

Abstract

Sanctuary: Shaping Frames and Shifting Perspectives is a multimedia, site-specific dance inspired by and created in the sanctuary space of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan. I chose Redeemer because I have attended that church for over seven years and have always had a fondness for the architecture. I fulfilled my idea of a site-specific dance in this space by collaborating with the architecture and the dancers in my cast. To inform my collaborative process, I researched notable choreographers who focused on site-specific dance, as well as current experts in architecture and design.

Sanctuary was never performed live due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The performance was intended to take place at Redeemer Presbyterian in Manhattan on March 26th, 2020, and we were asked to stop rehearsing one week prior to our performance. To replace the live performance, I created a video of the most recent rehearsal footage to be viewed by a selection of peers. They responded with feedback via email.

Sanctuary has three sections representing three visual perspectives: Frontal View, Profile View and Bird's Eye View. Through creating *Sanctuary*, I expected to show evidence that this dance could bring new life to a space that originally was intended for a different purpose. In order to accomplish this, I planned to shift the audience's perspective and shape the frame of their view by having the dancers perform on top of, under, and in between the pews, as well as along the columns and back wall. My rehearsal video demonstrates how I planned to use live movement and film to challenge, reveal, and enhance the audience's awareness of the sanctuary space.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

SANCTUARY: SHAPING FRAMES AND SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES

by

Lindsey Anne Hanson

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

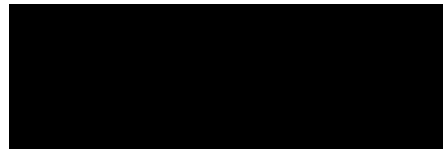
Master of Fine Arts

May 2020

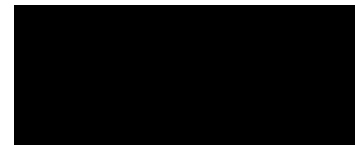
College of the Arts

Department of Theatre and Dance

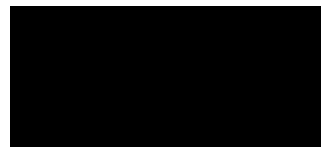
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A THESIS

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Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

2020

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to Redeemer Presbyterian and The Gallery at W83 for providing helpful resources along the way and allowing for creativity, spirituality, and dance to be celebrated in this space. The Gallery at W83 cultivates art and community on the Upper West Side, providing space for personal engagement, community conversations, and spiritual reflection. They collaborate with local artists from diverse backgrounds to explore universal themes of culture, community, and faith.

Endless thank yous to Montclair State University and thesis committee members: Maxine Steinman, Kyle deCamp, and Jessica DiMauro, for your guidance and insight throughout this process.

A special thank you to photographer Michael Haller, composer Lena Gabrielle, dancers Paige Sabo, Matthew Borchers, Lucy Wild, Sarah Hinderhofer, and Alberto Denis who were crucial in the early stages of the creative process.

My dear husband Michael, your patience, wisdom, and endless encouragement is invaluable. I could not have asked for a better partner to dance with through this chapter in my life.

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Introduction

How do we shift the perspective of what is seen and experienced? One way to change our emotional experience of a setting is by physically forcing ourselves to view it in a novel way. As an artist, my personal goal for this thesis was not only to contemplate how a specific space could speak to me choreographically, but also how it could enhance the viewers interpretation and experience of a space. Why choose a church for this thesis exploration? For many years, I have visited the sanctuary space of Redeemer Presbyterian Church by attending their church services. With each visit, changing where I sat affected my experience of the architecture. For example, from the balcony, the wooden pews below took on a different form than the view from the side or back. Altering my perspective shifted how I viewed and interpreted the sanctuary space both physically and mentally.

In addition to the design of the architecture, the presence of parishioners in the space added another element of interest. As the pews filled with people, I noticed the formation of bodies and how they organized themselves into the space. Different patterns and miniature dances seemed to happen naturally as people sat, stood, or shifted around. Inspired by the pathways and structures of the space, I desired to find new movement possibilities in relation to the architecture. This became my central reason for undertaking a site-specific dance investigating visual perspectives in the sanctuary. *Sanctuary* would have been viewed by way of two mediums: live performance for the first two sections and video projection for the third. *Sanctuary* was the product of a collaboration with my dancers and our collective experience with Redeemer's architecture.

My research for this project included works by prominent choreographers who focused on architectural properties as a source for inspiration and choreographic invention. I expanded my research by learning about the principles of architectural design, as well as the architectural plans for Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

Research

I researched notable choreographers whose work heavily focused on collaborating with architecture, either through live performance or film. Choreographers such as Busby Berkeley, Jack Cole, and Trisha Brown provided a historical foundation in creating *Sanctuary*. My inquiries included sources that informed me of the fundamentals of architecture and design, including the architectural firm Gertler & Wentz, the designers of the church. In addition, my connection with Third Rail Projects¹ had a major impact on my choice to create a site-specific piece for my thesis project. They informed my methods of working with perspective, framing, and design for both the live and filmed aspects of *Sanctuary*.

