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## The Dynamics of an Expanding Friendship. Community Making in the Streets of Porto Marghera

### Introduction

Earlier this year, during a recently established dance festival<sup>1</sup> in Sicily, the Italian dance scholar and historian Alessandro Pontremoli made an attempt to classify the current scene of dance as a theatre form into three aesthetic landscapes:

- the “museal”; the one that refers to the notion of museum as a place of collection and memory and it may include the reconstructions of historic dance works
- a second landscape that embraces recognizable dance material derived from the traditions of Western theatre dance and
- a third landscape that comprises less recognizable choreographic practices that challenge the conventional definition of dance.<sup>2</sup>

In the last one, as Pontremoli claims, there is a direct association to Gilles Clement’s *The Third Landscape*, which refers to

the sum of space left over by man to landscape evolution – to nature alone. Included in this category are left behind (délaissé) urban or rural sites, transitional spaces, neglected land (friches), swamps, moors, peat bogs, but also roadsides, shores, railroad embankments [...].<sup>3</sup>

The unattended nature that grows in the marginalized and neglected areas around human constructions is characterized by diversity and unconstrained evolution, and in Pontremoli’s classifica-

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1. The festival is called *ConFormazioni. Festival di Danza e Linguaggi Contemporanei* and it was first established in 2017.

2. Cfr. Alessandro Pontremoli, *Memoria e Trasmissione*, in *ConFormazioni. Festival di Danza e Linguaggi Contemporanei*, Palermo, online: <https://www.facebook.com/FestivalConFormazioni/videos/169004380402295/> (Accessed July 15, 2018).

3. Gilles Clement, *The Third Landscape*, online: <http://www.gillesclement.com/art-454-tit-The-Third-Landscape> (Accessed July 15, 2018).

tion, Clement's *Third Landscape* is employed in order to contain coexisting and diverse choreographic practices whose experimental character is key to the evolution of the dance field.

The *Third Dance Landscape* is an unbound and liquid territory where the concept of choreography is problematized through transgressive and difficult-to-classify choreographic practices<sup>4</sup>. More specifically, the *Third Dance Landscape* contains paradigms of choreographic practices that challenge our perception of dance by «exhausting»<sup>5</sup> the concept of movement and the traditional aesthetics of the dancing body. Conceptual choreographic practices<sup>6</sup>, such as those by Alessandro Sciarroni and Silvia Gribaudo as far as it concerns Italy, but also several projects of community dance, compose and contaminate the diverse and heterogeneous territory of the *Third Dance Landscape*. Somewhere in-between the horizontal choreographic topographies, community dance mutually informs and is being informed by the dance landscapes of today. Examples include: the cathartic slow falling devised by the British choreographer Rosemary Lee for *Melt Down* (2011) as a response to the death of loved ones; the choreographic projects of Charlotte Spencer, such as *Is This a Waste Land?* (2017) and *Walking Stories* (2013), which bind individuals in the course of score-based performances; the corporeal compositions of Italian choreographer Virgilio Sieni, which are based on the architecture of the gesture (a. o. *Agora*, 2010-2013; *La Cittadinanza del Corpo*, 2016) and the embodiment of failure and success against established aesthetic norms in Jerome Bel's *Gala* (2015). These are only few of the examples that make evident the diversity of community dance at an international level and its dialogue with the *Third Dance Landscape*. Everyday bodies and alternative sites become the core material of these choreographic practices that bind dancing communities temporarily or for the long term.

Besides its artistic character, community dance is also associated to a demand – undoubtedly urgent – for inclusivity or leisure inside educational or recreational contexts<sup>7</sup>. Community dance scholar and principal investigator of the Dance for Parkinson's project, Sara Houston, defines community dance as «an educational practice, a life-empowering formula, an artistic outlet, an enjoyable pastime or even several of these definitions at the same time»<sup>8</sup>. For instance, in the British context, where community dance has been supported financially, institutionally and academically approximately since the 1970s, community dance is defined as a movement practice that opens dance to non-professionals and becomes accessible to them. Through relational values such as «focus on participation, collaborative

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4. The third landscape is «il territorio che mette in evidenza il problema di definire coreografie i fenomeni più trasgressivi e difficilmente classificabili». Alessandro Pontremoli, *La Danza 2.0. Paesaggi Coreografici del Nuovo Millennio*, Bari-Roma, Laterza 2018, p. 111.

