HOLDING THE SPACE:
CHOREOGRAPHY, ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN HERITAGE

BY: *Marie-Louise Crawley, C-DaRE (Centre for Dance Research), Coventry University*
Rosemary (Rosa) Kostic Cisneros, C-DaRE (Centre for Dance Research), Coventry University

ABSTRACT

This article responds to the interdisciplinary developments that choreography has undergone in the twenty-first century, in terms of a focus on relationships between dance, architecture, site and cultural heritage. It makes a claim for how choreography within the city manifests itself in the form of a public bodily act, as artistic boundary-crosser and socio-political agent. We explore this through the lens of a central case study: artist Anton Mirto's *Scaffolding* (2019), a workshop-performance event for seven dancers sited within *The Chapel of Many*, an architectural installation by architect Sebastian Hicks and set inside the ruins of Coventry Cathedral (UK) as part of the Coventry Welcomes Festival's Refugee Week. Grounded in an exploration of dance and architecture in terms of spatio-temporal relations following Rachel Sara's (2015) framework of a 'trans-ontology of architecture and dance' and Rachel Hann's (2019) concept of 'fast architecture', we argue for how the choreographic process of making *Scaffolding* speaks back to both the architectural space and the urban heritage site in which it is located and addresses a certain experience of temporality, history and memory. In turn, the potential political agency of such a performed conversation between architecture and choreography in the twenty-first century city is revealed.

Keywords: *Architecture, choreography, Coventry, heritage, temporality*

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Dr. Marie-Louise Crawley is a researcher, choreographer and dancer. Her research interests include dance and museums, dance and cultural heritage and areas of intersection between Classics and Dance Studies, such as ancient dance and the performance of epic. She is Assistant Professor in Dance and Cultural Engagement at the Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE, Coventry University, UK).

Dr. Rosemary (Rosa) Kostic Cisneros is a researcher, dancer, choreographer and curator who works closely with the RomArchive and many NGOs. She is involved in various EU-funded projects which aim to make education accessible to vulnerable groups and ethnic minorities, and part of cultural heritage projects that bring dance and digital technologies together.

INTRODUCTION

This article responds to the interdisciplinary developments that choreography has undergone in the twenty-first century, in terms of a focus on the relationships between dance, architecture, site practice and cultural heritage. It makes a claim for how choreography within the city can manifest itself in the form of a public bodily act, as both artistic boundary-crosser and socio-political agent. From a dance scholarship and artist-researcher perspective, we explore this through the lens of a central case study: artist Anton Mirto's *Scaffolding* (2019), a workshop-performance event for seven dancers sited within *The Chapel of Many*, an architectural installation conceived and designed by architect Sebastian Hicks (2019) situated inside the ruins of Coventry Cathedral (UK). Grounded in an exploration of dance and architecture in terms of their spatio-temporal relations and following Rachel Sara's framework of a "trans-ontology of architecture and dance" (Sara, 2015, p. 62), as well as Rachel Hann's concept of "fast architecture" (2019, p.120), this article argues for how the choreographic process of making *Scaffolding* speaks back to both the architectural space and urban heritage site in which it is located. Furthermore, by offering *Scaffolding* as a significant example of the coexistence of both architecture and dance on a "shared continuum between space and event" (Sara, 2015, p. 65), we seek to demonstrate how the work addresses a certain experience of temporality and, by extension, because of its placement in the heritage space of the cathedral ruins, of history and memory as well. Finally, we hope to argue that the light the performance work throws on temporality, history and memory also reveals its significant socio-political potential. Through a close examination of *Scaffolding* within its architectural setting and urban heritage context, we make a claim here for the potential of a performed conversation between architecture and choreography in the twenty-first century city as a powerful political agent.

DANCE AND ARCHITECTURE

To date, the relationship between dance and architecture has been examined from a variety of perspectives - pedagogical, creative, architectural, choreographic and geo-political. Architecture is a spatio-temporal art form that lends itself to performance and the dancing body, and this subject has already been much addressed by various scholars, most notably Sara (2015), Sara and Rowan Watson (2015, 30–31 March), Sara and David Littlefield (2014), and Jonathan Mosley and Sara (2013). The relationship between dance and architecture is a critical one where differences, as well as similarities, need to be acknowledged: for example, dance in urban settings has, potentially, the capacity to 'other' the slowness and monumentality of architecture. The scope of this article does not allow for an exhaustive account of these various arguments to date; rather, in this context here exploring a specific choreographic work in a specific urban heritage setting, we have chosen to focus on Sara's (2015) argument for "a new trans-ontology that is between architecture and dance" (Sara, 2015, p. 62). This is an argument leaning on the notion of architecture as occurring at the intersection between place and event, and between concept and experience. Here Sara is following architect and urban theorist Louis Rice's argument that "architecture is the occupation of space"

(Rice, 2013, p. 75) and his use of the example of the events of the Occupy movement as "fundamentally architectural" (Sara, 2015, p. 63). It is a critique which can also be applied to dance, another "event-oriented" (Sara, 2015, p. 64) discipline:

> Equally to architecture, we may see dance as both able to exist as an experiential spatial practice (product of the senses) and simultaneously explore concepts that critique the nature of space (product of the mind) [...]. It is also possible to understand dance (as event) as influenced (or acted upon) by the place in which it is both created, rehearsed and performed. Simultaneously, the place is also affected (or acted upon) by the dance (event) that goes on within it. This implies another elision; perhaps we should understand the building *and* the people, the walls *and* the bodies, the architecture *and* the dance as mutually constitutive. (Sara, 2015, p. 64)

Essentially, what Sara is arguing for here is the coexistence of dance and architecture on a "shared continuum between space and event" (2015, p. 65); and that, by working in such a trans-ontological way and, necessarily, with the body, a deeper conversation can be developed "between *space and time*; between place and event" (p. 77, emphasis added). Our emphasis is key, for Sara here alludes to the importance of time to both architecture and dance as are spatio-temporal disciplines. In the existing study of dance and architecture's interrelationship to date, temporality is a factor that is somewhat brushed over in favour of more spatially-focussed arguments. This article therefore seeks to address that elision and, building on both Sara's and Hann's work alongside other performance theory approaches, as well as a dance practice-research perspective, claims for the importance of temporal relations in both architecture and dance on a shared continuum between place and event.