Busby Berkeley and the Bird's Eye View

The most impactful discovery during my process was the use of the bird's eye view filmed from the balcony level. Taking advantage of this view achieved similar objectives as the 1930s director and choreographer, Busby Berkeley. This bird's eye perspective was an identifiable characteristic of Berkeley's work in Hollywood (Reynolds 719). He often used architecture to allow his dancers to be seen in a kaleidoscope fashion, bringing a new perspective to the viewers (Barson). Berkeley

¹ Third Rail Projects is a NYC-based site-specific, immersive, and experiential dance theatre company.

reigned supreme in creating geometric shapes and disorienting effects with the dancers' bodies from this perspective (Barson). Extreme wide shots were commonly used to showcase the formation changes and moving images that his troops of dancers would create (Barson). He also designed scenes that dehumanized the dancers, presenting them as a moving machine composed of limbs meant to appear spoke-like (Reynolds 719). Displaying the architecture and dancers' bodies from this perspective in *Sanctuary's* film resulted in shapes and patterns looking different from their normal, frontal appearance.

Jack Cole: Architecture and Framing

Following Busby Berkeley in laying the foundation for future architecture-based choreography was choreographer Jack Cole. He created notable dances in Hollywood and Broadway during the 1950s and 60s (Reynolds 731). I chose to include Jack Cole in my research for his inventive use of architecture and camera framing, which were important tools used in designing *Sanctuary*. Cole found interesting ways to incorporate framing as a method of expanding visual interest for the audience (Reynolds 731). Dancers passed by the camera in the foreground to accentuate depth and force the audience into the action. He frequently used camera angles that "...exaggerated the dimensions of a performing space, and dramatized the asymmetrically balanced groupings in his choreography" (Reynolds 732).

Cole also created dance on camera that intentionally utilized and drew focus towards the architecture, unlike his predecessors who usually chose to dance around it. By doing this, he activated all areas of the space, thus increasing creative possibilities for choreography on film. Cole used stages with ramps, unseen fall pits, and stairs to increase visual options. An example of combining his use of architecture and framing can be seen

in the musical dance scene “Happy Ending” from *On the Riviera*, released in 1951. In “Happy Ending,” the camera cuts to a platform shot from a slightly lower angle (*On the Riviera* 1:26:55). The viewer can see the platform; however, due to the tight frame, we do not see what comes before or after it. In an instant, dancers enter the frame by jumping up on top of the platform from somewhere unseen, and then jump off into the abyss (*On the Riviera* 1:27:50-1:28:00). The viewers can only continue to see what is included in the frame. What happens outside of the frame is left to their imagination.

Cole’s directorial work and choreography provided a filmic vision that gave just enough mystery to perhaps draw the audience in further. Cole’s cinematic work has encouraged future choreographers like myself to use architectural elements as places for dance. Cole’s wild imagination embraced the task not only to create movement, but rethink where, and with what objects, the dance could exist.

Trisha Brown: Dance as a Vehicle to Reveal Unseen Spaces

Moving into the next decade, sculpture artist Robert Irwin popularized the term “site-specific” in the 1970s, deeming this time period the official birth of modern site-specific inquiries (Budwig). A choreographer who stretched the limits of site-specific dance and architecture was postmodern pioneer, Trisha Brown. Brown’s legacy informed the underlying motives and objectives behind my process. Using site-specific dance, she transformed how people viewed everyday spaces, and I desired to accomplish the same with my thesis.

Two works that *Sanctuary* specifically drew from are *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970) and *Roof Piece* (1973). In *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*, the notions of gravitational perception were challenged as the performer was

harnessed and walked down the side of a building, completely parallel to the ground below. Elizabeth Streb performed this piece in 2010 and gave an account of what the typical performer would feel in the iconic role.

The first time I walked down, my balance was so precarious. I was on the head of a pin and everything I did dislodged that balance. Everytime you lift your foot you're changing your center. Each walk that I took, there was nothing that became familiar. It deconstructed the walk for me in a way that I never expected it to. Until you frame out purely physical conditions and alter them, you're not really telling the truth about movement because you are already in a balanced situation. I love what Tricia [Brown] has done to alter the way people ask questions about movement. (Whitney)

There are mental and physical effects on the performer, but the audience's visual perspective is altered as well, as they watch a performer move through space going against rules of gravity.

In 1973, Trisha Brown debuted *Roof Piece*, a site-specific dance that activated geographical areas that would normally go unnoticed in lower Manhattan. The dancers were stationed on different rooftops and through improvised movement, they transmitted their interpretation of the same movement sequence from a far distance (Mangolte). Babette Mangolte, a French cinematographer, documented this iconic piece and gave us a new affinity for New York City, "...revealing the majesty and privacy of downtown roofs and the sculptural effect of its water towers" (Mangolte). This was significant for the 1970s because until that point in urban places, art was housed in galleries, theatres, and museums. There was an untapped "...desire for the invisible and the discovery of new

fields of action felt keenly by the avant-garde at the time” (Clausen). Brown and her site-specific dances satisfied that desire in society.

Gertler & Wente Architects

After looking back into the rich history of site-specific dance, it was essential to incorporate Redeemer’s architectural history and the intentions underlying the design of the church. I talked with Susan Lee, formerly of Gertler & Wente Architects to gain a better understanding of the space from the architect’s point of view. The building was originally a parking garage from the early 1900s (Eckersley). Redeemer Presbyterian and Gertler & Wente Architects agreed that the history of the industrial parking garage should be maintained in the DNA of the space. Inside the lobby and art gallery is the original exposed brick and steel millwork that provides the raw context for the building (Eckersley). In contrast to the qualities inside the lobby and gallery, the sanctuary space was designed to appear like “...an ephemeral object inserted into this industrial shell” (Eckersley).

