The City as a Score: Dialoguing with the Ex-Ghetto Ebraico of Bologna through Museum Research and Choreographic Practice

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Introduction

There are many ways to narrate the history of a city. Among the most evocative is undoubtedly the identification of spaces with the human communities that have made them vibrant. On the other hand, it is not uncommon to entrust the history of a people to the places that have witnessed them as active and pulsating subjects. Sometimes, but not always, these two interpretative keys merge, intertwining with each other to produce a final image much richer than the mere sum of their respective contents. When this happens, the historian must consider themselves particularly fortunate; and they cannot but accept the challenge. (Provasi 2015, 7)[1]

A visitor entering the Basilica of St. Petronio in Bologna, wishing to linger in the first chapel on the left side aisle, would encounter a statue of the St. Abbondio, sculpted by Giuseppe Pacchioni, a stained-glass window crafted by Giuseppe Bertini, and two frescoes by Giovanni da Modena: the *Allegory of Redemption from Original Sin*, on the left; the *Triumph of the Catholic Church over the Synagogue*, on the right. The latter presents a brachial cross with a dense network of allegorical meanings.[2] The ends of the crucifix terminate in human hands, extended upwards towards the gates of Paradise and Hell, and, on the sides, toward two female characters. The left figure, representing the Catholic Church, sits astride a griffin. The character on the right, representing the Jewish Synagogue, sits astride a goat, blindfolded. The hands reach down from the cross to place a crown upon the

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[1] From this point onwards, all texts published in Italian are presented in English for uniformity. Translations are provided by the authors of this contribution.
[2] This is one of the few brachial cross representations in Italy; the other one is in Mondovì (Cuneo), in the Church of Santa Croce.

Catholic Church and thrust a sword into the Jewish Synagogue's head. With a strong corporeal metaphor for Catholicism's supremacy, Giovanni da Modena demonstrates a motif of coexistence between the two religions. It was the year 1420.

According to Vincenza Maugeri, between the late 14th and early 15th centuries, Bologna "was one of the liveliest centers of Jewish culture in the Italian peninsula" (Maugeri 2022, 86).[3] The establishment of a Jewish ghetto, nonetheless, dates back to July 14, 1555, when the bull *Cum nimis absurdum* was signed by Pope Paul IV (Gervasio 1996, 177). This designated area, located between present-day Via Oberdan and Via Zamboni, was positioned at the city's nucleus, in close proximity to the famous landmark of the Two Towers. As will be described in this article, this location was strategic because it was hidden from the main city flows, yet integrated into the social fabric of the city-center.

The ghetto's specific history of persistence and hiddenness served as the starting point for the creation of *in some places the walls swallow sound,* a dance performance developed in Bologna (between fall of 2022 and summer 2023) with theoretical framework by Silvia Garzarella and choreography by Sarah Marks Mininsohn. A shifting group of artists participated in the early residencies, leading to a 20-minute piece performed at Teatro Nascosto in June 2023.[4] The performers included four dancers with varying dance training backgrounds: Daniele Chieppa, Maria Chiara Grasso, Rosa Rizzi, and Nina Rovera. Two musicians played a live sound score: Francois Ndayambaje and Erica Ruggiero.

In this article, we will outline the history of the former ghetto and discuss how the space has been engaged through performance in recent decades. This will be followed by a choreographic framework, providing background on improvisation and site-specific research as they relate to the project. We will then delve into the choreographic process itself, from the creation of early scores, to the work's choreographic structuring and soundscore development. The article will conclude by examining broader implications of encountering a city through a choreographic lens, without disregarding the historical identity of the place from which that choreography originated.

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[3] This is also evidenced by the establishment of a Hebrew chair in the Bolognese Studium (1468-1489 approx.) and the choice to organize the congress of the Jewish communities of central-northern Italy in Bologna in 1416, two years before the creation of the brachial cross (cf. Muzzarelli 1996, 19-53).

[4] Teatro Nascosto is a theater space in Bologna at Via Zanardi, 357.

Framing the Site of Research

At the beginning of the 16th century, the Jewish presence in Bologna was relatively stable and integrated into city life (Muzzarelli 2002, 78).[5] Several landmarks are testament to this, including money lending benches (*monti*)[6] in the city center (between the current streets of S. Vitale, Piazza S. Stefano, and Piazza di Porta Ravegnana), two synagogues (on Via S. Vitale and Via S. Stefano), and various commercial activities such as tailors, cobblers, and typographers (cf. Muzzarelli 1996, 19-53).

Just by walking through the city, however, it might be difficult to perceive the presence of Jewish culture and history. This impression of hiddenness aligns with intentional structures and precise historical occurrences dating back to the ghetto institution in 1555:

> As often happened in the Ancien Régime, not all laws and ordinances were effectively enforced as intended. Realities and practical circumstances often required mediation and adjustments. This was also the case in Bologna, which was then the second most important city in the Papal States. Initially planned and partially implemented, the ghetto here was sealed off or isolated from the outside and enclosed with walls and locks — not until 1566, eleven years after Pope Paul IV's bull, when jurisdiction over the Jews shifted from the hands of the Legate to those of the Pontifical Commissioner Angelo Antonio Amati. The ghetto in Bologna was dismantled in 1569, when Pope Pius V ordered all Jews, except those from Rome and Ancona, to be expelled from the Papal States. In 1586, with the bull *Christiana pietas*, Pope Sixtus V allowed them to return without the obligation to reside in ghettos. (Gervasio 1996, 178)

The Bolognese ghetto, therefore, had a short legal duration, as it was dismantled just ten years after its establishment. Nonetheless, its position influenced and was influenced by the city's dynamics. Historian Robert Bonfil notes the ghetto's proximity to the city center: "In most Italian cities, the ghetto is paradoxically located at the center, right around the corner from the cathedral, as a rule close to the market" (Bonfil 1994, 75). Importantly, despite its vicinity, the ghetto could not encompass the city's center of exchange or cathedral.[7] Therefore, the Italian ghetto was

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[5] About the presence and culture of the Italian Jewish community in the Middle Ages (cf. Toaff 1989; Todeschini 2018).