In order to underscore the importance of temporality within this debate, we have chosen to take as a central case study the choreographic work *Scaffolding*, a workshop-performance directed by artist Anton Mirto (2019) and which took place within and around an architectural installation, *The Chapel of Many*, itself set inside the ruins of St. Michael's Cathedral in Coventry (UK) and a collaborative effort between MiFriendly Cities and Coventry University's Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations within the context of the Coventry Welcomes Festival (itself a weeklong festival within the wider framework of the UK's national Refugee Week). From our perspective as dance scholars and artist-researchers, we explore this case study through the lens of participant observation in the making and performance of the work - one of the authors herself being a dancer in *Scaffolding* and the other observing part of the workshop process. In addition, post-performance, we conducted several interviews with artist Mirto, architect Sebastian Hicks and some of the dancer-participants. These were open-ended, loosely structured interviews based around a set of ten specifically tailored questions and conducted either face-to-face or via Skype. These interviews included questions about site practice more generally (e.g. the challenges that an artist must consider when working in site and to what extent the site informs, influences and shapes the work), the different relationships between the architectural structure, the urban heritage site

and the performance, how performers and spectators navigated the space, and what bearing (if any) the context of Coventry Welcomes Festival had on the development of the performance work. As sociologist Lucie Fremlová has explored, a "[r]esearcher's positionality and reflexivity fundamentally impacts all aspects of how social science researchers do qualitative research" (2018, p.100). With this in mind, the researchers employed Communicative Methodologies (CM), a methodological response to the dialogic turn of societies and science, which employs a continuous and egalitarian dialogue between the researcher and the people involved in the work. This approach allows for the voices of the research subjects to enter into honest and deep discussion which in turn has an impact on the data collected and encourages new understandings and scientific knowledge. CM lends itself to working closely with the performing arts sector and artists. For this article, data collection was underpinned by CM and the researchers worked closely with the artists interviewed, allowing them to review all the materials, to input directly and to correct the researchers' interpretations.

The ruins of Coventry Cathedral are an important, if not arguably the most symbolic, cultural heritage site in the city. During the Second World War, on the night of 14th November 1940, the city of Coventry was devastated by bombs dropped by the Luftwaffe; the medieval cathedral was hit by incendiary devices and burned as the city burned. The decision was taken to rebuild the cathedral; not as an act of defiance, but rather as a sign of faith, trust and hope for the future which in turn led to the cathedral's wider, and still ongoing ministry, of peace and reconciliation. Shortly after its destruction, the cathedral's stonemason, Jock Forbes, noticed that two of the charred medieval roof timbers had fallen in the shape of a cross. He set them up in the ruins where they were later placed on an altar with the words Father Forgive and the ruins - still on consecrated ground - together with the rebuilt cathedral, now form one living cathedral. The symbolism of choreographic work within an installation within the cathedral ruins is a striking one for our exploration of time in relation to dance, architecture and heritage site. Indeed, *Scaffolding* itself, especially within the context of the Coventry Welcomes Festival's Refugee Week, can be read as existing within a historic space of deconstruction and reconstruction, within a space for creating new routes and pathways through time and space, both through the architectural installation and in e.g. its relationship to the dance work. As we will explore further below, the choreographic work is a practice that speaks to themes of holding on and letting go, of what remains, of remnants, of how sculptural and architectural spaces can hold the traces of the site, the story and the moments that pass within the dance (See further Sara & Sara 2019, 22 July, on the notion of accumulating remnants within their practice of "Space Activating") on the notion of accumulating remnants within their practice of "Space Activating". Furthermore, with *Scaffolding*, there is a double layering to this notion of remnants. For, as Melanie Kloetzel argues (2019b, p. 226), very often, an end-goal of site-specific choreographers is that "the community connected to a site embodies the process of attending to place *long after the ephemeral movement sequences have left only their ghostly remnants in a site*" (Kloetzel & Pavlik, 2009, p. 7, emphasis added). In other words, site-specific dance aspires to an active, participatory and ongoing engagement with place, time and memory; and, in this paper, we argue for *Scaffolding* as an attempt to do this within the cultural heritage site of the cathedral.

SCAFFOLDING **(2019)**

Designed as a project driven by place, people in space and the relationships between those people and the spaces around and between them, *Scaffolding* has had previous incarnations in London (UK), Vienna (Austria) and Cape Town (South Africa), but as afore-mentioned, this particular iteration of the workshop-performance took place within *The Chapel of Many*, Sebastian Hicks' specially designed installation in the ruins of Coventry Cathedral. The walls of the installation were formed of chairs, creating a contemplative, protected and intimate space. As people gathered, the chairs could be removed, creating windows looking beyond to the surrounding ruins, thereby connecting interior and exterior, with the accumulating gathering of people creating light and transparency. The aim of the structure itself was to build on Coventry's international reputation as a symbol of peace and reconciliation, with its construction a collaborative process facilitating intergenerational learning that involved migrants, students and retired experts.

