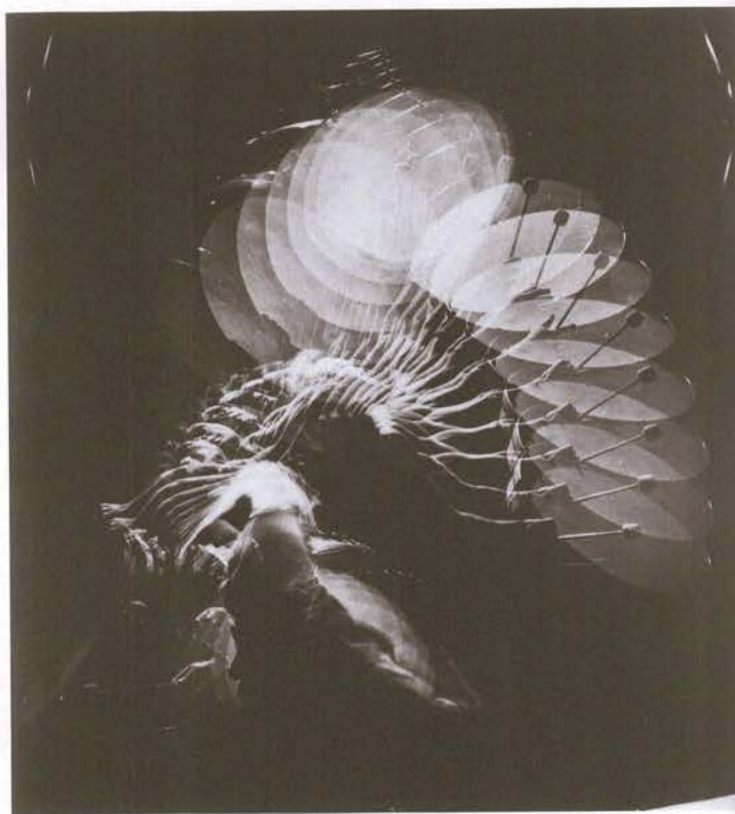


Figure 7.4 Gjon Mili (1904–1984). *Down Beat – Franziska Boas*, c 1940, photograph. Getty Images / The LIFE Picture Collection / Gyon Mili.

rather of suspension. Even more acutely, the photograph reads as an instant of time unnaturally stretched out—magnified—and made available for scrutiny.

At the other end of the spectrum lies his photograph of Franziska Boas, the pioneering dancer and percussionist (Figure 7.4).¹¹ In sharp contrast to the clearly delineated forms of Limon and Weidman, it is difficult to even locate Boas precisely within this photograph. The initial impression is of a blurred sweeping arc of movement. Upon closer inspection, forms begin to reveal themselves, including a brief arc of ghostly faces—Boas caught in a spasm of motion. Similarly, a wide swathe marked out by the descent of shapes is produced by the rims and surfaces of a drum. Linking the vagueness of Boas's torso and face to the lower left and this prominent arch of the musical instrument is a delicate filigree of spindle-like forms: her arm and the drumstick it holds. Mili's photograph tracks the full exuberance of face, body, hands, and drumsticks as it unfolds in space and time. In a single photograph, Mili compresses a range of movement that is ordinarily invisible but is here laid out, at once sequential yet a continuous whole. Here we find the third way through movement analysis that Mili carved out between Marey and Muybridge. Unlike Muybridge's serialized photographs that undid the continuous flow of movement by separating its phases and delinking them from each other, and unlike, too, Marey's distanced, analytical images, Mili's technique here arrests the flash of performance in the moment of its passage, rendering it a tangible object available to our gaze. If these "chronophotographs" (to indulge an anachronism) convey the energetic physicality of performance, then at the other end, they equally drive home the absolute precision required of those same physiques. And yet both perform a crucial materialization of what is otherwise ephemeral. Mili's ultra-high-speed photography allows us to read performance as image.

In her landmark essay "The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction," Peggy Phelan avers that "performance's only life is in the present." Any documentation of performance "becomes something other than performance." She further argues that no document or record of performance can ever amount to the performance itself, but only ever remains "an encouragement of memory to become present."¹² And yet this particular exhibition, at this precise historical moment—when no critical history of performance art, including what forms of spectatorship it activated or what genealogies of display it interrupted had yet been articulated—offers an opportunity to explore an alternative to Phelan's strict binary of performance/not-performance. Perhaps the life of performance is not limited to the time of its unfolding.