[6] Muzzarelli and Todeschini have thoroughly explored the topic (Muzzarelli 1994; Todeschini 2016).

[7] Bonfil notes that "the institution of the ghetto led to the crystallization of the Jewish presence within the city's topography." While around this time, many of the city's most

"a halfway house between acceptance and expulsion" (Bonfil 1994, 73), an ambivalent space to which, in the case of Bologna, the changing Papal regulations added indeterminacy. After the later expulsion, indeed, the local Jewish community began to reconstitute itself only from the nineteenth century, relocating the synagogue outside the area of the former ghetto.[8]

The decision to approach the ex-ghetto from a choreographic perspective stemmed from the recognition of a gap in relation to the history of the area, which – perhaps also due to this indeterminacy – has often been excluded from the performative actions that have taken place there in the last decades. The recent past of site-specific performance in Bologna can help us to understand the implications connected to this gap. The city was indeed the first in Italy to create a festival dedicated to dance in the urban spaces of the metropolis (Danza Urbana - Festival Internazionale di Danza nei paesaggi urbani), and the area of the ghetto has been involved since the very first editions.[9] In 1998, just one year after the festival's launch, Belgian choreographer Pierre Droulers staged "Petites Formes", a choreographic work for four performers (Stefan Dreher, Pierre Droulers, Thomas Hauert, Celia Hope Simpson) within the ex-ghetto period must be put before the 10[10]. The dancers, stationed at four different points, crafted a journey focusing specifically on the relationship between their movements and the city's architectural space. Another performance, "Dormitori Silenziosi" by the Laudati Danza company (Simona Bertozzi, Nicola Laudati, Marco Rebecchi), featured in both the 2000 and 2001 editions, similarly highlighted spatial dimensions by engaging the audience through the alleys of Vicolo San Giobbe.[11] In 2000, "Le Città invisibili" by Teri Jeannette Weikel

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powerful moved out of the city center, "the Jews, however, had originally preferred to take up residence close to the market places [...] in most cases, the institution of the ghetto 'tied' the Jews, so to speak, to these quarters" (Bonfil 1994, 75).

[8] The establishment of a small prayer oratory in a private house near Piazza Malpighi is recorded as early as 1839. The rental of a space on Via dei Gombruti, dated 1868, served as the initial nucleus of the synagogue inaugurated in 1877 within the former building owned by the noble Gombruti family (current address: Via dei Gombruti 7). The building was expanded after World War I (1928) and reconstructed following the bombings of World War II (1953) (Comunità Ebraica di Bologna 2024).

[9] The following reconstruction was made possible through dialogue with the artistic director of the festival, Massimo Carosi, who generously offered to revisit the memory of Danza Urbana, providing detailed information about the involved companies on May 9, 2024 (cf. Carosi 2011).

[10] Dreher Stefan, Droulers Pierre, Hauert Thomas, Simpson Celia Hope, "Petites Formes", choreography by Pierre Droulers), Festival Danza Urbana 1998.

[11] Bertozzi Simona, Laudati Nicola, Rebecchi Marco (Laudati Danza), "Dormitori Silenziosi",

(TIR Danza) explored the relationship with Calvino's eponymous text[12] and even in the latest dance creations that took place in that area ("Still-point" by Compagnia Urbani Guerra,[13] "CHAINED LOVE" by Compagnia Akesi,[14] and "Clima" by Compagnia MK di Michele di Stefano[15]), there was no specific reference to the historical memory of the place. These works share a common trait: their interaction with the architectural space, which has led to a concentration of performances in some of the most picturesque (and touristic) streets of the former ghetto, particularly Vicolo San Giobbe, Via Valdonica, and Piazzetta Marco Biagi.

In regard to performances that interact with urban site, Rossella Mazzaglia cites the work of anthropologist Elio Satti:

> Performances that take place in urban contexts interact, in various ways, with the identity of the place. Satti synthesizes the two main orientations as follows:
> A. In opposition to the identity of the place, its genius loci, to introduce disruptive elements capable of altering its identity; in this case, the movements carrying meaning do not engage with the context but conflict with it, depositing «new» images that are therefore unrecognizable.
> B. In harmony with the identity of the place to accommodate its essence and preserve its specificity in a situation of continuity; the movement arises from an incorporation of the context and thus results in an expressive rendering recognizable within the place itself. (Mazzaglia 2015, 94-5)

The creation process for *in some places the walls swallow sound* aligns closely with the principles outlined in option B, as it involved research into the ex-ghetto's context and essence. This process found a suitable interlocutor in the nearby Jewish Museum of Bologna (MEB), located in the heart of Via Valdonica. With the assistance of the current director, Caterina Quareni, and the resident librarian of the Documentation Center, Ivan Orsini, it was possible to delve into the social and historical specificity of the area,

choreography by Nicola Laudati, Festival Danza Urbana 2000 and 2001, Bologna. Cf. Laudati Danza Company official website: https://www.laudatidanza.com/produzioni/dormitori-silenziosi/, accessed May 10, 2024.

[12] Weikel Teri Jeannette (TIR Danza), "Le Città invisibili», choreography by Weikel Teri Jeannette, Festival Danza Urbana 2000, Bologna.

[13] Urbani Silvia (Compagnia Urbani Guerra), "Still-point", choreography by Silvia Urbani, Festival Danza Urbana 2012, Bologna.