Scaffolding invited and allowed for those not involved in the performance intervention to share in the experience and contribute to the work. At this juncture it is important to highlight the historical and political dimension behind the concept of the architectural structure of *The Chapel of Many*. As stated above, the wooden installation was designed by architect Hicks and consisted of chairs made by refugees now living in the city and students from Coventry University. Hicks himself suggests that:

> [S]ymbolically, the pavilion [the structure] stands for peace - deployable to places of conflict where the gathering of people at a human scale is required [...] a powerful symbolic narrative that builds on the identity of Coventry as a space of reconciliation. (Hicks, personal communication, September 9, 2019)
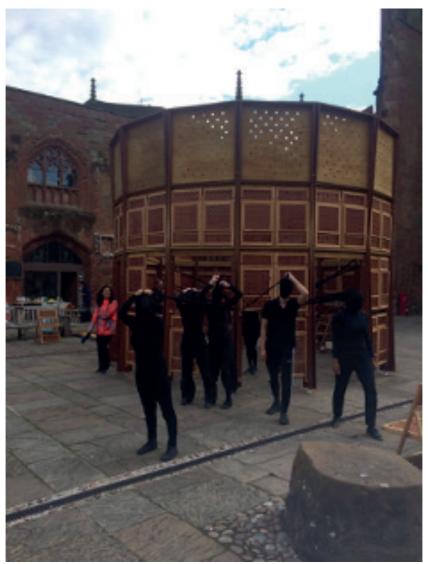
Citing Richard Sennatt's (1996) book *Flesh and Stone* as an influence, Hicks outlines that the initial concept for the structure emanated from his interest in the body and the physical space of the city and how bodies both occupy space and are aware of that space, as well as in how a spatial structure is formed when individual space (here, the chairs) form a collective space (the pavillion structure of *The Chapel of Many*). In particular, Hicks explains his original concept for *The Chapel of Many* as being a "gathering of people actively participating and transforming an object and changing the nature of a space" (Hicks, personal communication, September 9, 2019). Describing the process of conceiving and making the structure, Hicks places great attention on the historical and stylistic importance of the chairs, referring to their connection to the modernist city of Chandigarh, India built by Western architects, and Edouard "Le Corbusier" Jeanneret's *Chandigarh chair*. The city of Chandigarh was conceived by Jawaharla Nehru, who in 1947 was India's first prime minister. Chandigarh is considered to be a planned city that is known for its architecture and urban design and has an idiosyncratic Western tone to it. It is the capital of two northern Indian states, Punjab and Haryana, and is also seen as a union territory. Nehru saw Chandigarh as a symbol of peace and invested a great deal of resources into the city. In the 1950s, Le Corbusier devised and constructed

teak and cane chairs that were to be placed in the utopian city of Chandigarh. The chairs were intended to be used by the people and were produced by the thousands by local craftsman. Their functional, banal and sturdy nature were soon neglected as people gravitated towards more contemporary designs, leaving thousands of the chairs abandoned or used for scrap. Eventually, the local government intervened and the chairs, which reflect an important part of the city's heritage, were protected. Hicks was drawn to the Chandigarh chairs because they were "actually built by local craftsmen in local materials, whereas the architecture of the city was a Western projection using a lot of concrete [...], so the chair became almost a symbol of resistance to that new imperial design" (Hicks, personal communication, September 9, 2019). With *The Chapel of Many* in Coventry too, the act of making the chairs might be seen in this light of an act of resistance. In Coventry, Hicks involved a local carpenter in the project who built the chairs by hand from oak alongside some migrants to the city and some international students (who were, by happy coincidence, from India and Pakistan). The influence of the Chandigarh chair (representing power dynamics between East and West) on a structure built by locals, migrants and international students in a UK city within the Coventry Welcomes Festival's Refugee Week context, was fitting to the performance work of *Scaffolding* as it played with tensions between people and space, between push and pull, between attachment and resistance, between individual and community. *The Chapel of Many* and *Scaffolding* co-existed on Sara's "shared continuum between place and event" - and taking all elements together (the concept of the structure of chairs, the placement of that structure in the cathedral ruins and then the layering of the performance-workshop intervention taking place both inside and outside the structure), a multi-layered palimpsest of ideas of time, space, place and identity politics was revealed.

Artist Mirto's proposition to the performers was to work within the installation on an iteration of her performance work *Scaffolding*, a work where "masked in black nylon, faceless bodies move to an invisible set of instructions, extending and reflecting relationships between points, lines, curves and each other – merging body, geometrics, architecture, space and meaning" (Mirto cited in Crawley, 2019, unpaginated). Responding to *The Chapel of Many* and physically attached to the installation by lengths of black nylon fabric covering their faces, the seven participant dancers explored the space, moving both inside the installation and beyond, into the surrounding ruins, connecting with each other as well as to the external architectural features. The group comprised two dancers, one performance artist, a visual artist, a civil servant and two undergraduate Architecture students. It is important to note here a two-fold understanding of choreography at work within *Scaffolding*: first as Mirto's own choreography (concept, *mise-en-scène*, perspective and practice) and second, the actual performance *in situ* whereby *choreography* becomes a durational event beyond the choreographic score created by the choreographer. Through offering loosely directed tasks for improvised movement, Mirto encouraged the dancers to elongate and reflect the installation's inherent geometry and materiality, and to explore the nylon fabric as a tool to create new connections, relationships, patterns and readings. In such a way, *Scaffolding* saw extended bodies moving to invisible instructions, merging body,

geometry, space and meaning, exploring wider themes of restriction, identity and attachment.