I have been arguing that the "new media" of Mili's photographic practice, combined with the exhibition installation's lack of context for the subjects of his photographs, in effect reorganized the terms of its spectatorial encounter as one with the image of performance itself. My argument draws on Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's groundbreaking work on contemporary new media, in which they propose that "the representation of one medium in another" is a process of "remediation." As new media remediates older media, it seeks to "get past the limits of representation and achieve the real." However, this is a very specific definition of the real "in terms of the viewer's experience." As Bolter and Grusin put it, "[The real] is that which evokes an immediate (and therefore authentic) emotional response." In order to do so, new media reaches

toward excessiveness—they cite the audiovisual surfeit of early MTV video culture by way of example—as the very process by which remediation reconfigures the terms of encounter between audiences (or spectators) and media. This excess “becomes an authentic experience, not in the sense that it corresponds to an external reality, but rather precisely because it does not feel compelled to refer to anything outside itself.”¹³

The sparse installation aesthetics of *Dancers in Movement* should not be viewed as a curious lack of curatorial attention, but rather an occasion for the elusive “stuff” of performance—the variable temporality of bodies in movement—to come to the fore, unconstrained by narratives that would ordinarily limit each photograph to the status of a specific document of a specific performance. The new media of Mili’s ultra-high-speed photography, together with the exhibitionary structure of *Dancers in Movement*, remediated performance itself, seeking in the very excessiveness of that photography to evoke a different relation of spectator to performer (and to performance): an “authentic experience” that did not “refer to anything outside itself.” These photographs were the very image of performance, made available to the spectator as never before.

Nonetheless, Phelan’s account of the ontology of performance leaves open an obvious question: what happens after the event? Here we must return to the question of documentation, which continues to make available the material of performance art after the performance itself is over. For it was photographic documentation, after all, that made possible Mili’s remediation of performance, spanning the extremes from minute scrutiny of precise slices of movement in space and time to encompass the wholeness of motion itself. The results allowed MoMA the unprecedented opportunity to (re-)present performance within the gallery space. The work of the Dance Archives—founded three years prior to *Dancers in Movement*—allowed for a radical institutional reconfiguration of performance in relation to other, more established arts. And finally, *Dancers in Movement* enabled audiences to access “performance’s being” in its range and complexity, considering it alongside, and in tension with, the forms and vocabulary of the other arts. But to have a clearer sense of how this exhibition mattered beyond showcasing advanced technological developments in photography, to understand why these photographs of performance amounted to more than the sum of their parts, we must consider *Dancers in Movement* against the broader context of performance history in MoMA’s earliest years.

The Dance Archives

Surveying art museums today, one readily notes the prominence of programming, exhibitions, and discursive spaces constructed around performance art and other forms of “live” media practices. However, if today the general public flocks to highly visible performances and live events exhibited within museum walls, and if critics can speak of performance’s “institutionalization,”¹⁴ it is surely because we now have a certain critical purchase on what counts as performance. We have a vocabulary with which to think of, and write about, performance. This is a sensibility informed by the histories of Happenings, expanded cinema, postminimalism, and other avant-garde practices.

In the 1930s, however, the situation was very different. In fact, one may trace another, less material history—call it an underground history—of distinctly different museological interests that traveled well beyond traditional mediums. This history begins hesitantly, somewhat alongside the institution's official curatorial program as special events or accompaniments to other, more primary events. As early as December 1932, for instance, Edna Thomas and Gale Huntington performed street cries and folk songs to accompany a lecture on American folk art delivered by Regionalist painter Thomas Hart Benton. This event accompanied Holger Cahill's exhibition, *The Art of the Common Man*.¹⁵ Likewise, the singer Concha Michel performed "native songs of Mexico" to accompany a stereopticon lecture on ancient American art, presented by Herbert Spinden of the Brooklyn Museum in conjunction with the 1933 exhibition *American Sources of Modern Art*.¹⁶

It was not until 1936 that live art appeared at MoMA in a self-contained, freestanding manner with the famous exhibit of *Edward Steichen's Delphiniums* (June 24–July 1). This exhibition was considered so unusual by the museum that the press release announcing its opening contained remarkable wording: "[T]o avoid confusion, it should be noted that the actual delphiniums will be shown in the Museum—not paintings or photographs of them. It will be a 'personal appearance' [*sic*] of the flowers themselves."¹⁷ The amusing language of personification indicates something else, namely, that while Steichen was known as a photographer, the institution considered his horticultural work—a living medium—wholly distinct from other exhibitions organized under its curatorial purview. Live art was not, on this account, admissible within the museum. You couldn't dance in the gallery.