[14] Bricca Iunia, Costa Augusto Roberto, (Compagnia Akesi), "CHAINED LOVE", choreography by Compagnia Akesi, Festival Danza Urbana 2013.

[15] Di Stefano Michele (mk), Clima, choreography by Michele di Stefano, Festival Danza Urbana 2013.

which became a starting point for the choreography. The dialogue with the museum, chosen as a preserver of the memories of the place, served to 'awaken' the identity of the ex-ghetto in the choreography. The ongoing negotiation of spaces, internal geographies, and points of connection between the Jewish and Catholic communities became additional stimuli guiding the development of movement. Consistent with Mininsohn's background, the choreography unfolded within the lineage of American post-modern dance, employing improvisation techniques in the initial phase and more specific mapping in the second.

Choreographic Framework

Philosopher Alessandro Bertinetto argues that improvisation in artistic performance already deals with interactions between humans and their surroundings, specifically, "the way human beings organise their interactive relations with the natural and social environment" (Bertinetto 2021, 74). This environment, in the context of artistic improvisation, encompasses "everything that constrains the artist's agency to certain possibilities, excluding others" (Bertinetto 2021, 79). As improvisation plays out in relation to its environment, the dance becomes affected by 'contingency,' in other words, the possibility of change in this environment:

> Artistic improvisation inhabits the realm of uncertainty... It is not just a matter of dominating contingency, but of responding responsibly to it, treating it as a kind of 'artistic material' or as a condition of artistic production. In this sense, improvisation develops an artistic 'grammar of contingency' by means of which it mindfully dives into uncertainty. (Bertinetto 2021, 78)

The artistic improvisation's "grammar of contingency" exists both in relation to space and to other elements (choreographic tools, other dancing bodies, etc.), generating dynamics of constant negotiation throughout the dance creation process. This negotiation is aided by improvisational structures, or *scores*. Dance scholar and practitioner Victoria Hunter defines a movement score as

> a set of instructions employed in sited dance improvisation tasks and exploratory dance 'episodes' that either exist as movement experiences in their own right or function as a mechanism for explorations that develop and produce material to be included in a dance composition at a later stage. (Hunter 2019, 636)

These structured scores did not enclose the possibility of unexpected

movements, rather, encouraged them. Hunter quotes renowned American dance artist Anna Halprin (1920-2021) on the possibilities that may arise out of the parameters of a score:[16]

> 'The more you set on yourself, the more you have to push the edges out to get at more material. See, if I were just improvising I'd go to a certain point and I might just leave it and go to something else. An exploration requires you to stay on that particular path, focused on a particular element, for a given length of time. And you can't just run off. Or you can't just move into some more familiar way of doing things.' (Hunter 2019, 644)

In the case of *in some places the walls swallow sound* a variety of scores (with varying degrees of constraint) contributed to the development of the dance, including those influenced by Contact Improvisation (CI). Given Mininsohn's training in the form, scores drawn from CI offered primary practices of negotiation among contingent situations.[17]

In CI, a form with techniques and 'pedestrian' aesthetics[18] referenced throughout the choreographic process, dancers in contact not only participate in a movement dialogue with each other, but also in "a dialectical and reflexive relationship [...] between the person and the surrounding world" (Mazzaglia and Paxton 2013, 255). In describing CI, American dance scholar Ann Cooper Albright writes:

> more than the physical techniques, it is the common choice to improvise — to explore an unforeseen movement, to give value to the potential stories of physical contact — that informs the dancers' engagement in the duet. Like a kaleidoscope, contact improvisation can arrange and rearrange whichever piece of the world it focuses on. (Albright 2013, 79)

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[16] Halprin's contributions to the dance field, especially in relation to improvisation and architecture, have influenced the choreographer's artistry (cf. Colomban 2010).

[17] Mininsohn's choreography has been influenced by American post-modern dance traditions, including those stemming from the Judson Church artists and CI. Throughout this particular process, she was also training in Italy with contemporary dance artists Antonella Boccadamo and Nuvola Vandini, as well as tango maestra Luciana Semprini, artists who inevitably influenced the choreographic work by proximity.

[18] The American dancer and choreographer Steve Paxton (1939-2024), known as the founder of Contact Improvisation, contributed to a lineage of American postmodern dance with a particular interest in *pedestrian* movement: in other words, using what may be considered ordinary gesture in dance performances to blur the boundary between art and life (Mazzaglia and Paxton 2013, 254; cf. Perrin 2019 and Jacob's Pillow Dance Interactive 2024).

Due to its many possibilities for exploring unforeseen movement and viewing the world through new perspectives, CI offered key strategies for initially exploring urban spatial dynamics, while accounting for contingency, during the rehearsal process.

While CI played a significant role in the choreographic research, the final piece was not characterized by recognizable CI duets, so much as highly structured conversations between fixed movement (often referred to as 'set choreography') and on-the-spot decision making (often referred to as 'improvisation').[19] Importantly, the process did not entail clear distinctions between 'set' and 'improvised,' since moments of 'set' movement allowed for choice-making in the present, and moments of 'improvised' movement played out in the context of highly specific tasks or maps. American dance scholar Susan Foster remarks:

> The performance of any action, regardless of how predetermined it is in the minds of those who perform it and those who witness it, contains an element of improvisation. That moment of wavering while contemplating how, exactly, to execute an action already deeply known, belies the presence of improvised action. It is this suspense-filled plenitude of the not-quite-known that gives live performance its special brilliance. (Foster 2003, 4)

This wavering tendency between improvisational choice-making and set movements connected the choreography to a conceptual dialogue between freedom and constraint in the context of the Jewish ghetto. American performance scholar Danielle Goldman poses freedom as an improvisational practice, and she asks how it might be redefined as an active process that works through, rather than in absolute opposition to, constraints (Goldman 2010). She points out that certain ideas of 'freedom' demonstrate a hardened definition, that "if one could overcome a particular set of obstacles all would be well, thereby eliding the fact that there are always multiple strictures in the world" (Goldman 2010, 4). Despite constraining aspects of the ghetto, Mininsohn did not intend for the dance work to