Redeemer’s founder, Pastor Tim Keller, wanted to create a place where one could be still, reflect, relax, and still feel close enough to the hustle and bustle of New York City. The sanctuary space was designed with the intention to make its congregants feel like one body, and one community as they sat in the “curved wood pews enhanc[ing] this embracing feel[ing]” (Eckersley). Learning about the design plans for the church was important to this thesis, as my creative decisions were a response to the space.



Figure 1: Redeemer Sanctuary space. Photo provided by Timothy Eckersley. 2012.

Third Rail Projects: Collaboration with the Space

Third Rail Projects, a site-specific and immersive dance company in New York City, has created shows exclusively for unconventional locations (Third Rail Projects). I have danced with Third Rail Projects for over a year. In working with them, I learned the value of drawing unique and authentic inspiration from the space when creating site-specific work.

According to their website, the artistic directors of Third Rail Projects research “...each new site, community, and cultural landscape in which they work” (Third Rail Projects). After gathering contextual and historical information, the artistic directors will create choreography that draws on inspiration from the architecture and informed by their research. The resulting site-specific dance brings new life and perspective to the site. The audience sees places typically not used for a performance, such as a staircase, or hallway

be brought to life by the presence of dance. The resulting work is unique to that space and is modified per location (The One You Love is Sick 9:15).

Artist Evan Halter

The curators of Redeemer’s gallery space, The Gallery at W83, chose to debut *Sanctuary* along with an upcoming exhibit titled *Reflections* by painter Evan Halter, since we shared similar style and themes. *Reflections* is a series of “...selected elements from paintings and prints throughout art history, particularly historic Christian works, refocusing the viewer’s eye on what might otherwise be overlooked, both on the canvas, and in life” (Halter, Interview). It was important to my work to research what common threads join *Reflections* with *Sanctuary*. Evan Halter expanded on his process of embracing the limitations in painting the series in *Reflections*. He said, “All of the paintings...have the same painted frame but I have been working on making them all as distinct as I can...to see how much variation [I] can get out of working with pretty strict limitations” (Halter, Interview). In *Sanctuary*, the pews as limitations are explored, embraced, and challenged by the movement.



Figure 2: A Simple Gesture (After Jan van Eyck), Evan Halter. 2020.

Methodology

Background on Methodology

My methodology relied on experimentation with visual perspective. I viewed the sanctuary from various angles, creating choreography that manipulated the audience's perspective of the dancers' bodies in relation to the architecture. Taking into account the context for this dance, was equally as important. A church can be an emotionally charged space because of the religious connotations associated with it. To avoid any kind of narrative, I strayed away from gestures and postures that carried a religious meaning, like hands clasped as if in prayer. Instead, the dancers clasped their hands above their heads

and then slowly brought them down to separate at their stomachs. This allowed for me to keep the clasp gesture without the attachment of something typically seen as religious.

While considering the implications of certain gestures within the sanctuary space, I was equally as concerned with the bird's eye perspective. When I observed movement from this perspective for the first time, both the architecture and the choreography transformed. The concept of depth diminished as the distance between the pew and the floor became a singular flat surface. This occurred when a dancer slid off of the pew to the floor. In theory it was about a 20inch drop, but in this bird's eye perspective, the dancers looked like they were shifting from one floor to another in the same plane with the perception of depth completely null and void.



Figure 3: Crossing Planes. Still from video by Lindsey Hanson. 2020.

The sense of gravity and orientation shifted every time the dancers changed their facing and movement quality. When a dancer was standing, only the top of their head and shoulders were visible. In addition, from a bird's eye view, when a dancer was occupying

the horizontal space, such as lying down or leaning, more of their body became visible to the audience's view.



Figure 4: Occupying Horizontal Space, View 1. Photo by Michael Haller. 2020.

Elizabeth Streb, a site-specific choreographer, who previously described her experience in *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*, explained her theory of vertical versus horizontal performance space. She states,

Typically, our bodies occupy space vertically, i.e. right side up with the weight on the bottom of one's feet. By un-habitual space I'm referring to the space occupied when the body is not vertical. In un-habitual space, the body experiences discomfort and often confusion, mostly due to the lack of particular sensations that gravity and motion provoke. Choosing the latter involves other necessary questions: where, in un-habitual space, do you want to go? Directions and choices increase and become bewildering when the space one chooses to occupy ceases to

be two-dimensional, and one abandons the hegemony of the ground and standing upright (Streb 63-64).

Seeing the space from a bird's eye view resulted in moments of kinetic surprise and recalibration of our sense of direction and gravity. Placing the dancers horizontally as well as underneath the pews challenged the viewer's understanding of perspective since the dancers were moving in un-habitual space.



Figure 5: Occupying Horizontal Space, View 2. Photo by Michael Haller. 2020.

This was also true for the dancers as they experienced physical displacement from under the pews. Working within this frame informed the creation of the choreography and the type of movement that would make the biggest impact from this perspective.

While creating *Sanctuary*, I explored the use of my back body and other non-traditional body parts to maneuver around the pews. Focusing on body parts like the back

of my head, or back of my knee to anchor and press into the pews, freed my hands from being the primary manipulators. Moving around the pews without the use of my hands established a dream-like effect, creating a peaceful and liquid quality to the movements. I realized I could lie across the very top of the pew, that was only about 2 inches wide, against which a person's back would normally lean. Engaging my shoulder blades and calves on top of the pew, I found stability in a position that looked oddly peaceful, as if I was taking a nap on a tightrope.