Moving to a sound-score composed by Synthcurious, as well as to the ambient sounds of the outdoor space, the dancers negotiated the architectural structure and each other, finding relationships between bodies, spaces, objects and light. Synthcurious was a composition of unique sound made specifically for *The Chapel of Many*. Using multi-tracking, looping and layering techniques, the composition was designed to represent the diversity of humanity and both the uniqueness of every human individual and their participation in the groups they form each day. With Synthcurious' composition and the ambient city noise as soundscape, Mirto used a series of improvisational tasks to curate a choreographic score that set out to explore autonomy, interconnection, tension and fragility using tangible objects (black nylon, the wooden structure, the cathedral ruins) to facilitate those explorations. As a dancer, it was an "immensely powerful experience [to be] moving in such a charged historic space under swift-moving clouds above, the afternoon light shifting and the city bells marking the passage of time" (Crawley, 2019, unpaginated) as the performers collectively created an improvised performance for the gathering tourists and visitors. The improvised dance with "its slow, deliberate movements alternately stark and fluid, […] was seemingly a moving meditation through space and time, responding to sensations of stillness and movement, connection and solitude, light and shadow" (Crawley, 2019, unpaginated). Mirto herself described the performers as "'seeing' around corners, over distances, through and past the top of walls, with their heads covered in stretched black nylon, attached to a structure formed of chairs" (Mirto cited in Crawley, 2019, unpaginated). The living, moving bodies aimed not to detract from the stillness of the historically charged space; rather, together with the installation of chairs and the stillness of the surrounding space of the ruins, body and space, dance and architecture, mutually supported and enhanced one another. The structure of the installation, the presence of the dancers, the choreography itself and the focus on the performing body in such a space, aimed to engage with the history of the place while encouraging a new cohabitation and means of experiencing it.

FIGURE 1
Scaffolding and The Chapel of Many within the ruins of Coventry Cathedral (UK), 2019.
Photograph: Emma Meehan

The dancers occupied the space and interacted with the nylon and structure in a number of ways. They had the autonomy to make decisions and to pull on the nylon in varying intensities, creating short movement scores and solo moments but also working within the wider group setting. The vignettes of solo pieces which morphed into ensemble movement phrases balanced out the work and offered some relief from the tightly bound energy demonstrated in the individual performances at the start of the piece.

The dancers' ability to connect and reconnect with another throughout the entire piece referenced the interconnected nature of the group - not only body-to-body, but also the wider relationship of the dancing bodies to both the structure of chairs and the environment of the cathedral ruins. As Mirto describes it,

> The tensile black lines of the tights reframed and reconnected the 'inner and outer' spaces of the structure within the 'inner and outer' spaces of the cathedral ruins (both without a roof). Interconnected thus, with a limited sky and skyline, performers seemed to experience an inner and outer awareness of the body, spirit and mind. (Mirto cited in Crawley, 2019, unpaginated)

Furthermore, the ways in which the use of black nylon brings the relationship between dancer, architectural structure and ruins into sharp focus can be seen to resonate in critically productive ways with the domain of new costume and scenography theory (see e.g. Barbieri, 2017; Hann, 2019). In particular, Hann's holistic scenography theory about how different assemblages of scenographic traits orientate, situate and shape staged events is useful for addressing the crafting of place orientation that is going on during the performance of *Scaffolding*. Hann's notion of acts of "fast architecture" (2019, p.120), temporary architectural elements that can counterpoint slower, more monumental architecture, resonates well with the use of the ever-shifting nylon connections in *Scaffolding* within the slower architectural monument of the cathedral ruins. Hann's theory seems particularly apposite, given that one of the examples of "fast architecture" she gives is architectural scaffolding. Indeed, Hann argues that

> [t]he passing context of the scaffold - as that which occurs to sustain the monumental - also serves to highlight the need for support: it is […] a crucial part of a healing process; and a sign of the structure's temporal fragility. (Hann, 2019, p. 122)

Applying this thinking to *Scaffolding*, we can see the significance of the acts of fast architecture the dancers undertake as they manipulate the black nylon 'scaffolding' lines that underscore, support and highlight the monumental wider site's temporal fragility - the bombed-out ruins, and also of the *mise-en-abyme* image of the architectural scaffolding necessary to rebuilding and healing that which has been broken through acts of war and destruction.

Another key attribute of *Scaffolding* was its inclusive nature and how it welcomed and trusted bodies in space. At the beginning of the workshop that preceded the improvised performance, Mirto was careful to set a loose enough score to focus the dancers' choreographic choices but encourage an autonomy for those choices. Both the dancers who were directly connected to the structure and the visitors witnessing the work were all carefully considered. For Mirto, this consideration was a primary occupation for as she discusses here, her choreographic interests are particularly focussed on people and how those bodies behave in a public space:

My primary concerns at the moment are people, and that's where the activism comes. How we engage with work. How we allow the work to engage with ourselves, and our bodies, and our being, and then with each other, and then with the situational context. Whether that be the building, the air, the ground, the earth. Whatever that entails at the time [...] But when it's site specific, it's probably more people orientated at the moment than building orientated [...] How we behave in space. (Mirto, personal communication, August 9, 2019)

The carefully directed tasks that Mirto gave the dancers at the very beginning of the workshop were designed for them to find their physical and metaphorical place within the structure and the ruins - by considering various viewpoints and spaces where they might feel safe, or exposed and vulnerable. This consideration comprised an exploration of connections between each other, as well as between the architectural space of the structure and the cathedral ruins. As such, there was a series of constant negotiations in progress: of bodies to bodies, of bodies to the wooden structure and of bodies to ruins. The ruins themselves, as Mirto alludes to, gave