This adjunct status of performance in relation to MoMA's curatorial program fundamentally changed with the foundation of the Dance Archives in 1939. Lincoln Kirstein, a member of the museum's Advisory Committee who would later found the New York City Ballet, donated to the museum's library a large amount of material comprising "1,515 volumes, 1,631 prints, 1,212 photographs, 238 stereopticon views, 6 sculptures, 780 lantern slides, 19 films, 200 programs, music-covers, etc. and miscellaneous items that cannot be readily classified."¹⁸ This material, supplemented by numerous further additions, soon took the form of the Dance Archives under the custody of Paul Magriel.¹⁹ In 1942, he was succeeded by George Amberg, who helped transform the Dance Archives into a full-fledged curatorial department: the Department of Dance and Theatre Design. By 1946, this would become the Department of Theatre Arts, before being dissolved by the museum in 1948. At the time of its dissolution, the institution cited unsustainable costs of operating the department and distributed its holdings across the library and other curatorial departments.²⁰

The founding of the Dance Archives marked a crucial shift in MoMA's relation to performance in two clear ways: first, the sheer mass of documentary material provided by Kirstein allowed the institution to recognize a tangible corpus that gave historical evidence of an art that was otherwise difficult, if not impossible, to make legible within the walls of an object-centered art museum. Second—and following from this—it provided a path toward developing a curatorial program that might facilitate future performances in ways that encouraged greater visitor engagement. Until this point, visitors to the delphinium exhibit or a musical performance could—by the terms the

museum had set for itself—only experience them as novelty programs that either constituted a deviation from the institution's official curatorial operations or else as supporting some other "main" exhibition.

One primary reason why performance before the founding of the Dance Archives remained ancillary within the museum's institutional purview was the lack of material infrastructure. Archival records relating to the founding and brief existence of the Dance Archives include one substantial document likely composed in mid-1940, which offered a full articulation of the vision of the Dance Archives, including a summary of the remarkable rapidity with which its activities moved across curatorial and disciplinary lines.²¹ In the section titled "Purpose," which was likely composed by Paul Magriel, the author notes that:

the Museum of Modern Art Dance Archives ... will serve primarily as a bureau of research and information on the art, theory and practice of dancing. Consistent with the essential functions of the Museum of Modern Art, the emphasis on the collection housed here will be the dance in modern times and will stress particularly the body of information which concerns itself with the dance as a visual art.²²

A memo written by George Amberg in 1944 summarized the newly designated Department of Dance and Theatre Design, not only outlining its curatorial vision and operational details, but also arguing that the "collection is considered as part of the Museum collection, administered accordingly, with acquisitions submitted to the Acquisitions Committee."²³ In 1947, Amberg wrote a lengthy letter to René d'Harnoncourt, who had that year become the museum's Director of Curatorial Departments, once again mounting a spirited defense of the department. He concluded by insisting that "it should be appreciated that a curatorial department of this specific character is without precedent and parallel. Owing to its scope and definition, the Department is of a comparatively modest size, but ... it proves the capacity to function on the same level of significance and achievement as the Museum's other departments."²⁴

Across these writings, what emerges is a conviction—shared by Magriel and Amberg—that the holdings and activities of the Dance Archives amount to endowing performance (dance, in particular) with status on par with the other arts. They were not unjustified in this belief, for in 1935, the creation of the Film Library at MoMA had already achieved something similar for critical and vernacular attitudes to cinema. Film historian Haidee Wasson in her groundbreaking book *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Cinema* writes, "[W]hen the Film Library formed, no material infrastructure had been successfully built to secure lasting and studied attention to films themselves as had been done for paintings, sculptures, books, music, plays, and even photographs." Most importantly, the Film Library "declared film a modern art with an important history. It provided cinema a prominent institutional home alongside other traditional and emergent aesthetic forms ... MoMA asserted that this new modern art should be collected, saved, studied, and, most important, seen." To be sure, the history of MoMA in relation to cinema, and vice versa, has its own

nuances that I don't mean to overlook. The histories of MoMA's relations to cinema and performance are not isomorphic, given that performance has a much longer history than cinema. Yet there is some shared congruence: the Film Library was founded just three years before the Dance Archives; both were—somewhat surprisingly—founded before MoMA had a dedicated department of photography; both cinema and performance have confounded and continue to challenge art history, historiography, and the institutions of art.²⁵

It is in this sense that the founding of the Dance Archives enabled performance art to become more than a sideshow at the museum. Supported by the range of material infrastructure it constituted, and making use of documentary material, the museum could now exhibit photographs, prints, stage set designs, and other objects relating to performance within galleries in a manner that evoked the installation of more traditional media.²⁶ In a very elementary and yet fundamental sense, the Dance Archives permitted MoMA to begin rethinking the place of performance within the space of the museum. Relatedly, the archives unveiled opportunities for audiences—from the most disinterested visitor to the passionate critic or scholar—to apprehend performance, or the material traces thereof, alongside “the other arts.”