Figure 6: Use of back body. Still from video by Lindsey Hanson. 2020.

The architecture came with its own challenges. The floor was at a slight incline, and there were no indicators of place such as natural daylight and landmarks. Some rehearsals required the dancers to spend a prolonged amount of time under the pews. The environment under the pews felt endless, and a bit like tunnel vision. This easily confused the dancers, and exhausted them faster than a normal rehearsal.

The dancers that acclimated more quickly to the under-pew space had site-specific and aerial experience. Instead of feeling hindered by the pews as obstacles, they viewed them as an apparatus to be explored. Aerial artists are familiar with enduring pain and directional displacement associated with that particular genre. When preparing my cast for the bird's eye view section, I described that it would feel like doing aerial work on the floor.



Figure 7: Under Pew and Hidden Grips. Photo by Michael Haller 2020.



Figure 8: Under Pew and Hidden Grips. Photo by Michael Haller 2020.

I suggested to the dancers that they find a comparison between their own aerial experiences, if applicable, and the movements performed under the pews. In thinking back to my own aerial experiences, my calves, back muscles, and hamstrings were often cramped and the vertebrae, pelvis, and backs of knees were frequently tender and bruised. Transferring this information during rehearsal, helped the dancers mentally and physically to prepare their bodies for the experience of moving on the floor under the pews.

Opposition as Freedom

Most interesting to me as a choreographer, was viewing the pews as barriers instead of finding shapes that corresponded to the architecture. The pews were essentially short walls surrounding me. There were many movements, such as jumps and turns, I could not perform because of the limited space. Additionally, dancing quickly would often result in collisions with the pews. Taking a step back and embracing the limitations of the pews, I allowed the constraints of the space to become creative opportunities.

In January I experienced a defining moment using this mindset during my process of creating *Sanctuary*. My ideas were becoming stagnant and I felt a block in creativity, so I scheduled a session alone in the space. Having the dancers in the room provided so many options; however, at this point, it was necessary for me to work alone and solely focus on the architecture. In *A Choreographer's Handbook* by Jonathan Burrows, he explains that establishing a principle is not the answer to being creative. It simply "...takes care of some of the decisions, leaving [me] to be free to be intuitive" (Burrows 2). This frame of thought initiated my curiosity to form opposing qualities in relation to

the interior architecture of the space. Examples of this include the image of hardwood becoming soft sand and fluorescent lights becoming sunshine. My imagination placed me at the beach, a place that was impossible in reality. I did not know why the destination of a beach arrived in my mind so strongly, but if I were to honor this new idea, I would need to commit to it completely. I believed that eventually the solution would reveal itself through the experimentation.

A wonderful model of this blind commitment is discussed in Burrows' book when referencing Francis Crick, who in 1953 was one of the scientists to discover the double helix form of DNA. Crick said, "It's true that by blundering about we stumbled on gold, but the fact remains that we were looking for gold" (Ridley). At that time, I was not aware that committing to the beach scene would soon be a revelatory occurrence.

Movement became more interesting to me because the pews were being treated as something far away from reality. I followed the design principles of Matthew Frederick in his guide on architectural design, and "...imbued the space with a particular quality, making sure the quality [was] really there" (Frederick 33). By adding a soundscape of waves crashing and seagulls, I fully placed myself at the imaginary beach. In the moments that flowed afterwards, the beach idea became a catalyst to find cohesion and thematic glue, connecting the movement and architecture together. That juxtaposition of reality and imagination provided a rich landscape with far more potential for possibilities.

Ultimately, my objective was to show the audience a new way to see a church. This prompted me to find all of the nooks and crannies of the sanctuary that usually went unnoticed during a normal church service. Once the unseen places were identified, I used my oppositional mindset to redefine what those areas could be used for. An example of

this was in the very beginning of the frontal section. A dancer was perched on top of a hand rail against a pillar. This gave her height in a surprising way and displayed a different use for the arm rail as a foot ledge instead. Finding opportunities to reallocate the functions of the architecture provided “... friction to the context, energies, and meanings inherent in the space” (Burrows 39).

Originality Through Flexibility

For each separate section of the work, my dancers and I experimented with movement, taking our time to fully invest in multiple possibilities without committing to one outcome. This helped us to “...understand the design problem before chasing after solutions” (Frederick 29). Remaining open-minded, we continued to work while not knowing what the outcome would be. This process-oriented mindset relieved the pressure of having to be original, which, paradoxically, empowered me with a greater sense of artistic agency and made way for originality to form more organically.

In February while experiencing a creative block, I was reminded of Jonathan Burrows’ choreographic wisdom and asked myself, “Do I need to express something or am I already expressing it?” (Burrows 36). When trying to micromanage originality, it was not effective. I thought to myself, “I need to allow space for unplanned phenomena to happen.” I gave two dancers vague movement tasks. Rebecca was asked to *start standing on the handrail leaning against the column. Slowly slide down and come to a squat. Wait. Then, step off the handrail, travel to “here” and begin the phrase but dramatically slower.* I purposely gave her freedom to interpret her own timing and decisions. My other dancer, Jenna, was asked to *stand against the wall, close to Rebecca,*

about four feet below and walk away from her doing the upper body portion of the same movement phrase.



Figure 9: Chance movement phrase. Still from video by Lindsey Hanson. 2020.

In doing this, two separate tasks were strung together sharing the common denominator of a movement phrase, with the dancers controlling the variable of time. Synchronized moments occurred organically when the timing lined up. On other occasions, one dancer would counter the other by changing levels, or facing a different direction. There were enough commonalities and differences in the duet to provide dynamic qualities.