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[19] From the choreographer's perspective, these are common categories used to discuss movement in the dance field. Danielle Goldman notes the misconception that improvisation is a less-prepared version of composition, because of its spontaneity. This idea, she argues, does not consider the historical knowledge embedded in improvisational forms: "As the ethnomusicologist Paul Berliner states in *Thinking in Jazz*, composition and improvisation 'overlap hopelessly at the margins'" (Goldman 2010, 5). Throughout the choreographic process, the dancers were asked to find moments of improvisatory spontaneity in 'fixed' composition, as well as rigorous specificity in 'improvisational' scores.

idealize notions of 'freedom' and 'constraint.' Rather, the choreography researched interactions between these ideas, locating opportunities for movement enactment amidst a space once established for the purpose of movement inhibition.

The practices described in the following sections dialogue with the historical spatial limitations unique to Bologna's Jewish ghetto, and in doing so, they facilitate exchange between historical and choreographic fields of research. In each discussion, the body acts as a meeting point between conceptual fields, with possibilities for finding movement amidst constraints and improvising in response to contingency.

Early Residencies: Site Exploration and Improvisation Scores for Arrival

During the first residencies for the creation of *in some places the walls swallow sound*, (December 2022 and January 2023), improvisational scores were developed for comprehending the essence of the ex-ghetto space in relation to the surrounding urban landscape of Bologna.

One warm-up score involved mapping qualitative zones throughout the broader city of Bologna: dancers moved along the edges of the studio space using slow, horizontal, and sprawling movements (extending outward from the body's vertical axis, without concern for colliding with others), and gradually spiraled into the center of the studio as the movements become quicker, more vertical, and more contained (moving closer to the body's vertical axis, as though weaving through a crowded *portico* between Piazza Maggiore and the Two Towers). This spiraling pathway was imagined as something like a whirlpool, drawing dancers from the calm outskirts towards the frenetic center. Once in the center, the dancers spiraled outward again towards the studio-city's edges, again slowing and sprawling. They repeated this for ten or twenty minutes, allowing time for their bodies to warm while, simultaneously, the studio became marked with this schema.

This score provided a means of setting the stage for movement exploration and choreographic development. In the context of site-specific exploration, Hunter describes this early exploration process as a kind of 'arrival,' a familiarization with the site of choreographic research, with the potential for later reconstruction and retelling to an audience in a different setting (Hunter 2019, 644). She also acknowledges that such a 'retelling' need not entail accurate portrayals of the site, rather, it can raise "questions of selection and omission, authenticity and reinterpretation" (Hunter 2019, 644). Since the score took place in a dance studio rather than in the site

of the ex-ghetto, it served to reimagine a map or blueprint of the urban landscape in question, to which details could be added later on.

American choreographer Stephan Koplowitz suggests "site inventory" as another early stage of research when it comes to site-specific dance-making (Koplowitz 2022, 53), a step that would allow for the perception and initial embodiment of the ghetto's specificities. Koplowitz recommends spending time in the site of research, to "allow the visual and physical site to become part of your consciousness so that your subconscious mind can begin to work and perhaps make connections" (Koplowitz 2022, 53). He quotes Canadian choreographer Noémie Lafrance,

> 'I start by feeling the space, like a meditation. Then, I let these questions come in, and I start to superimpose visuals of bodies in the space. I ask what does this space mean to people who use it? Who used it a hundred years ago? I like to think about all those ghosts. What are the human relations that make or made this space what it is today? What was its intended purpose? [...] What is invisibilized here or in the idea that this space was made public?' (Koplowitz 2022, 48)[20]

Through similar modes of observation, the qualities in and around the ex-ghetto became translated into the dance studio. Along with Koplowitz' strategies, we could see this early movement exploration in relation to a specific mechanism of the human brain during the perception of one's environment. This is well explained by Alva Noë in his *Action in Perception*:

> Experience isn't something that happens in us. It is something we do; it is a temporally extended process of skillful probing. The world makes itself available to our reach. The experience comprises mind and world. Experience has content only thanks to the established dynamics of interaction between perceiver and world. (Noë 2004, 1)

According to Noë, a "perceiver" is someone who possesses bodily skills and sensorimotor knowledge. The central claim, which he calls "the enactive approach," is precisely that:

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[20] The author quotes American choreographer Jennifer Monson, who describes a 2018 project involving research at a site, followed by the performance in a theater. Though Monson and her collaborator, Mauriah Kraker never performed on the prairie site itself, they asked, "'How do the vibratory, planetary, atmospheric, and weather systems shape the body and the choreographic structures? How do we bring that knowledge and experience into the theater through sound, light, and movement?'" (Koplowitz 2022, 15). This example demonstrates how site-specific research may be transposed into the 'performance' setting of a studio or theater.

> Perceptual experience acquires content thanks to our possession of bodily skills. What we perceive is determined by what we do (or what we know how to do); it is determined by what we are ready to do. In ways I try to make precise, we enact our perceptual experience; we act it out. (Noë 2004, 1)

The 'skilled bodies' of the dancers thus became ideal for perceiving the urban space and transitioning from the global to the particular dimensions of places inhabited by the Jewish community during the Bologna ghetto's institution period.