Although short-lived, under its different nomenclatures the Dance Archives produced a surprisingly diverse series of exhibitions that ranged fluidly across lines of media and geography, cutting through the institution's discipline-specific sense of programming. Through exhibitions like *Dance and Theatre Design* (1944), *Modern American Dance* (1945), *Stage Design by Robert Edmund Jones* (1945),²⁷ *Boris Aronson: Stage Designs and Models* (1947), and others, the Dance Archives contributed or directly exhibited objects including drawings, miniature models, projected slides and film reels, shadowboxes and transparencies, photographs, prints, ballet and costume sketches, and plans for stage lighting.

This heterodox approach to exhibition design is typical of MoMA's early history. Presciently—if by necessity—operating across media, and foregrounding the documentation of performance as a means for making legible performance itself, the curatorial practice of the Dance Archives advanced the critical proposition that performance must be approached as always already a conversation between *epistêmê* and *technê*: between art, science, and technology. These exhibitions showcased the intrinsically multimedia character of performance, its spectatorship, and its modes of recording, storage, and display while openly acknowledging the difficulties performance presented to ordinary museological practices of collection, archiving, and exhibition. The early work of the Dance Archives, in short, laid the groundwork for a vocabulary and a politics of performance within the art museum.

Dancing in the Museum

Aside from the Mili exhibition, no other exhibition in which the Dance Archives played a part focused as singularly on the human body—the body that remains at the indisputable center of all performance art. Although previous exhibitions did include photographic documentation of dance, they did not constitute any systematic discourse

on the body and movement in relation to performance and spectatorship. The very abstraction of Mili's photographs ungrounded the performers from the spatiotemporal specificity of the event of their performance. Against the black void, with time either expanded or compressed, it was the sheer conceptual mass of performance that took center stage. This effect was very likely enhanced by the organization of the photographs within the exhibition. As installation images show, the photographs were simply mounted on the wall in more or less linear fashion without accompanying wall text to identify details of individual events (Figure 7.5). No instruction appears to have been provided as to how visitors were expected to navigate the exhibition. Although later exhibitions certainly showcased the importance of technology, design, and architecture to performance art, they leaned mostly toward the apparatus of performance rather than the performing body. While stage sets, lighting plans, and proscenium design (exhibited, for instance, in 1948's *World of Illusion: Elements of Stage Design*) are certainly crucial to the theatrical arts, such exhibitions—befitting the operation of the Dance Archives by that point as the Department of Theatre Arts—did not focus on performance qua performance. The questions of physicality, stillness and motion, perception, the spectator's relation to performance, and the difficulties of representing performance that recur throughout Gjon Mili's work, and which in their



Figure 7.5 Installation view of the exhibition *Dancers in Movement: Photographs by Gjon Mili* (January 13–April 9, 1942). Photographic Archive, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.

range make *Dancers in Movement* so compelling, do not figure in most of the other exhibitions during the brief life of the Dance Archives.

From its inception and by virtue of the nature of the material donated by Lincoln Kirstein, the Dance Archives conceived of dance (and in a larger sense, performance) as something that resisted medium-specific definitions. We can trace this sensibility in the range of documentary material and other performance-related objects that, in exhibition after exhibition, gestured to the fact of performance, circled around performance, while also never quite displaying performance itself as an art to be seen in the gallery alongside the other arts. This was a sensibility that would develop slowly and in dispersed fashion across the museum.²⁸ *Dancers in Movement* came closest to an exhibition of performance itself, exceeding its material form as photographs of performance through sheer abstraction and the aesthetics of installation.