When I needed help in dismissing self-imposed pressure to control every aspect of the choreography, I reminded myself that “a good artist understands that nothing comes from nowhere. All creative work builds on what came before. Nothing is completely original” (Kleon 7). Resisting the temptation to micromanage the choreography proved effective in allowing originality to percolate to the surface.

Framing

Designing the first impression of *Sanctuary*, I was meticulous about how the audience's initial view would be framed. The method of framing became the audience's window to the performance. In my foundational research of historical dance makers and filming techniques, crafting the audience's first perspective was of utmost importance to encourage the viewer to see the image a particular way (McPherson 25). For my thesis, framing was a powerful tool and was used in two ways: 1) using the pews to frame the bodies of the dancers and 2) using a camera to establish the frame.

The pews informed both the places for movement and qualitative choices for movement. For my scenographic choices, the edges of the pews created a frame for the choreography to be contained. Qualitatively, the backdrop of the hard, harsh texture of the wood led to the creation of contrasting movement that was liquid in texture. Internally focused, subtle movement with less exertion was more impactful than complex movement that competed with the structurally repetitive nature of the pews. Therefore the architecture informed not only the staging, but the quality as well.

Similar to painter Evan Halter's *Reflections* series, the architecture in *Sanctuary* provided barriers for the dance to live inside. In an interview with Halter by Young Space curator's Kate Mothes, Halter described his work as "meditative, geometric, and contained" (Halter, Interview). The pews were repetitive and geometric in their exact measurements, and due to the constraints on the space and framing in *Sanctuary*, the rehearsal video emulated those same qualities resulting in a sense of containment. However, the movement qualities that I used in my work did not follow those same descriptions. The dancers moved with freedom rather than containment, and softness

instead of the geometric quality that Halter describes. Sometimes, the bodies would cross over into new frames established by the pews, perhaps in an arabesque with the back leg reaching over to the pew behind them.

To control what the audience would view in the bird's eye perspective, I manipulated the camera so that the pews filled the entire frame, cutting off before the aisle or carpet entered the shot. The following two images show the full view and the frame cutting off the edges.



Figure 10: Full frame. Photo by Michael Haller. 2020.



Figure 11: Restricted frame. Photo by Michael Haller. 2020.

Restricting the frame made it less obvious that the dance was taking place in a church. Seeing movement from above while restricting the camera frame allowed this particular perspective to be provocative and confusing. Viewers would see images that do not align with normal gravitational rules. This would hopefully trigger the audience's desire to solve spatial and gravitational conundrums, such as falling upward.

An example of this is when one dancer is under the pews, using the legs of the seats to climb up the inclined floor. In the same moment, another dancer was slowly falling in the same direction, causing a visual disruption of gravitational rules. In trying to make sense of an impossibility, the viewer may ask themselves, "How could dancers climb and fall in the same direction?" It would be comparable to two people side by side, one climbing up a tree, and the other falling up the tree. According to techniques to capture dance on film, "it is often what is excluded from the frame...that will create

interest and energy in the design of a shot” (McPherson 25). Using a restrictive frame from a bird’s eye view allowed for many imaginative moments like this to happen, causing the audience's imagination to make sense of something that in life would never be possible.

Rhythm

The rows of pews serve as a place to sit in the sanctuary. However, in *Sanctuary* the pews had multiple functions as we have now seen. In architectural design, rows of a structure can function as “...a rhythmic counterpoint to irregular elements” (Frederick 18). In this case, the pews acted as the predictable architectural rhythm, and the dancers were the irregular elements. This repetitive, and somewhat linear, visual rhythm allowed for relationships to unfold with the space and the movement. I experimented with these relationships by finding ways to counter and complement the repetitive nature of the pews with the dancers’ bodies. Experimenting with visual relationships in rhythm proved to be a helpful tool in composition and editing. If a sequence was not appearing the way I desired, I tried working against or with the rhythmic visual effect. Sometimes I chose to enhance the repetitive and linear qualities, and other times I chose to counter it with movement that was irregular, or curved.



Figure 12: Disrupting rhythm. Photo by Michael Haller. 2020.

In architectural rhythm, the observer goes through a mental process to first learn the rhythm they are witnessing, and then once learned, the mind naturally lightens the effort needed to anticipate what comes next (Rasmussen 134). Subtle variations in disrupting the visual rhythm of the pews hopefully would have allowed the audience to remain engaged. The inverse would have resulted from the rhythm having no counterpart of irregularity and thus the audience easily growing tired of the monotonous pattern. Soon their eyes would have taken in the rhythm as constant, and shift into autopilot mode creating a stimulating effect. Hopefully, the audience would have invested in the pattern, which would have given me purchasing power to disrupt the above mentioned stimulating effect (Rasmussen 134).

In essence, my desire was to allow the audience to relax into a pattern and then capture their attention with change and irregularity, heightening the energy and viewing experience of the room. A pattern that was useful in my rehearsal process was the

choreographic tool “theme and variation.” A movement sequence was created and repeated a few times. Then the dancers performed small variations of the sequence, such as changing direction or slotting in a new movement. Using different versions of the same choreography was a dynamic way to add irregularity within the use of visual rhythm.

Revelation

There were three ways that revelation played a role in my process: how I choreographed the bird’s eye section, how I designed the audience’s first experience in the space, and how the architecture revealed the dancers’ bodies.