[a] sense of [...] sanctuary, because it's an old church [...] a space of divinity, of sacredness, of ritual. And somehow there's an energy within that that, for me, smelt of freedom somehow. (Mirto, personal communication, August 9, 2019)

Mirto here speaks to the sense of the site's sacredness and the site is itself a powerful and ambiguous co-author of the performance. However, the performance itself seems to challenge the multi-layered and complex memory and history of the ruins, for alongside the sense of freedom and safety that Mirto alludes to, attached by the physical binds of the nylon, the dancers also played with ideas of restriction and attachment. Mirto chose pathways and gave movement exercises that would allow the dancers to develop their own sense of movement style with the nylon. She also choreographed prompts signalling an interaction among the dancers. This was accomplished by movement patterns in which the dancers wove around one another while also depending on the other bodies in space. Each individual had a role and the performance as a whole would not have been successful without everyone relating to and relying on one another and committing to the choreographic score. This loose score called for the dancers to be constantly aware of both their own position in space, and of each other's positions in space. As such, over the course of the workshop and the improvisatory performance, the choreographic choices called for a deep listening within the ensemble, a higher pitched sensory awareness (which was further heightened due to the dancers' own sensory visual deprivation, as the black nylon masking their faces meant that they had to *listen* rather than *see*).

In addition to the necessity of this deep ensemble listening and awareness of the whole group, some of the improvised choreography also called for duets or small group sections, which encouraged the viewer to move around the structure and to weave in and out of the surrounding ruins alongside the dancers. In such a way, Mirto's choreographic decisions not only had a direct impact on the dancers' dancing

bodies but also on the bodies of the viewers as they were prompted to navigate the cathedral and the structure itself in this semi-controlled manner. However, the layering of dancing bodies, architectural installation and cathedral ruins helped guide the spectators and public visitors through the space. As such, the work acted as palimpsest and the stratification of the multiple elements involved - the ruins, the structure, the dancing and the pedestrian bodies - reflected *Scaffolding*'s focus on time, energy and interrelatedness, as well as Mirto's interest in people.

Undeniably, as a site practice, the site itself informed readings of the work for both visitors and dancers. One of the performers, Elaine O'Sullivan, later reflected how

> It feels as though some buildings or sites are designed for moving through or passing-by whereas others invite us to pause, be still and contemplate for a while. The site of the old cathedral still retains this sense of reverence and memorial despite the new construction work taking place in close proximity to the ruins [...] Dancing in ruins, we explored the slowing down of movement. The stilling of motion. Our micro-choreographies focused on paying attention to that which might arise in the moment. Of course, each moment carried and continues to carry, a trace of the old in the new. (O'Sullivan cited in Crawley, 2019, unpaginated)

This slowing and stillness, which the environment of the site contributed to, was an element that also struck Mirto (personal communication, August 9, 2019): "The more static, just being with the nylon in the space, just being and doing nothing, hardly any movement, for me was what worked the most".

It was almost as if the conversation in *Scaffolding* between the movements performed by the dancers shifting the nylon lines into position and the stiller moments of pause reflected a wider conversation between the 'fast' and 'slow' architecture (to again use Hann's definition) within the site, with the moments of stillness as key. Placed within the cathedral ruins, the image of these still sculptural bodies, the stark geometry of the sculptural figures in space, attached to the architectural structure, calls to mind performance theorist André Lepecki's (2006) reading of anthropologist Nadia Serematakis' "still act" - a term he borrows to "describe moments when a subject interrupts historical flow and *practices* historical interrogation" (Lepecki, 2006, p.15). As Serematakis herself suggests:

> Against the flow of the present [...] Stillness is the moment when the buried, the discarded and the forgotten escape to the social surface of awareness like life-supporting oxygen. It is the moment of exit from historical dust. (Serematakis, 1994, p.12)

The stillness of the present moment concentrates all the moments that have gone before and simultaneously reaches forwards in time and space. As such, this stillness constitutes a moment of a slippage of temporalities (for a fuller account of Lepecki's reading of

Serematakis, see Crawley, 2018). What this slippage of temporality means for *Scaffolding* as a potentially subversive choreographic practice will now be more fully explored in relation to the wider context of site choreography and time.

SITE CHOREOGRAPHY AND TIME

Site choreographic practice is accustomed to moving bodies in space and considers a number of variables that may be out of immediate control. There are often unpredictable conditions that may impact a work in an unexpected way and that requires all participants to surrender to a level of experimentation. Each performance or sharing may generate a new result. Each time the choreographer and dancers share the work in an outdoor setting they are challenged by the space and are asked to respond dynamically to a changing environment which stimulates the creation of a new version of the work. The pedestrian and dancing bodies may meet; the public space offers the kinetic charge and energetic dynamic of the dancer potentially encountering the passerby. These chance meetings have the potential to affect and influence the perception of the space for both the dancer and the spectator. As Kloetzel reminds, "such experimentation also occurs with time, as site choreographers may reach into the past or future of a site, meshing it with the present in unexpected ways" (Kloetzel, 2019a, p. 31).

This oscillation between the past, present and future has also been considered in the field of cultural heritage studies but from a slightly different entry point. At this juncture, memory is a term that can be brought in to consider the interconnectedness between a body and a place. Memory has been variously defined in the fields of psychology and neuroscience, and here we seek to look at it through the lens of heritage discourse. Heritage discourse considers both tangible and intangible cultural heritage and pushes the conceptual boundaries of cultural production and of how memory is discussed in relation to site and the body. For example, Dacia Viejo-Rose (2015) looks at the lexicon being used to refer to the relationship between heritage and memory. She suggests that heritage is not only an object, but also comes in the form of a verb, adjective and noun and may therefore be considered a process and qualifier. As such, heritage in relation to memory is

> [e]xperienced and perceived, or to use the neurological term "inputted", at the level of the individual, through the senses. And yet it is only through social interaction —whether at familial, national or 'world' level— that heritage fully comes into its own. (Viejo-Rose, 2015, p. 4).