5. Cfr. André Lepcki, *Exhausting Dance. Performance and the Politics of Movement*, New York, Routledge, 2006.

6. «Molta di questa danza è stata definita concettuale e le è stata attribuita una condizione subculturale non molto diversa da quella degli esponenti della medesima corrente operante nel modo dell'arte visuale». Alessandro Pontremoli, *La Danza 2.0. Paesaggi Coreografici del Nuovo Millennio*, cit., p. 114.

7. Diane Amans (edited by), *An Introduction To Community Dance Practice*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2017.

8. Sara Houston, *Dance in the Community*, in Diane Amans (edited by), *An Introduction To Community Dance Practice*, cit., p. 12.

relationships, inclusive practice, opportunities for positive experiences and celebration of diversity»<sup>9</sup>, dance is being democratized and disseminated to people who do not meet bodily, aesthetic, and in general conventional standards that are associated with the right to exercise dance as profession. The joy in the experience of dancing, and often its therapeutic potential, is both a driver and an outcome of community dance inside educational, recreational and artistic contexts.

Hovering between community dance and urban dance practice, *Mar Gh'era. Un secolo in corsa* (*Mar Gh'era*, 2017/18) is a choreographic event that merits attention as it has much to offer to our understanding of the *Third Dance Landscape* and its relationship with community dance. *Mar Gh'era* (fig. 1) is a promenade performance that managed to transform a neglected industrial site into a place of community bonding. The performing community that temporarily occupied this derelict site recalls Clement's landscape, which anarchically invades sites constructed by humans but left neglected. More specifically, *Mar Gh'era* is a project which was devised by the "non-mainstream"<sup>10</sup> – to use once more Pontremoli's words, which are relevant to the concept of the *Third Dance Landscape* – Venetian choreographer Laura Boato. With a Degree in Philosophy and strong leadership skills, Boato is an acknowledged female choreographer and dance curator with a growing reputation. The movement language of *Mar Gh'era* – greatly informed by Boato's exposure to Western codified techniques and Somatics – contains strong corporeal imagery, pedestrian vocabulary and improvisation material in a state of continuous research and evolution. The *Mar Gh'era* project involved more than one hundred performers, along with an even larger audience (totalling 750 people on a rainy day!) and it took place in the almost abandoned site of the industrial zone of Porto Marghera (the Marghera Port at the outskirts of Venice). Although the participants of *Mar Gh'era* are a mixture of professional artists and everyday people exposed to performing arts (dance, music and singing) as a non-vocational activity, community building is not the goal or the outcome of an educational or recreational process, but the condition from which the creation process emerges by taking advantage of the dynamics of a growing and expanding friendship. Community building emerges out of the urgency to narrate the story of a place that has affected the past and the present, and which continues to shape the future of the community residing in the industrial site of Marghera.

### ***Mar Gh'era. One hundred years compressed into one hundred minutes***

On the occasion of the commemoration of the establishment of the industrial zone of Marghera one hundred years ago, a performing arts community was gradually built under the direction of the

9. Diane Amans (edited by), *An Introduction To Community Dance Practice*, cit., p. 9

10. The third landscape is «una riserva ai margini della cultura *mainstream*, dove diverse specie di artisti, esiliati, trascurati dal sistema, sperimentano e producono danza al di fuori degli schemi». Alessandro Pontremoli, *La Danza 2.0. Paesaggi Coreografici del Nuovo Millennio*, p. xi.



**Figura 1** – *Mar Gh'era. Un secolo in corsa* (*Mar Gh'era*, 2017/18). Dir. Laura Boato. Photo by Michele Toniolo.

choreographer Laura Boato in order to celebrate the history and the yet-to-become of an urban site that has been very highly discussed by artists, authors and journalists, activists and politicians<sup>11</sup>. The performance event, an urban promenade and inter-disciplinary performance, occupied artists as diverse as contemporary dance performers (Laboratorio Danza Contemporanea, Gruppo Contact Improvisation Venezia), *traceurs*<sup>12</sup> (Apta Parkour), musicians (Street Percussion Marghera, Istituto Comprensivo “Filippo Grimani”), actors (Farmacia Zoo:È) and singers (Coro Voci dal Mondo, StorieStorte). This human landscape has been a well-integrated mixture of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic groups that reside in Italy and native Italian dance students and professionals.