A pivotal moment in my process was due to one of my dancers having a minor injury and asked to sit out for the rehearsal. Taking a negative situation, and turning it into a positive one, we switched roles. I went into his movement track, and he took on the directorial role for the rehearsal. Working the material from a hands-on role was a helpful tool for me to figure out movement from the inside. I better understood the obstacles the dancers were encountering by experiencing them myself. This revealed new movement patterns that I previously did not see. This switch was a crucial turning point in the process because it revealed new interpretations and movement studies in the bird’s eye perspective that I was not currently witnessing from observing and directing.

I carefully designed revealing the architecture and the dancers to the audience. In site-specific dance, the first impression of the space sets the tone for the rest of the experience. Architect Matthew Frederick addresses the process of having a person already form their ideas of a space based on their preconceived notions or path leading to the reveal (Frederick 11). He uses an artful method of diversion to take the audience

“...on an unexpected path to create additional intrigue or even momentary lostness...[which] will make the journey more interesting, the arrival more rewarding” (Frederick 11). In the audience’s entrance for *Sanctuary*, I planned to have them pass through a small side room outside of the sanctuary space. This room has lowered ceilings, and cramped quarters. It was my goal to have the audience feel confined immediately before entering the open and airy sanctuary, looking out into the rows of pews before them. Placing these two experiences adjacent to each other was an architectural design principle termed “denial and reward,” a method ideally heightening the experience (Frederick 11). I denied the audience certain sensations and then rewarded them for it afterwards, hopefully feeling the expanse of the environment.

Having the audience on stage, I expected them to also encounter feelings of “role reversal” watching the dancers perform in the seats that they normally sit in. Revealing the dancers from far away reinforced the vastness of the space, shifting the viewer’s task of watching a show, to witnessing a quiet moment in time. Through experimenting with proximity, it was an uncommon perspective to have these first moments of importance feel oddly far away. Maintaining the distance of this reveal, it was my intention for the audience to feel a sense of detachment, yet still privileged to be included as a spectator. The use of revelation was a necessary entry point to tap into the audience’s sense of imagination. With the frontal view of *Sanctuary*, the audience could not see what was under the pews. I used this as a tool to control what was visible, and what was left to be imagined. The pews as a revelatory tool also provided visual surprises and altered perceptions. Dancers simply appeared and disappeared, seemingly out of nowhere, leaving the audience to fill in the missing information with their imagination. This added

mystery as to how dancers were connecting or anchoring to the pews to make certain gravitational feats happen. The pews allowed for hidden grips and anchor points, which enabled dancers to maneuver in secret within the architecture in surprising ways.

Results

Unfolding Perspective

The space's unique combination of framing, rhythm, and revelations offered an unrepeatable site-specific thumbprint to *Sanctuary*. I learned through this thesis that the themes I embraced offered a continuous and evolving view of the space. Shifting perspectives with viewing dance through the lens of my research enlivened the sanctuary. I will now see the space differently because of the movement that was affected and amplified by the architecture. I learned how to complement and counter the architecture from the musings and inspirations that I encountered during this process. Balancing emulation versus imitation, this thesis has resulted in finding moments of freedom while working within constraints.

While intimately exploring the sanctuary, I have found the duality of closeness and vastness. The feelings that resulted from shifting my perspective and how that can greatly alter an experience were far more impactful than I imagined. I assumed that seeing dance performed in the sanctuary space would be novel and exciting. However, I did not realize that the act of movement in a spiritual site would evoke a new-found appreciation for the spiritual implications. Joel Kady, one of the pastors of Redeemer, told me during a rehearsal that by weaving dance into the architecture it made him think

that I was treating this space with a different kind of reverence and holiness that he did not previously know was possible.

The result of my thesis was closely related to Evan Halter's *Reflections* series. Halter's exhibit is near flawless, and he prides himself in using a size zero brush to execute his attempt at achieving perfection. However, his work gives us a hint that he also desires for the subject to live outside of the established parameters. Halter shows this by placing a small smudge of paint outside of the painted frame. Intentionally leaving a smudge behind is an homage to the imperfect, living outside of the constraints. It was in this duality of perfection and imperfection that we both found the balance in our work revolving around the shared spiritual contexts.



Figure 13: Shouldered (After Giovanni Bellini), Evan Halter. 2020.

By physically and intentionally exploring the sanctuary space, I proved that the architecture could provide a place for dance in an unconventional way. This revelation gives credit to my research. Redeemer's sanctuary space was designed to receive

information from the stage in a clear manner. The lighting, sound, and sight lines were all taken into consideration to aid the parishioners sitting in the pews looking forward.

Drawing a parallel to the objective of Trisha Brown's *Roof Piece*, when people typically walk into the sanctuary space for church, they quickly sit down and look forward to the stage. The space was not designed for the focus to be on the pews.

In flipping this around and having the audience be on the stage looking at the pews, the pews and the surrounding architecture are noticed, taken in, and celebrated. Dancers running their hands along the walls and sliding their backs on surfaces that have never been slid upon before allowed the dancers and me to experience this space in a fresh way, simply because we had never been in a position, or perspective, to notice the space in this way before.

Critical Analysis of the Work

Even though *Sanctuary* could not be performed live, I received thought-provoking feedback from my peers from the rehearsal video they viewed. They wrestled with the following questions: Which way is up? Are the dancers working with or against gravity? Where is this dance happening?

