

## New York “Topologie”

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► **To cite this version:**

Julie Perrin. New York “Topologie”. Noémie Solomon (ed.). Dance : A Catalog, Les Presses du réel, p. 71-88, 2015. hal-02293880

**HAL Id: hal-02293880**

**<https://hal-univ-paris8.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02293880>**

Submitted on 25 Oct 2019

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YORK** Julie PERRIN  
***TOPOLO  
GIE***

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# NEW YORK TOPOLOGIE

Julie PERRIN

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Almost inevitably, a French dance scholar heading to the Chocolate Factory Theater in Long Island City on May 6, 2014 to discover Annie Vigier and Franck Apertet's outdoor choreography experiences contrasting emotions. Feelings of intellectual and kinesthetic excitement are forged en route, telescoping into at least three planes of impression.

Firstly, the history of site-specific art in New York comes up, particularly outdoor experimentations by choreographers in the 1960s. Greenwich Village revealed itself a significant site for an urban artistic research that left a deep impression on art history, inasmuch as site<sup>1</sup> became the essence and condition of an artistic practice. Several choreographic examples, often cited by dance historians, spring to mind: Lucinda Childs' *Street Dance* in 1964 and Trisha Brown's *Equipment Pieces* in the 1970s, amongst others. Yet dance's specific contribution to this history remains undefined, especially in light of critical approaches in visual art and, in particular, land art. Outlining this contribution is an endeavor beyond the scope of this article. From a contemporary perspective, dance's historical trace is rather nebulous and somewhat mythical because of its somewhat illusory foundational narrative,<sup>2</sup> which no doubt simplifies facts and issues. Nonetheless, it does bring to light a set of questions that organize the way I currently read choreography beyond the stage. Namely, the works of some French choreographers, likely lesser-known in the United States—Laurent Pichaud, Mathias Poisson, Armelle Devigon—endlessly rekindle these questions: what is the role of the city in each project? What spatial principles organize the relationship between site and art form? Simply identifying this move outdoors is obviously insufficient to either qualify the aesthetic of a work or the spatial engagement of a practice. There is a vast distance between Merce Cunningham, who, through his *Events* beginning in 1964, relocated excerpts of choreographies for the stage using collage and

<sup>1</sup> At this time, New York City, alongside many other landscapes for land artists (from the beginning of the 1960s for Walter de Maria), began to define parameters and a new scale of artistic practice outdoors.

<sup>2</sup> Spectacular Western dance is said to have appeared outdoors in the '60s and '70s according to accounts forgetful of previous manifestations, particularly at the beginnings of modern dance.

relating choreography and outdoor sites,<sup>3</sup> and Trisha Brown, who conceived of *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970) as a direct response to the New York architecture, which it both signals and depends on. Brown is not locating but rather collapsing site and gesture into “site-object art.”<sup>4</sup>

This historical resonance also brings to mind visual artists, dance artists, and musicians alike paying a kind of shared attention to the city, resulting in actions appearing to be quite proximal.<sup>5</sup> Yoko Ono’s *City Piece* in 1961 invited us to “walk all over the city with an empty baby carriage.”<sup>6</sup> Around 1965, Trisha Brown “walked downtown for long hours with her child’s stroller.”<sup>7</sup> The contents of the carriage influence the meaning of the proposal; an empty carriage signifies an action without a function or practical goal. In one case, the urban walk is a performative work and in the other case, it becomes part of a process that gets artists out of the studio and makes the city a workspace (“I observed and reflected,” continues Trisha Brown, who sometimes makes the city her studio.)

Secondly, there is the immediate pleasure of traveling from Manhattan to the Chocolate Factory Theater, as though all locomotion is intensified by the historical and artistic charge of the city. As a dance scholar and an eager tourist, I have been wandering through New York for a couple of days. As with Yoko Ono, Trisha Brown, and many more illustrious walkers, walking means letting movement give way to the aesthetic dimension of an ordinary action that is both a means and an end.<sup>8</sup> On this walk, while my drifting thoughts intermingle the kinesthetic pleasure of the momentum prompted by New York’s architecture, the perspective of passing through Long Island City awakens another resonance. Here, on June 23, 2002, Francis Alÿs, artist self-defined as “professional tourist,”<sup>9</sup> organized a procession from the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan to the Museum of Modern Art in Queens, getting to 33rd Street by way of the Queensboro Bridge and Queens Plaza. With *The Modern Procession*, Alÿs carried and exhibited the duration of this walk, as much a ritual as a parody of the path the museum pieces would travel between these two sites.<sup>10</sup> In fact, Francis Alÿs is a reference for Annie Vigier and Franck Apertet. I do not yet know if this work will be called upon or even evoked in *Topologie*, but sites are layered with meaning—references, stories, and rumors weave into a slightly confused expectation. Walking may even be a subject in *Topologie* and if so,

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of spatiality in the *Events*, see “Zur räumlichen Dimension choreografischen Erlebens jenseits der Bühne am Beispiel von Cunningham und Ciríaco/Sonnberger,” Jörn Schafaff, Benjamin Wihstutz, eds., *Sowohl als auch Dazwischen: Das Potential ästhetischer Erfahrungsräume* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, appearing in 2015).