Marghera was a controversial site that contained the tension and the friction between the Venetian area that continues to be over-saturated by tourism and the need for industrialization. The choreographic event of *Mar Gh'era* (2017/18) is a project that reflects the history, the politics and the diversity of the anthropological fabric that inhabited this conflicting site. Around the 60s, almost fifty years since the construction of Marghera, which is currently nearly abandoned and half-demolished, the industrial

11. A few artistic and literature examples that have the Port of Marghera as a central focus include: the documentary film *The Last Firebrands* (by Manuela Pellarin – Enrico Soci, 2004); the research paper *La Rinascita Della Comunita Cittadina di Marghera* by Anthony Candiello (2007, online: <http://www.anthonycandiello.it/#articoli>); *Mortedison* (1973), a happening devised by Giovanni Rubino and Corrado Costa that was performed by workers who transported a crucified puppet wearing a gas mask during an actual strike in Marghera; the poems of Antonella Barina (*Madre Marghera 1967/2017*, Helvetia Editrice, Venezia, 2017) and Ferruccio Brugnaro; the film animation *El Mostro. La Coraggiosa Storia di Gabriele Bortolozzo* (2015) directed by Lucio Schiavon and Salvatore Restivo and many other Venetian artists such as the painter Emilio Vedova and the musician Luigi Nono.

12. *Traceurs* in French or *tracciatori* in Italian are the dancers who practice parkour.

zone encompassed «7 million square meters in size, 17 km of navigable canals, 24 km of waterfront, 32 km of roads, 117 km of railways, 200.000 Amperes of electrical power [...], 25.000 workers»<sup>13</sup>. As both an important national and international industrial site, the zone of Marghera has been a promise and a “praxis” – evidence – of available labour, but also a site full of risks that derived from the lack of or limited health insurance, the growing pollution and the illegal use of cancerous gas.

The promenade dance performance of *Mar Gh'era* unfolds across 2km long train tracks that traverse the industrial site of the port. A predefined and choreographic path across the Via dei Petroli corresponds in chronological order to the big events that shaped the site's history and its transition from a place of dreams to a place of nightmares. Through poetic means, such as corporeal movements, texts and sounds, the narration gradually unfolds. The opening scene, evoking the promise of the Industrial Revolution, celebrates a version of the Manifesto of Futurists adapted by the director and dramaturge Gianmarco Busetto who recites<sup>14</sup>: «We wish [...] to destroy the fake Venice that is full of gondolas and empty palaces [...] we wish [...] to destroy the Adriatic Sea»<sup>15</sup>. Busetto's text goes on to describe how the industrial site of Marghera was a place of concentrated hope for an improved way of living that would render people independent from nature's whims. Indeed, the transition from the unpredictable and nature-dependent labour to machine-based initially brought stability in financial income and benefits.

As the performance unfolds, the personal stories of the workers – their everyday lives, their working conditions, their first demonstrations, the cancer that hit both workers and residents – are heard or represented through a series of movement scenes. These are performed at times by large groups of performers – such as the one where all the dancers gather in order to recall the proletarian demonstrations that are depicted in Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo's *The Fourth Estate* (1901) or the scene in which dancers emulate the movement of the machine. At other times, the audience passes in front of intimate scenes of duets or smaller groups. The narration of the personal, yet political, reflects each individual associated with the site of Marghera. We hear: a song performed by the local female band *StorieStorte* and based on Italo Calvino's *Canzone Triste* (1958) about a couple who alternate their working shifts and thus never manage to meet; the story of a father who urges his son to study in order not to end up vomiting blood and dust due to working in the factory – a place that people gradually realise to be

13. Manuela Pellarin – Enrico Soci, *The Last Firebrands*, cit.

14. Marghera was born at the same time as the Manifesto of Futurists was written and the correspondence with the original manifesto is evident: «Why should we look behind us, when we have to break in the mysterious portals of the Impossible? Time and Space died yesterday» (Cfr. *Exhibition of Works by the Italian Futurist Painters [With an Initial Manifesto of Futurism by F.T. Marinetti]*, 1912, online: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/manifesto-of-futurism> (Accessed July 29, 2018). Marghera reflects the *zeitgeist* of an era that is concerned with the release from the burden of history and the making of space for the new.