At a time when the flattening tendencies of digital technologies of art making, exhibition, and circulation threaten the specificities of media even as they open up exciting opportunities for conversations across disciplines, performance art—conceived at MoMA as inherently interdisciplinary and a counterpoint to the more object-based operations of its curatorial departments—now returns forcefully as a site from which the museum, and all who care about the unfolding histories of modern and contemporary art, may rethink the still-pertinent questions of performance and its afterlives. Between the moving body that was the subject of Gjon Mili's photographs and *Dancers in Movement*, which exhibited the indexical traces of that movement across the spectrum of animation, it is documentation that most compellingly remediates performance for the institutional spaces of the art museum. Visitors today attend, by the hundreds, major performances staged at prominent museums (the sensationalism that surrounded Marina Abramović's 2010 MoMA retrospective *The Artist Is Present* is a case in point).²⁹ And yet much of their appeal lies largely in audience documentation of the event; as Hal Foster remarks, "[W]hat is staged is less a historical performance than an image of that performance; the performance appears as a simulation, one destined to produce more images for circulation in the media (perhaps it is partly designed to do so)."³⁰ In this very novelty lies the danger of resurrecting the sideshow aspect that afflicted some of the earliest performances at MoMA, when neither curator nor visitor (nor, it must be said, trustee or board member) knew how to negotiate performance art.

Dancers in Movement: Photographs by Gjon Mili successfully argued that the documentary remediation of performance is as crucial to acknowledging the challenge of performance art as is witnessing the performing body in its liveness. It did so at a time when the Museum of Modern Art did not accord equal status to performance art; generally, live events and performances were presented as accompaniments to exhibitions and were frequently cordoned off or otherwise marked as "separate."³¹ In this regard, the lesson of 1942 remains a guideline as the Museum of Modern Art ambitiously expands and reaffirms its commitment to better accommodating performance art within its walls. For it was not in presenting the specific spectacle of Martha Graham, or Alicia Markova, or any other dancer performing live, in a given place at a given time, that the exhibition broke new ground; rather, following the lead of the Dance Archives' curatorial commitments, it presented the documentation of

performance—Mili's photographic remediation of the performing body and his abstraction of the material of performance itself—alongside artworks across the museum's galleries. It is this connection that must, in the end, sustain the lives and afterlives of performance art within museological practice.

Notes

- 1 Kathy Halbreich, "Shall We Dance at MoMA? An Introduction," in *Ralph Lemon: Modern Dance*, ed. David Velasco and Thomas J. Lax (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2016), 11.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 11–16.
- 3 The museum's Chief of Archives, Michelle Elligott, has done tremendous work in this area, but beyond her efforts, just two prior chronologies exist of performance at MoMA: one ends with the year 1979, while the other omits certain key moments in the institution's history in addition to relying on a fairly narrow understanding of performance. The chronologies in question were compiled by Ruth Perez-Chaves (2004) and Matthew Breatore (2009). Both are available in the museum's archives.
- 4 This essay would not have been conceived without the support of the Mellon Foundation–Museum Research Consortium Fellowship. I am also grateful for the many discussions with Athena Holbrook, Collection Specialist in MoMA's Department of Media and Performance Art, on conserving time-based media. This chapter is largely informed by archival research I conducted as the Mellon Museum Research Consortium Fellow at MoMA's Department of Media and Performance Art in 2015–16. In the course of my research, I compiled what is, to my knowledge, the most comprehensive chronology of performance or live art at the museum, surveying the period 1929 through 2014.
- 5 See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, "Remediation," *Configurations* 4, no. 3 (1996): 311–58 and *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003) and Phelan, "The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Representation," in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, ed. Peggy (New York: Routledge, 2004), 146.
- 6 MoMA press release, "Exhibition of Ultra-speed Photographs of Dance Movements Opens at Museum of Modern Art," January 9, 1942. https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_325289.pdf and "Dancers in Movement," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 9, no. 30 (February 1942), 10.
- 7 MoMA press release, "Exhibition of Ultra-speed Photographs of Dance Movements Opens at Museum of Modern Art," January 9, 1942. https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_325289.pdf
- 8 Unsigned memo to Gjon Mili, May 10, 1943, MoMA Archives, NY.
- 9 In his autobiographical work, Mili recalls having encountered a column by G. K. Chesterton in the *London Illustrated News* in which Chesterton describes the cinematograph as a *Zeitlupe* ("time magnifier"). Mili writes: "Chesterton's ideas were eye-openers for me." Later, addressing his work with Edgerton, Mili notes that the latter's ultra-high-speed photographs of objects and small animals in motion "shook me. For the first time, I realized that time could truly be made to stand still, texture could be retained despite sudden, violent movement." Gjon Mili, *Gjon Mili: Photographs & Recollections* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1980), 18–20.