<sup>4</sup> “Objet-lieu d’art” in French. This is how geographer and land art specialist Anne Volvey describes the inextricable link between art object and site as it “operates with space” in a reciprocal co-construction. Anne Volvey, “Spatialités d’une land activité: le Land Art à travers l’œuvre de Christo et Jeanne-Claude,” *Activité artistique et spatialité* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2010), 91-134.

<sup>5</sup> This appearance of proximity remains theoretical, as there are not enough traces of these often-ephemeral practices to closely compare different modalities of action and ways of doing.

<sup>6</sup> Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions and Drawings by Yoko Ono* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970).

<sup>7</sup> “Rencontres publiques avec Trisha Brown à Angers, 12-14 janvier 2006,” *Histoire(s) et lectures: Trisha Brown / Emmanuelle Huynh* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2012), 124.

<sup>8</sup> See Barbara Formis, *Esthétique de la vie ordinaire* (Paris: PUF, 2010), 28-38; Rebecca Solnit, “The Pace of Thoughts,” in *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> For *Turista* (1995) in Mexico City, Francis Alÿs stood on a sidewalk with a small sign indicating “Tourist” alongside other workers looking for a job (plumber, electrician, painter...); for *The Loop* (1997), he signed a contract with a cultural institution as a “professional tourist.” Cited by Thierry Davila, *Marcher, Créer. Déplacements, flâneries, dérives dans l’art de la fin du XXe siècle* (Paris: éditions du Regard, 2002), 18-19.

<sup>10</sup> In the end, reproductions of these works, as well as a living artist, Kiki Smith, were carried on palanquins. The project took place while the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan was being renovated and had opened an annex in Queens. *The Modern Procession* was filmed by Rafael Ortega and led to a book: *Francis Alÿs, The Modern Procession* (New York: Public Art Fund, 2004).

what will be its specificity? Artistic urban walks are as diverse as the Baudelairian stroll; the Dadaist chance encounter; the Situationist psychogeographic *dérive*; the trailings of Vito Acconci (*Following Pieces*, 1969) or Sophie Calle; the walk with a stroller or any other object (famously, André Cadere's stripped stick);<sup>11</sup> ambiguous, political demonstration-like parades (Anna Halprin's *Blank Placard Dance*, 1970) or processions (Gustavo Ciríaco and Andrea Sonnberger's *Here whilst we walk*, since 2006). Each artistic walk reveals and constructs an idea of the city. The city also invents itself according to the artist's modes of attention and, collectively, through a certain conception of art and particular relationships with cultural institutions.

In this case, it is the Chocolate Factory Theater in the frame of DANSE, a French-American Festival of Performances & Ideas organized by the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the United States. In other words: a perfect institutional framework for questioning frameworks. *Topologie* is part of the re|action cycle begun in 2008 and presented as an experimental process to consider performance frameworks.<sup>12</sup> We are invited to the theater between May 1 and 10, 2014. *Topologie* is free, suitable for all audiences, and seems to be going on all day. This is an unusual temporality for live arts<sup>13</sup> and produces a feeling of vagueness. Herein lies my third impression: my desire to discover an artwork as much as a neighborhood, or rather a neighborhood through an artwork, may be left unsatisfied. There may be nothing to see, or it may not be what I expect. Les gens d'Uterpan (the people of Uterpan) has been the choreographers' authorial designation since 1994; they insist on the collective and undetermined number of people that may, at any moment, shape a project and as such they are known to play with expectations. The re|action cycle has no less than 18 different "strategies," each defined by a "statement" (the artists use the English word in their French documentation) alongside the title (or not). Of these, I have seen *Audience* (2010) and *Parterre* (2009). *Parterre* flouts the rules of programming in a theatre by delaying the scheduled performance with a different program, sponsored by another cultural institution. Performers glide down the seated audience toward the stage, a first time clothed and a second time naked. *Audience* invites spectators into a seating arrangement set up in a public space. As they soon understand, there will be nothing more to see than the panorama available from their vantage. The city becomes performance and the seating attracts attention from passersby. With the seated viewers drawing focus, *Audience* undermines notions of spectator, performer, and performance. This very brief introduction highlights the kind of curious anxiousness fueling my contrasting emotions leading up to *Topologie*. Thirsty for walking, fascinated by New York, curious about site-specific art and its questions, confusedly expecting to be confronted in my role as audience: this was my situation.

## *An audience without a work*

An approximately square-shaped neighborhood map hangs in the entranceway at the Chocolate Factory Theater, nearly blocking the steep hallway. Published by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the map has a familiar code, but an imposing and luminescent red linear graph crosses over it. A chair in front of the map invites the viewer to sit and put on the nearby headset, which plays a recording of urban sounds: traffic, some voices in the distance, a bus door, grit crunching on the pavement, footsteps, bird-

<sup>11</sup> These few examples illustrate that Paris, especially until the first half of the 20th century, was just as active as New York in terms of artistic walks.

<sup>12</sup> See company website: accessed January 15, 2015, [http://www.lesgensduterpan.com/projets\\_reaction\\_uk.html](http://www.lesgensduterpan.com/projets_reaction_uk.html).