15. «Noi vogliamo [...] distruggere la Venezia finta e vuota delle gondole e dei palazzi [...] noi vogliamo [...] rovinare il mare Adriatico» (Personal Communication with the choreographer).





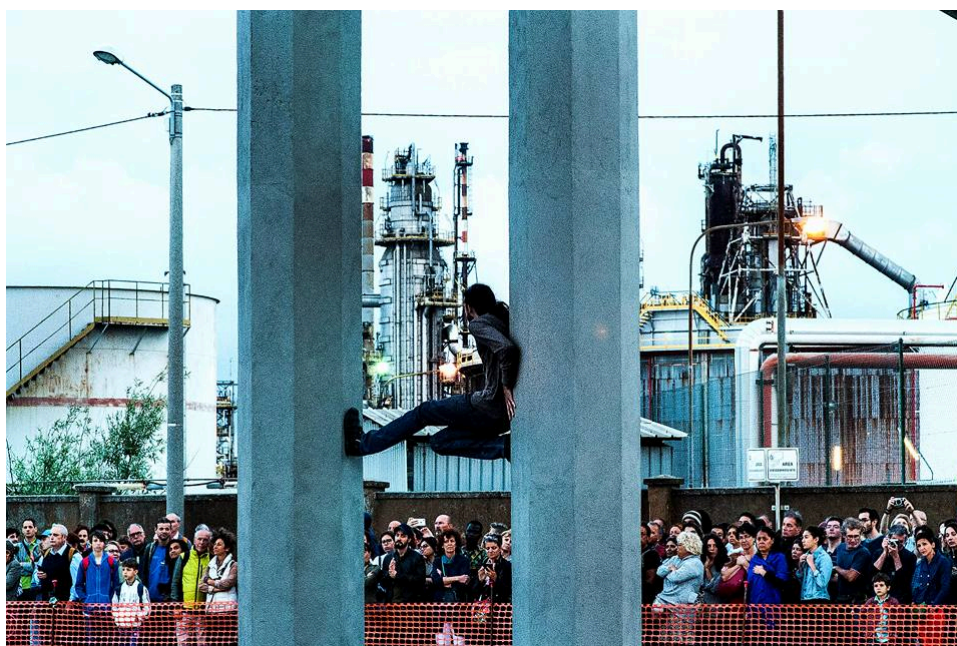
**Figura 2** – Performers in swimming suits sunbathing surrounded by silos and factories. Photo by Michele Toniolo.

an incubator of slow death; the songs of *Coro Voci dal Mondo*, which narrate left-wing lyrics about the first proletarian demonstrations in Marghera. We look at the choreographed paradox of a family in swimsuits sunbathing in the midst of the industrial and deeply polluted site, between the silos and the factories (fig. 2).

Text, songs and dance supplement each other in order to narrate the story of the site and by extension of the local people and more. Busetto claims that writing and speaking about Marghera is not only an action that concerns the local, but Italy as a whole, and it offers a point of view that is historic, political, anthropological and poetic<sup>16</sup>. In this embodied narration, Gabriele Bortolozzo, who is the person who, against all odds, first revealed the ecological and health scandal that happened in Marghera, receives a special mention. In the dedicated scene about his contribution, the use of the bicycle wheels is twofold (fig. 4): one concerns Bortolozzo's fatal accident in 1995 while he was riding his bicycle, and the other evokes his belief about collaborative spirit as found in the metaphor that one wheel cannot drive us anywhere unless there is at least another one<sup>17</sup>. Next, *StorieStorte* sing about the first trials that covered the scandal that Bortolozzo together with other workers attempted to bring to light, and which absolved the factories' managers until approximately 1998. As the narration proceeds

16. In Busetto's words: «scrivere di Marghera, della sua storia, non significava parlare solo di chi è nato e cresciuto qui: scrivere di Marghera significa parlare dell'Italia intera, da un punto di vista storico, politico, antropologico e poetico» (interview for the editing-in-process documentary).