- 10 Lacking available documentation, one would need to comb Mili's entire oeuvre and attempt to match up individual photographs with the often-unspecific titles from the exhibition checklist to reconstruct the exhibition. This is made more complicated given that several photographs existed in multiple versions, as in the seven photographs of Martha Graham's work, most of which are simply titled "Martha Graham I . . . , etc."
- 11 After founding the Boas School of Dance in New York in 1933, she created the first Western all-percussion orchestra in the early 1940s. Boas would remain actively engaged in dance, teaching, and studying at Anna Halprin's studio as well as Stanford University, the Universities of Wisconsin, Washington, and other academic institutions.
- 12 Phelan, *Unmarked*, 146.
- 13 Bolter and Grusin, "Remediation," 17–21. Their initial essay (later expanded in a 2003 book) is wide-ranging in its analysis of how mediation operates across media. Crucially, theirs is not an analysis limited to digital new media, but rather studies it as a test case for operations of remediation across all media.
- 14 Hal Foster, *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency* (London; New York: Verso Books, 2017), 127.
- 15 MoMA press release, December 10, 1932. https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/95/releases/MOMA_1932_0032_1932-12-10.pdf?2010
- 16 MoMA press release, May 13, 1933. https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/126/releases/MOMA_1933_0026_1933-05-13.pdf?2010. Another example would be the Navajo sand painters who worked in MoMA's galleries in conjunction with the *Indian Art* exhibition of 1941.
- 17 MoMA press release, June 22, 1936. https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/331/releases/MOMA_1936_0027_1936-06-18_18636-17.pdf?2010
- 18 MoMA press release, "Museum of Modern Art Establishes Dance Archives," March 6, 1940. https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/588/releases/MOMA_1940_0019_1940-02-29_40229-15.pdf?2010
- 19 "The Dance Archives," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 8, no. 3 (February–March 1941): 4.
- 20 In her notes for *Another Modern Art: Dance and Theater*, an exhibition she curated in 2009, MoMA Chief of Archives Michelle Elligott wrote, "[T]hough the Museum issued a statement indicating that the department was disbanded due to the institution's rising operating costs, Amberg, probably rightly, understood the underlying cause to be the lack of a clear realization of its function within the Museum's structure."
- 21 One measure of this is the fact that less than a full year since its founding, the archives had contributed material to no less than seven major exhibitions. Furthermore, an overview of the archives mentions that the richness and breadth of its holdings were at the time second only to those of the Bibliothèque de l'Opéra in Paris.
- 22 "The Museum of Modern Art Dance Archives" held in Dance Archives, I.14 "Kirstein—Foundation of Dance Archives," *The Museum of Modern Art Archives*, New York. This series ("Series I. Departmental Matters") provides a reasonably clear picture of the institutional life of the archives through its dissolution.
- 23 "The Museum of Modern Art Dance Archives" held in Dance Archives, I.6 "Correspondence and Departmental Report," MoMA Archives, NY.

- 24 "The Museum of Modern Art Dance Archives" held in Dance Archives, I.6 "Correspondence—René d'Harnoncourt," MoMA Archives, NY.
- 25 Both performance and cinema ultimately resist ready categories and threaten disciplinary boundaries. That MoMA so presciently, and so early in its history, chose to engage systematically with both contradicts prevailing notions of the institution as a conservative bastion of so-called high modernism. See Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 4–5.
- 26 For instance, in 1940 the Dance Archives contributed material and chronological research for the ballet and stage sections of *Picasso: Forty Years of His Art*.
- 27 This exhibition also marked the opening of a permanent gallery space for the Department of Dance and Theatre Design. MoMA press release, "Museum of Modern Art Opens Theatre and Ballet Design Gallery," April 9, 1945. https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/984/releases/MOMA_1945_0018_1945-04-09_45409-15.pdf?2010
- 28 Crucially, the numerous programs of musical performances, such as Jazz in the Garden (established 1960), Summergarden (established 1971), and others, would play a key part in elevating the visibility of performance. Before these, John Cage's concerts at MoMA (from his debut in 1943 onward) would also play a significant role.
- 29 Marina Abramović, *The Artist Is Present* (March 14–May 31, 2010). Organized by Klaus Biesenbach.
- 30 Foster, *Bad New Days*, 129.
- 31 One example is the 1941 exhibition *Indian Art of the United States*, which included demonstrations of Navajo Indian sand-painting techniques. These demonstrations, as indicated by exhibition installation photographs, were set off by barriers and obviously coded as adjunct to the primary exhibition, not a part thereof.