The emergent terminology that falls under this lexicon of memory is reminiscent of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1945/1962) work on "the habit-body [body memory] and the body at this moment [body representations]" (1945/1962, p. 95). This lived body is called into action when dance is taking place. There is an added layer to this dynamic when dance is performed in a cultural heritage site, as not only may the movement be informed or inspired by a site, but it e.g. may also rely on the silent memory that lives within the individual, the site itself or combination of both. Between the multiplicity

of the environment and these silent memories there is a tense, vibrational relationship and the dancer and the body represent an encounter point for this. Site choreographer Ann Carlson notes that performance (with past-present juxtapositions) can create a "space-time collision […] [t]hat emphasizes the circular continuum of historical events" (Carlson, 2009, p.108). Such a confrontation between past and present can also shift perceptions of time, "throwing into question what human bodies can access on site with regard to the temporal spectrum" (Kloetzel, 2019a, p. 32).

Scaffolding offered a particular temporal experience grounded in place and memory on a multiplicity of levels - the charged memory of the ruins, the memory of the bodies (dancers' and spectators' bodies) moving in that space, and potentially also the migrant's experience of place and memory (implied through the context of the work taking place in Coventry Welcomes Festival and the involvement of migrants in the construction of *The Chapel of Many*). In her recent exploration of site dance practice, place and memory, dance scholar Victoria Hunter, building on Laura Millar's (2006) argument on archives as touchstones, uses the term "material touchstones" (Hunter, 2019, p.133) to describe the geo-spatial triggers which contribute to individual and collective memory. We might here think of the material touchstones of the Coventry Cathedral space in which *Scaffolding* took place. Site choreography offers an opportunity for the material, and the immaterial, to engage where the body writes silently on the space. The air, light, sounds and material environment meet with the immaterial aspects of the body drawing on individual as well as collective memory. The moving body dancing within the material touchstones of the heritage site may serve as an entry point for a spectator to witness a past but also invite them to step forward into the present moment.

Significantly, in her argument, Hunter (2019) also refers to Owain Jones and Joanne Garde-Hansen's (2012) notions of fluid place, and how memory can become "crucial in weaving […] places together […]" (Jones & Garde-Hansen, 2012, p. 86). Hunter (2014) herself uses weaving as a material metaphor in her own site dance practice in the performance work *The Abbots Dances*, where the dancers use brown string to chart their own life journeys, thus "weaving past, present and future narratives and trajectories through the performance" (see Hunter, 2019, p.146). Weaving is a metaphor that is striking too for *Scaffolding*, as the dancers wove in and out of each other and the structure, weaving black nylon lines through time and space. Interestingly, Mirto herself also used weaving to describe the movement of spectators as they too moved through the work and the site:

> So as a spectator would come in, they might engage with that isolated person that's stretched out, but then somehow the space and what was happening also allowed spectators to weave in and out of that building, in the same way as the performers were weaving in and out. (Mirto, personal communication, August 9, 2019)

So, as in Hunter's practice, in *Scaffolding* too, weaving acted as a metaphor for the interweaving of past and present in a historically charged heritage site. Yet in *Scaffolding*

the nylon material was not only interwoven in what at some moments felt like a giant cat's cradle, but it simultaneously also offered the possibility for an extension, an elongation, of the dancer's bodies, as they stretched the material to its limit in order to keep the tension of the geometric lines. As such, for the dancers - at least in one of these authors' experience of performing in the work, a

> sense of time became distorted...as my body became elongated, it was almost as if time of my body became elongated [...] it was almost like this extension of the present moment [...] a moment when it was very, very still and just a shape in space and time. (Crawley, cited in Mirto, personal communication, August 9, 2019).

> And I think it's interesting when you start to look at when it's not just the body in space but when it's other materials, and the body and materials in space, and then how that affects your experience of time and space in the body. (Mirto, personal communication, August 9, 2019).

Mirto herself described how the extended figure somehow scales up impact somehow, whether that's a movement choreographic impact or a time impact. Like something small becomes larger, or longer, or bigger [...]

The encounters between the body and material, body and space, stillness and movement, certainly led to a feeling of a suspension of time; a concentration of all time in the present moment of performance which again speaks back to Lepecki's (2006, p.15) reading of Serematakis' "still act", a performance moment in *Scaffolding* which Mirto refers to as "akin to meditation" (Mirto, personal communication, August 9, 2019). There is something interesting here about the balance between the linearity of time as history (the linear geometry of the elongated bodies stretching the black nylon) and the circularity of time in performance (the round, protected space of *The Chapel of Many* within the sanctuary of the cathedral ruins). Mirto's work also speaks to relationship-building through encouraging that deep presence, that deep listening to one's self, the surroundings and the wider political context. This sharpening of awareness was central to *Scaffolding* and to creating an intimate space in such a public space. Mirto's intention to extend the idea of building within a building and responding to it in accordance to her own instinct relates to this theme of sensory listening. The liminal space that Mirto encouraged the dancers to explore through such a meditative exploration suspending time offers innovative approaches to sensing the individual as well as the collective. We might consider that the work thus speaks to a relationship of time and stillness (cf. Barbour, 2019, p.130) versus migratory flow (in terms of the context of the work as part of the Coventry Welcomes Festival). Mirto's approach to sensing deeply and community building is relevant to working with migrant communities, as smaller bonds and more intimate settings can foster bonds that result in tighter foundations and facilitate lasting relationships.