17. Free translation from Italian: «una ruota sola non va da nessuna parte [...] ma quanto ci vuole a far partite un movimento?» (Personal Communication with the choreographer).



**Figura 3** – The numerous audience gathered to attend the promenade performance. Photo by Michele Toniolo.

and gets closer to the present time, the story comes nearly to its end with the Dow Chemical accident, a large fire that occurred in 2002 and threatened to devastate even Venice. The end of the story about Marghera as an ambiguous site between life and death concludes with the solo performance of the dancer Carla Marazzato, and when a car passes over her body, an African pray of high energy is heard from afar.

Marazzato, still alive underneath the car, turns on a torch and a voice from a nearby out-of-order telephone box describes the Marghera of 2117 when nature (the *Third Landscape* of the introductory lines) has besieged the factories. The Marghera of 2117 is again beautiful, clean and unpolluted thanks to a successful ecological plan devised and applied by the repentant humanity; the lagoon is full of fish and nobody has cancer any more. The epilogue is totally unexpected. At the end of the walking journey which began in a heavy industrial landscape and which concludes next to the Venetian lagoon – there where nature reclaims its space and which looks almost like the vision of Marghera of 2117 –, the audience should have encountered a pregnant woman dancing to the sound of a lullaby and should have looked from afar at the illuminated Venice. But unexpected heavy rain cancels the pre-planned and pre-choreographed scene. The sudden rain brings total chaos and urges a cathartic and collective cry; nature together with dance performance creates a universe that participates in something powerful: a journey in which a community, performers and audience, begin to share a past and a present.



**Figura 4** – The scene dedicated to Gabrielle Bortolozzo. Photo by Michele Toniolo

### ***Mar Gh'era* & the layers of community**

The performers of *Mar Gh'era* joined the choreographic experiment by responding numerously to a call for participants that was immediately spread from mouth to mouth or by spontaneously expressing their interest in the project. A series of observations around the characteristics of the performing community are worth discussing. These observations, which are derived from the following questions are helpful to understand what community dance is and/or what it could be:

- What is a dancing or dance community? What is community dance?
- How and why is a community built? How does it expand or contract?
- What does a community share? What do members of a community have in common? What binds a community together?

Much debate, especially in the British context, has been going on about segregating community dance as a separate category from the realm of professional dance. As Houston observes, community dance is commonly defined as a «participatory activity that is done by amateurs and often led by professionals»<sup>18</sup>. This segregation usually places professional dance on a high scale and it negatively affects the appreciation of dance performed by amateurs. When considering how fluid the borders between community and professional dance can be, this definition becomes quite problematic. Who

18. Sarah Houston, *Dance in the Community*, cit., p. 11.



are considered amateurs and who are defined as professionals? Maya Deren, a versatile figure of Avant-Garde film, who transgressed dance, poetry, writing and anthropology, makes a distinction between the professional and the amateur, emphasizing the fact that an amateur is one «who does something for the love of the thing rather than for economic reasons or necessity»<sup>19</sup>. Through this lens and taking into account the etymological root of the word amateur from the Latin verb “amare” (to love), a person who loves an activity or his/her profession can also be an amateur, although (s)he may receive compensation or not.