A subsequent early improvisation score continued to outline city spaces, this time zooming in on the ex-ghetto to explore the particularities of its confines. Starting from the colored *Map of the Jewish Itinerary of Bologna*, reproduced on the floor of the permanent section of the MEB,[21] the dancers remapped the shape of the ghetto in the studio.[22] They traced its vaguely trapezoidal form, more narrow towards the city center (oriented as downstage in the studio) and wider towards the city's periphery (oriented as upstage). Initially, the dancers moved along the ghetto's frame each with their own timings, playing between slowing down and speeding up, letting curves on the map and rhythms in the room influence their decisions. Due to differences in speed, they would cross paths and come into physical contact, layering another score: *when I push, you push; when I pull, you pull*. As dancers' hands, elbows, chests, and knees came into contact, small conversations of push and pull played out along the border. Duets and trios formed and split. This improvisational score of push-and-pull became casually referred to as the 'tango score' in rehearsals (referencing the choreographer's experience of subtle interactions of push and pull in her practice of Argentine tango).[23] This layered score marked the ghetto's edges as both boundaries and sites of negotiation, referencing the negotiation of borders and the 'in-between' presence of Jewish life in Bologna. At the same time, the score sparked the development of an intricate mapping practice based on the ghetto space, which would be elaborated upon for the remainder of the process.

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[21] The MEB consists of a permanent section dedicated to Jewish identity, a section for temporary exhibitions, meetings, and educational activities, and a Documentation Center for scholars.

[22] Maps can also be consulted in the text by Bonilauri and Maugeri (Bonilauri and Maugeri 2002, 96).

[23] Due to Mininsohn's practice of Argentine tango, the form was referenced as inspiration during some rehearsals. Tango and CI (and related improvisational and somatic practices) have a history of theoretical and practice-based encounters (cf. Rufo 2020).

Choreographic Structuring: Understanding the City-Body through Detailed Mapping

After the first residencies and explorations, the improvisational scores became layered with detailed structures and 'set' movement, transforming gradually into the iteration performed in June. This process of transformation was influenced by researching 'city-body' in relation to 'human-body,' an interplay that led to the emergence of new functions, patterns, and boundaries in the dance work.

The concept of the 'city as body' is ancient and transcultural. In Greek and Roman Culture, for example, the correspondence between the human body and the city presents a central subject of investigation. A theoretical foundation for this reflection can be found in Vitruvius, *De Architectura*: "Without symmetry and proportion there can be no principles in the design of any temple; that is, if there is no precise relation between its members, as in the case of those of a well shaped man" (Morgan 1914, 72). Renaissance-era philosophical thinking also adds a theological element to the Vitruvian theme: the extension of the harmony of individual-building proportions to the layout of the entire city. Just think of the illustrations by Francesco Di Giorgio Martini in the *Codice Salluzziano* (Bussagli 2000**,** 148). As mentioned by the Italian historian Marco Bussagli, Di Giorgio draws parallels between the human body and urban planning:

> When in this city there is no need to build a fortress, its place must be attributed to the cathedral church, with its corresponding square where the noble palace should be located. And from the opposite side, [corresponding to] the roundness of the navel, the main square [must be located]. The hands and feet, and other temples and squares are to be established. And just as the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth, the veins, intestines, and other internal and external organs [are] organized within and around the body according to its necessity and need, so should be observed in the city. (Bussagli 2000)

Bussagli notes that for Di Giorgio, much like organs within and around the body, buildings in the city should be positioned according to necessity:

> There is therefore a correspondence between the city and the body that also concerns the hierarchy of the limbs and the consequent placement of buildings in relation to it. For this reason, when Di Giorgio draws on the margin of the Codice Saluzziano […] the suggestive plan of an anthropomorphic fortified city, he takes care to place the possible fortress in the position of the head, the church in the chest, and the main square around the navel. (Bussagli 2000)

From these images emerged an essential question that guided the choreographic creation: if a city were a body, what would be its bones, its organs, its functions?

To imagine a map of XVI sec. Bologna in relation to the human body, one could think of a religious body, with the central cathedral, Basilica di San Petronio (located in Piazza Maggiore), as the 'heart.' The nearby ghetto, in contrast, drawn to exclude main bodily landmarks of the Catholic city (such as churches and government buildings), would be 'off-center,' in a space 'between' the organs needed for the functioning of the more pervasive Catholic body. The ghetto considered the "ombilico più precioso di Bologna" (Bologna's most precious navel) as the city's inhabitants wrote after the decree of Paolo IV, complaining about the choice to place the Jews 'nella più bella, sicura e salutare parte della città' (in the most beautiful, safe, and healthy part of the city) confirming the pervasiveness of the anthropomorphic conception of urban space (Dondarini and De Angelis 1997, 68).

The comparison between the Bolognese ghetto and the navel, usually associated with the central part of the city's Catholic body (in Martini's depiction, the square), introduces another point around which the choreographic creation was organized: the dynamics of negotiation and exchange that affected the boundaries of the ghetto and its very function of segregation, which, according to Gervasio, was never fully agreed upon:

> In the sources consulted, I found no evidence that the closure of the ghetto was implemented at the time of its establishment — even though the document indicating the places where gates and walls were to be located is one of the earliest to be drawn up. On the contrary, all indications would lead us to believe that the ghetto was closed much later, in 1566. It is also worth considering that implementing such closure meant working on an urban intervention that was probably not easy to complete quickly. [...] It is therefore likely that in Bologna, the operations for the closure of the ghetto dragged on for a long time. Probably, at the local level, there was no particular interest in isolating and confining the Jews, strictly enforcing the harsh provisions of 1555, especially considering the close economic and financial collaboration existing between Christians and Jews. In more than one document from the archive of the Bolognese Embassy in Rome, on different dates, it is lamented that though Jews are not in the ghetto, it still has not been closed. (Gervasio 1996, 203-4)