The context of the Coventry Welcomes Festival was also reflected in the very physical manifestation of ideas of attachment and letting go with the dancers physically attached

to the installation at all times and only releasing themselves at the very end of the performance. Mirto herself points to the connections of *Scaffolding*'s themes to the migrant experience:

> There are ideas about wanting to let go and not being able to. All those ideas. And anonymity, and the masked face, and not being seen. Wanting to be seen. Not being able. This whole idea of how you connect counterpoints and readings. That's also choreography, but that's also people moving in time and space, which is what refugees do. They have to reconnect. They have to create new patterns. They have to find a new rhythm. They're read differently every time. They are read. There's all of that. (Mirto, personal communication, August 9, 2019)

The choreographic potential of *Scaffolding* for exploring reconnections and new patternings in time and space thus points to its socio-political dimension. In this final section, we argue that the light that this performance throws on a different experience of time and space also reveals how a performed conversation between architecture and choreography in the twenty-first city can be a potentially powerful political agent.

SCAFFOLDING'S SOCIO-POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

Peace studies and international relations authors Oliver Ramsbotham et al., in their book *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, highlight the "ability of the arts to bring people together through a shared interest and provide a space for personal as well as communal growth" (2011, p. 358). This coming together to create and produce something, whether that be an object or performance piece, is a starting point for relationship building and establishes a platform where bodies can connect with the material and the immaterial. Dance has its own understanding of the political and can be seen as central to the performing of gender roles, social and cultural realities, as well as heavily charged topics such as austerity and global justice. Dance crosses lingual, cultural, ethnic, and religious boundaries, and has an aptitude for building relationships. Furthermore, site dance lends itself to political dimensions as it is often found in public spaces and in outdoor arenas. Alexandra Kolb (2010) references the political potentiality that emerges when dance is taken out of traditional and/or conventional establishments. The political possibilities of working in-site are manifold, perhaps most especially in urban environments, where "performing the city' becomes an "assertion [...] of the political values of access, participation and cultural democracy" (Makeham, 2005, p. 158). Assembling bodies in urban space can make a powerful political statement - we might think of the political power of bodies in site as part of the Extinction Rebellion climate breakdown protests, or the Occupy movement. When those bodies are dancing, their subversive power grows yet further. Heather Harrington (n.d.) has explored site dance protest work where dance is framed as a political act confronting dominant narratives that otherwise negate certain minority groups' bodily expression in public spaces (cf. Hunter, 2019, p. 209). In such site dance protest work, Harrington argues how

> [d]ance can change the meaning of a public space, and *therefore change the social*

dynamics that are played out in that space. Social hierarchies can be broken down by infusing new meaning to the parks, subways, or a financial district through movement. (Harrington, n.d, unpaginated, emphasis added)

It is perhaps going too far to cite *Scaffolding* as an explicitly political work, in the vein of Mirto's other works such as *The Army* (2016), presented at the Whitechapel Gallery and locations across the city of London, and described by Mirto as "a guerilla performance" (Mirto, personal communication, August 9, 2019). In *The Army*, a collective of women gather together to perform an eight-minute score. The central image is one of collective force; here, there is certainly a very overt sense of activism of the power of bodies gathering in site. Other similar examples of this type of work featuring a collective of women moving in/through a particular site include Clod Ensemble's / Suzy Wilson's *Red Ladies* (first performed in London's Trafalgar Square in 2005 and in subsequent locations since) and Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux* (2014). *Scaffolding* is a quieter protest, but it is no less a powerful one (indeed, it is arguably more so for its stillness), and we hope to make a claim here for the transgressive political power of the quieter, slower practice that it provoked for both the dancers and also the spectators.

CONCLUSION: HOLDING THE SPACE

As a final note here, we would like to suggest the notion of *holding the space* as the means by which *Scaffolding* might reveal its potential political agency. For both Hicks and Mirto, holding the space was an important trope. Speaking about the cathedral space from an architectural perspective, Hicks describes how it is

[a] certain space which is about reflection, about a historical moment, and that reflection on that moment and the moment is maintained through the lack of the roof [...] the symbol of the memory of that moment. Within that space, there's a certain kind of spatial intimacy, but once the object [the installation] was there and the sound, [there was a] holding the space [...] that further increased that reflective capacity. (Hicks, personal communication, September 9, 2019)

For Hicks, a success of *The Chapel of Many* was that holding of the open-air cathedral space in how it gave a focus point to enhance reflection. *The Chapel of Many* was a protective space, a safe space of sanctuary with its connectivity between the inside and the outside: you could be held inside it, but the perforations meant you could still be aware of, and thus connect with, the outside world of the ruins and the city beyond. Likewise, the loose choreographic score of *Scaffolding*, the physical space in which that score took place, and the nylon material covering their faces, protected performers while still connecting them to the wider structure and to the wider world. Here, the concept of *holding the space* once again speaks back to Hann's (2019, p. 122) notion of "fast architecture". Furthermore, through the loose score and directions which she gave to performers, Mirto also held the space for them to make their own choreographic choices. Holding such a space also enabled the deep listening of the piece to develop, as individual dancers moved simultaneously as unique beings yet connected and

literally bound to a larger collective. By holding the space both architecturally and choreographically, *Scaffolding* allowed for reflection, contemplation, and slowing down; through its sculptural stillness, the practice enabled a deeper encounter of the individual body with the collective body, interweaving themes of time, space, memory and identity. In the midst of the ever mobile, fast-paced twenty-first century city, set within the historic cathedral ruins, *Scaffolding* revealed the power of a performed conversation between architecture and choreography to quietly interrogate - and resist - the socio-political status quo.