In the case of *Mar Gh'era*, all the participants, amateurs-as-professionals and professionals-as-amateurs, were un-paid<sup>20</sup>, yet they were still enthusiastic about performing in this massive event. Due to the fact that receiving proper financial compensation is a major issue for those involved professionally in the Arts, there should be a greater need to join a community project that overcomes the necessity of livelihood. The commitment with *Mar Gh'era* began as an enjoyable leisure activity which ended up being nourished by deeper feelings and motivations. Gradually during the year long process, the participants started to feel part of the story of Marghera and responsible for the transmission of its story that often remains a social taboo. These participants gathered in order to demonstrate, through the form of an urban promenade performance, about the precarious possession of labour, the unequal and dangerous labour conditions and the raising of awareness about an impending ecological disaster. An urban promenade performance that is motivated by such urgencies shares a close affiliation to political marches and protests, and through this lens it has the potential to become political<sup>21</sup>. Dancer, scholar and social activist Randy Martin successfully argued that «dance's capacity to mobilize performers and audiences offers us an embodied model of politics in motion»<sup>22</sup>. The streets as urban spaces of circulation are places of concentrated polyphony and diversity, where political and social actions, and conflicts may take place. However, the choreographic path in the streets of Marghera is a soliciting of perambulation, a route-finding device through a mapped space and a traced history for the happening

19. Bruce R. McPherson (edited by), *Essential Deren. Collected Writings on Film by Maya Deren*, Documentext, New York 2005, p. 17.

20. The lack of compensation was not an intentional curatorial and choreographic choice, but it derived from the lack of available financial support.

21. For a full argumentation regarding the political dimension of dance, please consult Randy Martin's *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina & London 1998); Mark Franko's *Dance and the Political* in Franco, Susanne – Marina Nordera (Eds) *Dance Discourses: Keywords in Dance Research* (Routledge, London & New York 2007); Alexandra Kolb's *Dance and Politics* (P. Lang, Oxford-New York 2011); Stacey Prickett's *Embodied Politics: Dance, Protest and Identities* (Dance Books, Hampshire 2013). Furthermore, in *Choreographies of Protest*, Susan Leigh Forster examines from the perspective of the dance scholar the non-violent actions of physical intervention, such as sit-ins, walk-ins and pray-ins. She asks «what kind of significance and impact does the collection of bodies make in the midst of its social surround? How does the choreography theorize corporeal, individual, and social identity? [...] what do they (the bodies) share that allows them to move with one another?» (Susan Leigh Forster, *Choreographies of Protest* in «Theatre Journal», vol. 55, n. 3, 2003, pp. 395-412, p. 397, online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25069277>). This is a choreographic point of view in the analysis of social movements.

22. Randy Martin in Judith Hamera, *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference, and the Connection in the Global City*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2007, p. 3.

of a poetic and peaceful demonstration. The community of mobile and mobilized spectators is empathetically engaged in the activation of the past, and history and future are constructed through their feet.

The corporeal story-telling of the architectural site of Marghera spans a time frame of 100 years and situates Marghera Port as a contradictory site. Not dissimilar to the Tamburi district of Taranto, the Ilva steel plant and other international cases<sup>23</sup>, Marghera was a promise for a better future and yet it has been a site for slow death. Hundreds of people were employed in the factories of the industrial zones and also hundreds of them died from insufficient and carcinogenic working and living conditions. As the interviews for the editing-in-process documentary<sup>24</sup> of *Mar Gh'era* reveal, all the participants of the choreographic experiment had a relative, a family member or a friend who was a worker in Porto Marghera and had died due to cancer. The one hundred performers, empowered by a sort of increased "cultural citizenship"<sup>25</sup> and a shared empathy for the loss of their loved ones, were joined in order to celebrate the possibility to remember a story and to imagine and envision the yet-to-come social change that is driven by local and individual actions. Citizenship as the responsibility towards the environment and as the freedom to claim the social rights of the self and the other were the thrusting forces for this poetic demonstration<sup>26</sup>.

Besides the common purpose of narration and peaceful demonstration that motivates the participants to gather together, there is an additional element that binds them together: the fact of being "local". But, what does it mean to be "local" in a world of high mobility and a continuous flow of bodies? Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai contends in *Modernity At Large* that locality is ephemeral and not much concerned with spatial and geographical areas and borders. He views locality as «a complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts»<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, locality may be viewed as a process of building social bonds also through memories, public and private, that are being shared and created in a continuum of processes that take place in the present. Beppa Casarin, the director of *Coro Voci dal Mondo*, which participated in the project of *Mar Gh'era* (fig. 5), states that «making memory is to create common roots for the present and the future of all of us» (interview for the editing-in-process

23. I refer to cases such as the Chernobyl disaster (1986) in Ukraine, the mining disaster (1972) in Rhodesia, now named Zimbabwe, and others.