Having no sense of a story line or emotional agenda to my movement, it was interesting to learn that the audience saw two very different shades of emotions. One half saw images of sadness and loneliness. Feelings of isolation and uncertainty were common reactions from this group of people. This could be due to the time in which the group viewed *Sanctuary*, which was during COVID-19 pandemic when everyone was isolated from each other. The viewers came to these conclusions because they commented that the pews naturally kept dancers from existing in the same row. However,

to the audience's perspective, they witnessed that the dancers were unknowingly suffering in loneliness together. This was even more apparent when the dancers were moving in unison, but still stayed separated because of the architecture.

A contrasting reaction from the audience was experiencing peace and serenity. They also were reminded of scenes from the beach. The soundscape was a helpful contributor to the beach association. A classmate of mine, Candice Schnurr, articulately described the images she saw, “The sort of gliding quality of the movement reminded me of rolling waves, the dancers often times appeared as birds playing on the surface of the water, or swooping in and out atop a current of wind”.

In the second section, most of the partnering was done back-to-back, or without direct eye contact. The dancers were relating to each other but in an indirect, non-confrontational way. This continued the idea of perceiving a sense of isolation and individual struggle throughout the first two sections. However, in the bird's eye view section, the dancers became visually aware of each other and for the first time had moments of looking at one another. This awareness changed the isolation storyline and created a relational and empathetic theme for some.

In reaction to the bird's eye view section, audience member Michael Hanson said that, “The end is magical. The change in perspective makes the dancers look like they're floating and climbing at the same time.”. Many viewers themselves experienced physical reactions to this unconventional view. Montclair State faculty member Maxine Steinman expressed that she felt her stomach turn when the dancers began leaning to occupy the horizontal space. To try and correct the new orientation in her mind, she said that she found herself tilting her head to the side at the start of the section.

Adjusting to a new orientation is similar to an astronaut getting accustomed to a zero-gravity environment: The idea of up and down are central to how we as humans interpret our surroundings. Not having those parameters in place confounds one's belief of space until the mind is able to release that idea (Streb 59). In *Sanctuary*, the viewers' notion of directional orientation was greatly disrupted. Caitlin Dutton-Reaver saw the bird's eye section as "...tricking the eye into reconsidering what is 'up,' crawling along the bench, shifting to the next side, dripping from one edge of the screen to the other underneath the pews."

Creating *Sanctuary* resulted in a deeper appreciation for the sanctuary space for myself, the dancers, and the audience. My curiosity grew as a result. In committing to the exploration and union with the space that inspired my creativity, I found myself far from where I thought this project would conclude. I listened more to the architecture rather than coming in with material already prepared. Letting go of control allowed enough space for the sanctuary to give me feedback.

It was my goal to have *Sanctuary* feel meditative and relaxing for the audience as well as the dancers. Part of the editing process of *Sanctuary* consisted of allowing more space between the images so that the audience did not feel rushed viewing the images. To accomplish this, I incorporated moments of stillness and simplified the movement vocabulary when needed. This attempt proved to be useful in accomplishing those goals. Schnurr "...appreciate[d] [my] restraint with the vocabulary and the space and time [I] allowed for [them] to see the composition and feel the soothing quality."

Keeping the choreography symbolically vague and emotionally neutral, I hoped to let the audience connect the metaphorical dots, finding a deeper meaning through their

own interpretations. Through the critical analysis, I determined that I completed my objective of actively engaging the architecture, thus creating a new and informed appreciation and experience of the sanctuary space.

Conclusion

Dance in Architecture

Dance in architecture naturally stems from a collaboration between the two. My initial process for this work drew from the undercurrents of the building's architectural design to find the DNA of the movement. I was constantly inspired by the interconnectedness of these researched variables and the dancers. In creating *Sanctuary*, every step of the process was a collaboration both with the dancers and the sanctuary space, drawing inspiration and developing finalized choreography. Developing my thesis manifested in how dancers related to each other, to the architecture, and how it all connected to the audience.

I have concluded that involving the architecture as an equal contributor in the creation process yielded a unique result. The choreography performed by the dancers in relation to the space could not have existed anywhere else. This furthers my belief that site-specific dance will continue to produce new and exciting ways to view places and will illuminate places that are normally unseen. Similar to the unique methodologies of artists Jack Cole and Trisha Brown, *Sanctuary* reveals a new perception of a religious place as a performance space. It proved to be successful in demonstrating the ways architecture can exist as a means of creating movement.

Importance for Redeemer West Side

Redeemer is a strong advocate for the arts in featuring a variety of visual artists (photographers, painters, and sculptors) at Gallery at W83. In addition, Redeemer's sanctuary space, which also doubles as a concert hall, presents performances by notable musicians, actors, cinematographers, and poets. However, there has never been art created within, inspired by, or housed in the sanctuary space. *Sanctuary* was made specifically for this unique setting, with Redeemer and its architecture in mind from beginning to end. This site-specific dance performance, would have been Redeemer's first, created unconventionally, utilizing multiple perspectives. This performance, when finally presented, will be a distinctive way to celebrate the architecture of Redeemer Presbyterian for the people who inhabit it.