REFERENCES

Barbieri, D. (2017). *Costume in performance: Materiality, culture, and the body*. Bloomsbury.

Barbour, K. (2019). Dancing gardens. In K. Barbour, V. Hunter & M. Kloetzel (Eds.) *(Re)Positioning site dance: Local acts, global perspectives* (pp. 107–131). Intellect.

Carlson, A. (2009). An interview. In M. Kloetzel & C. Pavlik (Eds.), *Site dance: Choreographers and the lure of alternative spaces* (pp.104–112). University of Florida Press.

Crawley, M.-L. (2018). "The crafted body": Thoughts on dancing, viewing and remembering. In S. Ellis, H. Blades & C. Waelde (Eds.), *A world of muscle, bone and organs: Research and scholarship in dance* (pp. 59–75). C-DaRE (Centre for Dance Research).

Crawley, M.-L. (2019). *Workshop and improvised performance with Anton Mirto* https://culturemoves.eu/post/79479061

Fremlová, L. (2018). Non-Romani researcher positionality and reflexivity: Queer(y)ing one's own privilege. *Critical Romani Studies*, 1(2), 98–123 http://dx.doi.org/10.29098/crs.v1i2.25

Hann, R. (2019). *Beyond scenography*. Routledge.

Harrington, H. (n.d.). Site-specific protest dance: Women in the Middle East. *The Dancer- Citizen 2*, http://dancercitizen.org/issue-2/heather-harrington/

Hunter, V. (2019). Material touchstones: Weaving histories through site-specific dance performance. In K. Barbour, V. Hunter & M. Kloetzel (Eds.), *(Re)Positioning site dance: Local acts, global perspectives* (pp.107–131). Intellect.

Jones, O., & Garde-Hansen, J. (Eds.). (2012). *Geography and memory: Explorations in identity, space and becoming*. Routledge.

Kloetzel, M., & Pavlik, C. (Eds.). (2009). *Site dance: Choreographers and the lure of alternative spaces*. University of Florida Press.

Kloetzel, M. (2019a). From recontextualization to protest: 50 years of site dance practice in North America. In K. Barbour, V. Hunter & M. Kloetzel (Eds.), *(Re)positioning site dance: Local acts, global perspectives* (pp.107–131). Intellect.

Kloetzel, M. (2019b). Site-specific dance and environmental ethics: Relational fields in the Anthropocene. In K. Barbour, V. Hunter & M. Kloetzel (Eds.), *(Re)positioning site dance: Local acts, global perspectives* (pp. 217–246). Intellect.

Kolb, A. (Ed.) (2010). *Dance and politics*. Peter Lang.

Lepecki, A. (2006). *Exhausting dance: Performance and the politics of movement*. Routledge.

Makeham, P. (2005). Performing the city. *Theatre Research International*, 30:2, 150–60. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/s030788330500115x

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1945/1962). *Phenomenology of perception*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Millar, L. (2006). Touchstones: Considering the relationship between memory and archives. *Archivaria: Special edition on Archives, Space and Power*, 61, 105–126

Mosley, J., & Sara, R. (Eds.) (2013). *The architecture of transgression AD*. Wiley.

Sara, R. (2015). Between architecture and dance. In V. Hunter (Ed.), *Moving sites* (pp. 62–77). Routledge.

Sara, R., & Littlefield, D. (2014). Transgression: Body and space. *Architecture and Culture Journal*, 2(3), 293-302. http://dx.doi.org/10.2752/205078214x14107818390513

Sara, R., & Sara, A. (2019, 22 July). *Space activating* [Paper presentation]. Sensing the City Salon., C-DaRE (Centre for Dance Research), Coventry University, U.K.

Sara, R., & Watson, R. (2015, 30-31 March). *350 duets: body with-in place. Towards a methodology of attunement* [Paper presentation]. Spaces of attunement: Life, matter and the dance of encounters, School of Planning and Geography, Cardiff University, U.K.

Sennett, R. (1996). *Flesh and stone: The body and the city in Western civilization.* W.W. Norton and Company.

Serematakis, N. (1994). *The senses still: Perception and memory as material culture in modernity.* University of Chicago Press.

Ramsbotham, O., Woodhouse, T., & Miall, H. (2011). *Contemporary conflict sesolution: The prevention, management and transformation of deadly conflicts* (3rd ed.). Polity Press.

Rice, L. (2013). Occupied space. In J. Mosley and R. Sara (Eds.). *The architecture of transgression AD*. Wiley

Viejo-Rose, D. (2015). Cultural heritage and memory: untangling the ties that bind. *Culture & History Digital Journal*, 4(18), 1–13.

ARTWORKS REFERENCED

Hicks, S. (2019). *The chapel of many*. [Architectural installation]. Coventry Cathedral: Coventry.

Hunter, V. (2014). *The abbots dances*. [Live dance performance] George Abbot Almshouse hospital, Guildford, Surrey.

Mirto, A. (2016). *The army*. [Live performance]. Hackney, London.

Mirto, A. (2019). *Scaffolding* [Live performance]. Coventry Cathedral: Coventry.

Ouizguen, B. (2014). *Corbeaux*. [Live dance performance]. Marrakech Art Biennial: Compagnie O.

Willson, S. (2005). *Red ladies*. [Live performance]. Trafalgar Square, London: Clod Ensemble

INTERVIEWS BY THE AUTHORS

S. Hicks (personal communication, September 9, 2019). Face-to-face interview with the authors.

A. Mirto (personal communication, August 9, 2019). Skype interview with the authors.