24. This is a documentary about the creation process and the final product of *Mar Gh'era*. *Un secolo in corsa* (2017/18) that was commissioned by the choreographer Laura Boato to film and theatre director Giulio Boato. The documentary is currently in the phase of editing.

25. Cfr. Nick Stevenson, *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitan Questions*, Open University Press, Maidenhead 2003.

26. Other international projects that awake a sense of citizenship and incite civil dialogue and action are *Sparrow's End* (1997) by Jo Kreiter, a site-specific and community project in a public space frequented by drug dealers and users, and *The Iyve Project* (1994) by Tamar Rogoff, a project in Iyve, a small town in Belarus, engaging as performers Holocaust survivors and their families.

27. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis-London 1996, p. 178.



**Figura 5** – Coro Voci Dal Mondo. Dir. Beppa Casarin. Photo by Michele Toniolo

documentary of *Mar Gh'era*). Therefore, being local is not identified by the cultural and national origin and residency, but by the ephemeral sharing of “now”; the individual present that constructs the collective future. Through this lens, locality is perceived dynamically and it adapts an elastic and fluid dimension, so that its expansion or contraction depends on the ebb and flow of the remaining, but also incoming and out-coming population (natives, immigrants and refugees).

In the choreographic experiment of *Mar Gh'era*, the story of the industrial site gradually unravels through the spoken words, the sounds and the movement that narrate how this architectural site has impacted people's lives. We are used to imagining and perceiving architecture as a discipline that is concerned with space design, disregarding the fact that architecture is responsible for the relationships among people which are fostered by the spaces they inhabit. The relationships between the dwellers and the dwelled that may be perceived as a choreographic intervention is at the core of humanity and community building. Architecture is not only about physical limits and spatial demarcation, but also about possibilities for interaction (and the sensing of locality as Appadurai suggests). Architecture remains incomplete until the body can turn the abstract geometric *space* of design into an ephemeral and variable *place* that is lived, inhabited, used, altered, recognized and remembered through everyday and ordinary interaction<sup>28</sup>. *Mar Gh'era* addresses the living<sup>29</sup> dimension of the industrial site of the

28. Cfr. Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1984.

29. Architecture is a place that affects and is being affected by the people who inhabit and interact with it. Through this lens, living refers to the ability of architecture to change, evolve and disappear through time. “Living” is also in tandem with the Lefebvrian notion of *appropriation* that renders the experience of architectural space and its adaptation un-separated

port: the political and everyday events that took place during the last 100 years.

Architecture has been traditionally re-membered and archived through textual and visual archives, such as static diagrams, blueprints, and 3D animation, all of which are inclined towards capturing architecture as an idealised moment of conception «before people, dirt, rain and history move in»<sup>30</sup>. These are archiving tools that freeze architecture in time and disregard the need to address the living dimension of space. Therefore, considering the train of thought that is concerned with the archiving of architecture as *place*<sup>31</sup>, it is necessary to find supplementary ways of archiving architecture as living, and thus through corporeal movement as «it is by means of the body that space is perceived, lived – and produced»<sup>32</sup>. In the choreographic experiment of *Mar Ghèra*, the promenade narrates how and why the industrial site has affected the lives of the workers and their families, the communities associated with the specific site. In this way, the performance becomes an *archival* testimony of the factories as contested sites where riots, solidarity, community spirit and communism are often interlaced.

As the art critic and historian Hal Foster proposes, the *archival* – what is related to archive – is «concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces»<sup>33</sup>. He also suggests that the archival «not only draws on informal archives but produces them as well, and does so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private»<sup>34</sup>. The promenade performance on the industrial site of Marghera, as a sort of archival art, is based on found objects, texts, oral histories and movements invented and re-assembled in new ways. Myth, fiction and facts create an archaeological site of combined construction and excavation where history is produced and archaeology is practised «less as the discovery of the past and more in terms of different relationships with what is left of the past»<sup>35</sup>. In this format, the abandoned and ruined site of Marghera is temporarily activated through the sound of the words and the bodies in motion that trace its history. All of them they are actively engaged in a dialogue between the present, the past and the future. In that respect, the site of Marghera is archived through the dialectics of space, time, body and movement that produce architecture-as-event<sup>36</sup>.