We note here that the ghetto was not entirely restrictive, nor was it entirely agreed upon by local Christians (cf. Muzzarelli 2019, 25-34). This imperfection of the ghetto's constraining function opened space for choreographic intervention. In particular, the conversion of the mental image of

the city as a body and the ghetto as one of its parts led to a more precise exploration of the ghetto's boundaries, in order to understand possibilities of moving into it. The writings of the American writer and activist Rebecca Solnit were useful in facilitating this transition. For Solnit (2000) walking allows for a deep connection with the surrounding landscape and is a form of active presence in the world:

> Walking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord. Walking allows us to be in our bodies and in the world without being made busy by them. It leaves us free to think without being wholly lost in our thoughts. (Solnit 2000, 5)

To build on these considerations, we asked the MEB to guide us on a walking tour through the streets of the ex-ghetto, which would stimulate the next directions of the choreography. Thanks to Vincenza Maugeri, MEB former director who guided us, we rediscovered the points where gates stood, retracing the ancient walls and investigating spaces that facilitated exchange and negotiation with the broader Bolognese community.[24] This walking tour included buildings where, albeit centuries later, further exchanges and renegotiations with Jewish culture can be traced, such as the Hebrew inscriptions on the facade of the majestic Palazzo Bocchi (via Goito, 16) (cf. Busi 2006, 187-196; Scannavini 1991).

Discoveries from the tour found their way into the studio through the act of walking, forming choreographic substructure (cf. Zaltieri 2011, 1-14). While early scores more broadly outlined the ghetto's borders, the February and March residencies involved improvisational scores for mapping specific pathways within it. The dancers followed a specific pathway of streets and *vicoli* transposed into the studio: cross into the ghetto from Via Oberdan onto Via S. Simone, turning left up Via S. Simone and then backtracking down through Vicolo Mandria. Vicolo Mandria turns into Vicolo S. Giobbe with a left turn, then left again up Via dell'Inferno, then down again through the horizontal side streets: Via del Carro, Via Canonica, Via De'Giudei, and back to Vicolo S. Giobbe, before exiting into the loud and frenetic city center, in the vicinity of the Two Towers.

Tracing this pathway by foot provided a method of translation between city and studio, with the body as the central link. Rebecca Solnit discusses the act of retracing pathways as a strategy for both remembering and

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[24] The walking tour with Vincenza Maugeri took place on February 20, 2023.

memorizing: "There is a very practical sense in which to trace even an imaginary route is to trace the spirit or thought of what has passed there before" (Solnit 2000, 82). She describes how retracing one's footsteps might allow memories from those sites to return, referring specifically to the classical Greek 'memory palace' technique, in which an orator would associate a line of a speech with a place in a building as a practical tool for memorization (Solnit 2000, 83). Solnit writes,

> Memory, like the mind and time, is unimaginable without physical dimensions; to imagine it as a physical place is to make it into a landscape in which its contents are located, and what has location can be approached. That is to say, if memory is imagined as a real space… then the act of remembering is imagined as a real act, that is, as a physical act: as walking… To walk the same route again can mean to think the same thoughts again, as though thoughts and ideas were indeed fixed objects in a landscape, one need only to know how to travel through. (Solnit 2000, 83)

As the dancers walked the transposed ghetto pathway, its lines and angles developed double meanings: first, the memory of a given point in the Bologna ghetto, and second, the specified movement for a point within the dance (this meaning also became tied to the positions of other in given moments, which were useful for dancers to note while memorizing choreography). The two overlaid maps–ghetto and studio–became more and more intertwined as the rehearsal process continued. The quality of the walking itself became specified (*direct, but loose in the arms*), and the steps became units of measurement (*Via dell'Inferno is 10 steps; Via del Carro is 3*). With each repetition of this pathway, the dancers formed a choreographic body, which was entangled with the city body. These embodied techniques for perceiving the city proved useful for investigating the broader idea of 'body' as more than a singular being, but a nest of intricate systems of movement and negotiation.

The mapped walking gradually developed into different movements, performed at certain spatial points and memorized through association with ghetto landmarks. These movements tended towards constrained, angular, and sculpted qualities, though the dancers sometimes broke into patterns that one might describe as more free-flowing and momentum-based (for example, falling forward from a held arabesque into a run downstage, through the transposed Vicolo Mandria). While at times this choreography occurred in 'set' unison, at other times, an improvisational score determined its timing: dancers would displace a movement from its specified position on the map and perform it at a different spatial point. Considering the relatively small space, dancers came close to colliding along the map, and the score

encompassed these inevitable negotiations of space (though small brushes of touch were embraced in the dance, more drastic collisions were avoided).

Such negotiations of tight spaces were influenced by a practice of readiness for the unexpected. Goldman notes:

> The practice of improvisation—the training that truly skillful improvisation requires—is a rigorous mode of making oneself ready for a range of potential situations. It is an incessant preparation, grounded in the present while open to the next moment's possible actions and constraints. According to this logic, even when there is no 'exquisite' moment, no clear arrival or climax, the practice of improvisation is politically powerful as a mode of making oneself ready. This is the way in which improvisation pushes against static reifications of freedom. (Goldman 2010, 142)

This mapping score addressed readiness when approaching other bodies, with the possibility of collision, asking the question: what micro-interactions are necessary for moving throughout a given space? What do these micro-interactions have to teach us about movements and negotiations that would have taken place within the ghetto? Though dancers held constrained forms during parts of this section, the task required that they quickly soften and shift in order to move through the small space, tuning their individual bodies with the choreographic body.[25] Connecting across bodies became central to understanding the identity of the place.