Implications for Future Research

My artistic research agenda explores methods for reimagining the ordinary, as I seek to invite audience members to rethink the spaces around them. I continue to be curious about how the common places in life become magical. How do we replicate that on a stage, on the screen, or through an architectural space? In future research, I will examine new ways to find meaning in the familiar, shifting into different settings, creating work surrounding the influence of the site and the audience's perspective. Any site has the potential to activate different perceptions simultaneously, according to the visual perspective. This beckons me to ask the questions for other sites: What idiom(s) of dance will result in a compelling experience for the audience to see the space differently? How can the body reveal and change qualities of a space or architecture? Lastly, what are the communal, cultural, and spiritual implications for showing a piece like this?

Regarding my future artistic endeavors, I will continue to pose these questions first through reimagining concepts and settings; then determine the particular idiom of dance, whether it is through stylized or abstract movement, transforming the ordinary into the reimagined. Using *Sanctuary* as a guide for setting site-specific works in other churches, I will explore the visual indications of spiritual and architectural/spatial relationships. Creating unique versions of *Sanctuary* will be a way to celebrate the characteristics of that specific church based on their values, history, or style of architecture. Through site-specific dance I would like to challenge people's assumptions of a space, stretching the limits of perspective and revelation.

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Appendix: Supplemental Figures and Illustrations

Postcard (front)



Postcard (back)

SANCTUARY
a site specific dance performance

Thursday, March 26 | 7:00PM

free admission • RSVP at
sanctuarydance.eventbrite.com

Presented in Partnership with
The Gallery at W83

LINDSEY HANSON presents her dance thesis, *Sanctuary*, as a gift to the congregation and neighbors of her church, Redeemer West Side. Her choreography, inspired by her experiences worshipping in the sanctuary and participating in the life of the church, activates the space's modern architecture with dancers from The Lindsey Hanson Collective performing amid, over and sometimes under the pews, exploring themes of connection and perspective, and the slow or sudden ways both can shift.

The performance is timed to celebrate the eighth anniversary of W83 Ministry Center as a worship center for Redeemer West Side and a community and events space serving the Upper West Side. The performance will be followed by a talkback and wine reception.

Photo by @michaelhallerphotography

THE GALLERY AT
150 W83

150w83.com | @150w83 | @thegalleryatw83

W83 Ministry Center
150 W 83rd St
New York, NY 10024

Performance Program (front and back)



photo credit: Michael Haller

The music included for this performance is for educational purposes only, not for commercial use. No copyright infringement is intended.

SANCTUARY



photo credit: Michael Haller

A Site Specific Dance Performance
MFA Thesis Concert by Lindsey Hanson
W83 Ministry Center
[INSERT DATE HERE]

Performance Program (inside pages)

Director/Choreographer:

Lindsey Hanson

Cast (*in order of appearance*):


Rebecca Van Dover
Jenna Purcell
Zachary Denison
Devika Chandhani
Alberto Denis
Ellie Van Bever

Crew/Staff:

Videography: Full Out Creative
Photography: Michael Haller Photography
Music by: Matteo Myderwyk and Michael Logozar
Producers: Eva Ting, Carey Wallace, and Uri Frazier
Moderator: Rev. Joel Kady
AV Technician: Mark Rufino

About The Performance

Sanctuary is site specific dance performance. You will be guided through three view points during the performance. Please be sure to check any jackets and non-valuable belongings prior to the performance. No photos or video recording during the performance. Please silence your cell phone. Cast talkback and wine reception to follow.

 @lindsey.hanson.collective

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Montclair State University and thesis committee members: Maxine Steinman, Kyle deCamp, and Jessica DiMauro, for your guidance and insight throughout this process.

Thank you to Redeemer Presbyterian, The Gallery at W83, and Andrea Yee for graciously providing helpful resources. Your support has allowed creativity, spirituality, and dance to be celebrated in this space.


A special thank you to photographer Michael Haller, composer Lena Gabrielle, dancers Paige Sabo, Matthew Borchers, Lucy Wild, Sarah Hinderhofer, and Alberto Denis who were crucial in the early stages of the creative process.

To my dear husband Michael- your patience, wisdom, and endless encouragement awards you an honorary MFA (wink). I couldn't have asked for a better partner to dance with through this chapter in our lives together.

Surrounding every graduate student is a village of family and dear friends whom their endless support and encouragement does not go unnoticed. I thank God for my village!

About The Gallery at W83

The Gallery at W83 cultivates art and community on the Upper West Side, providing space for personal engagement, community conversations, and spiritual reflection. We collaborate with local artists from diverse backgrounds to explore universal themes of culture, community, and faith.

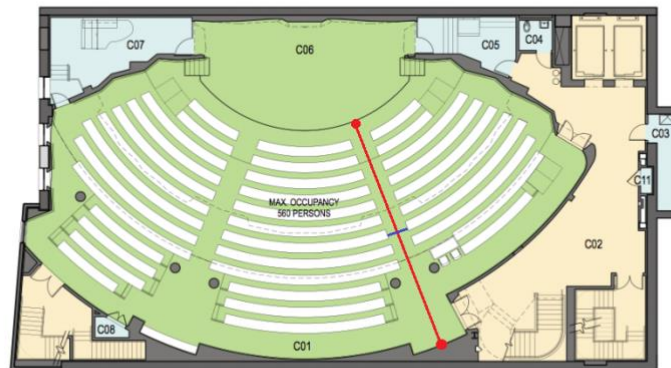
 @thegalleryatW83

THE GALLERY AT
150 W83

Blueprint of Sanctuary Space

Measurements of Sanctuary Aisle

-  Back wall, to the front of stage = 45 feet, 4 inches
-  Aisle width, from pew to pew = 69 inches



REDEEMER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Rehearsal