The architectural history expert Iain Borden comments that «architectural historians limit their conceptions of architectural space to the space of the designed building-object – a fetishism that era-

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from the living communities inhabiting this space through time (Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by D. Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell, Oxford-Cambridge 1991).

30. Jeremy Till, *Thick Time: Architecture and the Traces of Time*, in Iain Borden – Jane Rendell (edited by), *InterSections: Architectural Histories and Critical Theories*, Routledge, London & New York 2000, p. 286.

31. Cfr. Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, cit.

32. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, cit., p. 162.

33. Hal Foster, *An Archival Impulse*, in «October», Fall 110, 2004, p. 5.

34. *Ibidem*.

35. Gabriella Giannachi – Nick Kaye – Michael Shanks, *Archaeologies of Presence: Art, Performance and the Persistence of Being*, Routledge, London & New York 2012, p. 2.

36. Cfr. Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture & Disjunction*, The MIT Press, Cambridge-London 1996.





**Figura 6** – Group photo by Michele Toniolo.

ses social relations and wider meanings»<sup>37</sup>. *Mar Ghèra* may fail to reproduce the architecture of the industrial site according to its static architectural and diagrammatic conception, but it succeeds in providing a series of individualised events that occurred between architecture and its original users. More specifically, *Mar Ghèra* captures personalized experiences of architecture-as-event – in this case the experience of architecture as a lived place – which in turn generate new experiences as *events*: the spectators' encounter with the interactions of the performing bodies and the found site, the archived material, the objects, the personal stories and the texts. In this way, the performance community that awakes and constructs a collective memory is embraced and enlarged by the community of spectators who are drawn to the site to applaud their *friends*, just for curiosity or for encouragement. In the course of this promenade performance, the audience – the mobile and mobilized spectators – forms a second layer of community, and together with the performers they all build a larger one.

### **Instead of conclusion. Dance community versus community dance**

In this text, I have attempted to shed light on a site-specific, urban promenade performance which gained visibility only in the region of Veneto in Italy. The lesson from this choreographic experiment lies in the fact that a sense of augmented cultural citizenship brought together almost one hundred performers for the production of a massive event. Private and collective memory became the source

37. Ian Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City. Architecture and the Body*, Berg, Oxford 2001, p. 7.

for devising a poetic demonstration about urgent ecological and social issues. A dance community, stylistically diverse but still evocative of Pontremoli's *choreographic landscapes* of today was joined by other communities that use different means of expression (music and voice). All these sub-communities formed a non-homogenous, intergenerational and multi-cultural community of performers and spectators. Friendship as a way to support each other and circulate information for the creation of the project, friendship as an outcome of locality and friendship as a prerequisite for a community-making process were fundamental for the accomplishment of the project.

The choreographic project in Marghera is an opportunity for reconsidering the definition of community dance beyond the binary between amateurs and professionals or inclusivity and exclusivity. Rather, it is an opportunity to rethink community in broader terms. As sociologist Day Graham observes, the essential meaning of community refers «to those things which people have in common, which bind them together, and give them a sense of belonging with one another»<sup>38</sup>. Performing arts – although comprised by fundamentally different forms – is a common language among the participants of *Mar Gh'era*. Furthermore, historical and political forces, a collective spirit of activism, an evolving and elastic sense of locality and citizenship as responsibility towards the other and the future through the actions of the present are the binding elements of this expanding community.

As the vibes of kinaesthetic empathy that were evoked by *Mar Gh'era* gradually fade away through time, what is the current materiality or immateriality of this community? *Mar Gh'era* was a one-off event resulting from a year-long rehearsal process. As the participants have dispersed to their individual everyday routines, can we still speak today of the performing arts community? A community needs a regular practice and a sort of “everydayness” in order to maintain its bonding. A community is simultaneously something alive and contingent. The specific community might have disappeared, but for all of them (participants and audience), the choreographic project of *Mar Gh'era* has been a life milestone that hopefully will motivate future actions of social activism and other social reconfigurations of solidarity and togetherness.

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