Sonic Exchange: Soundscore as Interaction Between Urban and Choreographic Bodies

Scholar Michael D. Fowler writes[26]: "Landscape is not a natural feature of the environment but a synthetic space, a man-made system of spaces superimposed on the face of the land, functioning and evolving not according to

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[25] Another mode of navigating tight (and often precarious) spaces was 'becoming invisible,' a score borrowed from Jennifer Monson for this process. 'Becoming invisible' was not about hiding oneself, or folding oneself into small shapes, but rather, about changing one's 'presence.' In the studio, the dancers practiced moving between states of invisibility and visibility by inhabiting the desire to be seen, or the desire to pass unseen. Questions were posed, such as: how do we hold ourselves walking down the street when we want people to see us? How do we hold ourselves when we hope that no one will see us? Becoming invisible involved an imagined retreating towards the body's vertical axis, a focus inward, while becoming visible involved expansion.

[26] In reference to the insights of John Brinckerhoff Jackson, a leading figure in landscape studies (Brinckerhoff 1970).

natural laws but to serve a community" (Fowler 2013, 111). According to Fowler, this concept is fundamental to understanding writer and composer R. Murray Schafer's notion of "soundscape," which is closely linked to the notion of landscape but characterized by different complexity as it "consists of events heard not objects seen" (Schafer 1997, 8). Consistent with the strong connection between these two research paths, the work on the sounds that accompany this choreography did not simply exist beside the danced movements, rather, it followed a similar path to choreographic composition, involving improvisation and drawing inspiration from dialogue with the MEB.

In his pioneering book, *Our sonic environment and the tuning of the world. The Soundscape* (1997), Schafer discusses the challenges in understanding the evolution of the soundscape over time, emphasizing the lack of direct documentation and the importance of literary, mythological, and historical sources to recreate it with an historical perspective:

> While we may have numerous photographs taken at different times, and before them drawings and maps to show us how a scene changed over the ages, we must make inferences as to the changes of the soundscape. We may know exactly how many new buildings went up in a given area in a decade or how the population has risen, but we do not know by how many decibels the ambient noise level may have risen for a comparable period of time. More than this, sounds may alter or disappear with scarcely a comment even from the most sensitive of historians. Thus, while we may utilize the techniques of modem recording and analysis to study contemporary soundscapes, for the foundation of historical perspectives, we will have to turn to earwitness accounts from literature and mythology, as well as to anthropological and historical records. (Schafer 1997, 8)

Connecting to the sound-history of the place enabled the dance work to imagine beyond the present soundscape of the area which, while relatively tranquil, still experiences a degree of noise infiltration from the noisier city center. This imagining was supported by insights gleaned from readings on the historical presence of the Jewish community in the city. According to Bonfil, during the Italian Renaissance, Jewish communities would tend towards silence in order to avoid drawing unnecessary attention:

> The inclination to choose silence was just one more manifestation of the more general propensity on the part of the Jews to elide and conceal their presence, while at the same time seeking, unconsciously and paradoxically, to be as fully integrated as possible in a society determined to exclude them and with which, in any case, they had very little in common. (Bonfil 1994, 234)

Within the Jewish ghetto, therefore, the dimensions of quiet were twofold: planned by the Jewish community and imposed by the surrounding social context.

The soundscore for *in some places the walls swallow sound* involved its own improvisations and exchanges based on sounds of the city.[27] By April 2023, the cast and musicians were set, and the process turned to shaping the scores into a fixed order, creating and refining a sort of 'map' of the dance. These rehearsals also involved more consistent collaboration with the two musicians, at this point regularly present in the studio. Both trained in jazz and free improvisation, Ruggiero and Ndayambaje were familiar with improvisational technique, which influenced their contributions. Two aspects of the soundscore in particular were determined by sonic components of the ghetto: first, the stark auditory difference between inside and outside the ghetto's boundaries, and second, the infiltration of sound from church bells. Negotiations around volume, rhythm, and musical quality emerged from these sonic components.

Early in the choreographic process, Ruggiero had recorded sound samples as she walked from the area outside the ex-ghetto to within it. Listening to the clip later, the contrast in volume from loud (outside) to quiet (inside) was clear.[28] In the studio, she experimented by overlaying this sound sample in multiple parts of the dance, and arrived at using it once to open the piece and another time to close it. The clips were played softly (the audience would be unlikely to perceive them without being told), framing the dance in a subtle blend of sound.

Sounds from outside the ex-ghetto also bled into the dance, as the soundscape of the quarter was never entirely closed to the outside. During one of the visits to the MEB, Quareni suggested that the proximity between the quiet Jewish ghetto and one of the busiest parts of the city center led not only to exchange in goods and services, but also the sounds of the church bells.[29] Inspired by this conversation, recorded bell sounds were used in several parts throughout the dance, first during the map-tracing section, and the other during a later solo performed by Grasso. These recorded

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[27] The chosen title of the dance, *in some places the walls swallow sound*, stemmed from this sudden perceived quiet upon entering the ex-ghetto space.
[28] To the musicians, this recording 'was like a call from the outside world' into the ghetto, facilitating a sensory crossing in through the gates to begin, and a retreating back out to end. This and the following suggestions from the involved artists were gathered during rehearsals.
[29] The conversation with Cristina Quareni took place on February 5, 2023. The bell sounds were recorded in March 2023 by Ndayambaje.

sound samples were not intended to replicate the ex-ghetto, rather, they aided the transition from one environment to the other, further connecting the historical and choreographic research processes.

As the dancers performed duets and trios, the dance itself entered into a duet with the musicians, with dancers and musicians playing off each other and engaging in practices of active decision-making. From the perspective of the musicians, they became a sort of 'orchestral body' with the dancers, passing between performing melodies and harmonies alongside the movement, towards a composition in which one cannot be completely separated from the other.

Rhythm and quality were key to this musical negotiation, as the musicians navigated between points that were more and less rhythmically and affectively synced with the dancers.[30] During the rehearsals, Ruggiero described the 'atmosphere of movements,' as a qualitative mode with which the musicians perceived the 'current' of the choreography and then contributed to it through music. As the dancers' movements affected the musicians' perception, the musicians worked to interpret the dance through its qualities, sometimes intensifying these qualities, and other times contrasting with them.

As the dance arrived at a completion, the musicians fixed certain moments of the sound score, much like how some of the improvisational movement became fixed into set choreography. However, the fixed sounds were always slightly different with each run, since the musicians had a summary 'map of atmospheres' of the dance, rather than a sheet with precise musical notes. These negotiations between 'planned' and 'spontaneous' sounds, contributed to an atmosphere that was constantly shifting, never fully constrained nor fully free. Considering the church bells and other noises from outside, the quiet of the ex-ghetto resulted as imperfect, as were its sounds. Dialoguing with this contemporary perception, the soundscore of the dance was built to demonstrate physical and sonic exchange.

Conclusion: Encountering the City through the Studio Dance Performance

Four dancers stand in a 'pedestrian manner' off to stage-right, relaxed with arms hanging by their sides. The soundscape from the ex-ghetto

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[30] Lepecki references Henri Lefebvre's writing on "the many ways in which quotidian experiences of embodying flows and rhythms simultaneously express and constrain subjectivity and perception" (Lepecki 2004, 153). We could think of the rhythms provided by the musicians, especially the beat that brought the dancers into a unison walk along the mapped pathway, as an architectural rule that could be both followed obediently and pushed against.

begins to play as a muted suspension of noise. The transposed ghetto map is taped out onto the studio floor. One-by-one, with casual demeanors, the dancers walk into the map. They take their time on this walk, inhabiting a quality of uncertainty as they become subtly pulled in different directions by a solo version of the push-and-pull 'tango score.' Barely visible, this movement blends into the soft blur of the city soundscape. They reach the longest diagonal line of the map, Via dell'Inferno. Upon arrival, the subtle push-and-pull bubbles up into a burst of quick-yet-stationary movement. Their upper bodies expand outwards in all directions, though they remain fundamentally contained to their vertical standing positions. They pick up on each other's rhythms and pauses, points of sharpness cutting through the suspension of sound. Then, deciding their timing together, they let this movement fizzle out, sinking into a quiet tableau in contact (a head rests on a shoulder, an arm on an elbow). Ambivalently, they separate and retrace the pathway, walking back to their starting point, where they assume positions for their next passages along the map.

As the performance unfolds, the dancers break away from these mapped pathways and into a series of duets and trios, which reshape boundaries between their bodies and the space. After a lively solo where a dancer attempts to retrace traversed pathways and recount enacted movements, they eventually reunite, and the dance concludes with a slow evolution transitioning between a series of tableaus. The dancers once again synchronize their timing with acute awareness. The contours of the ghetto and its streets reside within their bodies, as the map transforms into a tangible, corporeal image. As their movement fades away, it blends back intothe surrounding soundscape. Traces of the choreographic body remain as the predominant presence, absorbing movements and sounds, until it dissolves into silence.

This process involved observing and comprehending Bologna on foot. The city, which could be perceived as an object of walking between points, became the subject. Engaging this more active perspective through a conscious use of movement allowed us to perceive the walking body as a dancing body, and the city as a choreography.

Dance theorist Gabriele Klein writes about the city as an urban choreography, characterized by specific architectures and infrastructures, as well as by histories of human interactions:

> Research on urban choreography addresses the relationship between macro- and micro-structures, order and movement, structure and situation, whereby order materializes itself objectively, on the one hand (in traffic infrastructure, architec-

ture, buildings, etc.). And on the other hand, it is part of human figurations, highlighted by the intertwining of people's movements. The relationship between macro- and micro- structures in social figurations proves to be ambivalent: on the one hand, it leads to a conventionalization and standardization of social norms and rules, while on the other hand, it provides potential for disruption and intervention. From a sociological point of view, the manner in which this ambivalence is revealed is central to the study of urban choreographies. (Klein 2017, 145)

Klein's description of the city as choreography ties into how we have understood the ex-ghetto in relation to its surroundings, both an enclosed area with a history of social constraints, and a space of exchange with potential for intervention. Physically encountered, the ghetto has led us to interact with other bodies: those of dancers, musicians, staff of the Jewish Museum, and naturally, with people inhabiting that area daily. These cross-disciplinary connections offer potential for expanding the possibilities of site-specific choreographic research, while also allowing us to comprehend histories through a lens of contemporary practice.

In the choreographic work *in some places the walls swallow sound*, the departure from a solely architectural connection with the former ghetto was understood, in a political sense, as a strategy for attending to the fraught identity of the place as a 'ghetto,' while also connecting with the entities that safeguard its memories. Mazzaglia theorizes how the relationship between dance performance and urban environment

> not only concerns direct, physical, and dynamic interaction with urban evironments but can also be thematic, metaphorical, social, and political. It extends to the gaze that the choreographic work places on the city and that, from the city, ascends to the artist (due to the reciprocity between dance and space highlighted so far), to the exploration of contemporary ways of living, and to the search for and exposition of glimmers of identity and local culture eclipsed by globalization. (Mazzaglia 2015, 66).

This "eclipse," referring to tourist-driven developments that disregard the histories of marginalized communities, poses the risk of producing sanitized and marketable versions of urban spaces, thereby erasing their complexities and conflicts. By engaging with a city's history, including the constraints and contingencies faced by its residents, dance performance has the potential to disrupt this sanitization, bringing to the forefront the complexities of urban life (Foster 2002). Doing so through improvisatory methods, in particular, allows for honest exploration of those aspects of a city's history that remain unclear and unknown. This choreographic work aimed to provide a frame-

work for engaging the body in historical research on urban spaces, with the potential to challenge dominant narratives and amplify alternative voices.

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