<sup>13</sup> With the exception of when live arts adopt the museum or gallery schedule and temporality, for example Tino Sehgal, or Xavier Le Roy in *Retrospective* by Xavier Le Roy (2010).

song, children screaming and crying, and the permanent din of a big city.

*Topologie* makes me a stationary spectator, seated inside the theater building. I am alone: there are no performers before me. I am perhaps disappointed, or my anticipated disappointment is confirmed. Straightaway and conversely, the materials divergently speak of movement and the outdoors. The map and the sound score function through opposing rationales. Nicolas Martz' composition is a kind of traveling soundscape of somebody's walk. By extraction, a recording of an outdoor reality is brought indoors. It seemingly points to performers in the city (five are mentioned in the handout) and acts as a trace of past actions or, at the very least, creates a path from this trace. Dispersion dominates; many recognizable signs of the city and journeys within it emerge without coordinates. The sound score tells of a Western megalopolis, probably New York (judging by the accents and the intensity of the sound) without ever precisely grounding us. Jean-Christophe Bailly speaks of the urban phenomenon as a densification of signals, a powerful immersion, and as such, "this mass of signals [sounds in this case] is like an emission, a floating urban unconscious."<sup>14</sup> Listening to the sound score, the city somehow invades and enfolds me.

The map is other: through its figurative capability it prompts a different relationship to reality. It does not operate through contact or sampling. It gives access to an otherwise ungraspable reality, including that of land exploration. "A map shows an object we cannot access otherwise than through itself," explains Jean-Marc Besse, "It opens onto a territory of reference presented as whole, a *sui generis* entity. However, the viewer's perceptive experience only provides a partial or fragmented access to this territory. [...] Representation [and especially a map] is the drawing of an object that does not preexist its own image."<sup>15</sup> While the sound score brings fragmented information, the map proposes a synthesized whole, the result of successive operations for a territory project. Nelson Goodman's pragmatic view of the map, shared by Besse, insists that it does not aim to "recreate experience. [...] Though a map is derived from observations of a territory, the map lacks the contours, colors, sounds, smells, and life of the territory, and in size, shape, weight, temperature, and most other respects may be about as much unlike what it maps as can well be imagined [...] A map is schematic, selective, conventional, condensed, and uniform."<sup>16</sup> Inasmuch, it differs quite a lot from the sound score. Looking at it, I'm at a bird's eye view, a distance, no longer at the heart of a sensory reality. Traveling is translated otherwise, through another temporality. On one hand, I escort the sounds step by step and on the other hand, my gaze drifts—or almost drifts. The imperious red line arrests my focus. Its color and trace are imposing and speak of the artists' work. The line functions according to a different logic than that of the land. The streets of Long Island City unfold to infinity, to the borders of the map, in a nearly regular grid (aside from the Long Island Rail Road's wide, diagonal path). The graph, however, traces a closed geometric circuit of oblique, overlapping triangles. Looking at the circumscribed area (from West to East, the East River to 36th Street; and from North to South, the American Museum of the Moving Image to 50th Avenue), I know that I would not be able to complete this journey on foot in an afternoon. Until now and although nothing had invited me to go for a walk, I had not completely given up on the idea of doing so. There is a striking absence of shared logic between the territory and the line, heightening the improbability of following the artists on their journeys through the neighborhood. This

<sup>14</sup> Jean-Christophe Bailly, *La Phrase urbaine* (Paris: Seuil, 2013), 173.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Marc Besse, "Cartographie et pensée visuelle. Réflexion sur la schématisation graphique," in Isabelle Laboulais, ed., *Les usages des cartes (XVIIe-XIXe siècle). Pour une approche pragmatique des productions cartographiques* (Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2008), 19-32. (Cited from the digital version, accessed January 15, 2015, <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr>, 12.)

<sup>16</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Problems and Projects* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1972), 15.

calls into question the status of the map, the project it intends to contain, and the nature of site-specific art; in other words, the spatial principle governing the relationship between art form and site.

If the map is “a system, a method to conjoin the concept of a territory and a set of empirical data produced by the use of this land,”<sup>17</sup> the red tracing contradicts the land and so does not seem to belong with it. It does not come from any kind of survey or physical exploration of the space. Although site is intrinsic to *Topologie* (as evidenced by the title, the map, and the sound piece), the artistic concept did not emerge from this particular site.<sup>18</sup> This is confirmed by the printed *Topologie* program—which the artists referred to as “statement”—available on location: “In a given space (the point of reference), the *Topologie* graph standard is exhibited and displayed over a map of the location where the project takes place. [...] For several days the performers leave a predefined point of departure, following an individual itinerary determined by the graph.” The performers are immersed in the city, but their imposed itinerary does not depend on the city’s logic. They test the standard graph on a real terrain, a measurement applied to the cities in which the project successively unfolds.<sup>19</sup> This raises a question around the gap between the programmatic nature of the map and the prescriptive one of the graph. The urbanistic reasoning of the map forecasts a space being used for circulation and living. These uses are contradicted by the graph, which cuts across buildings, diagonally or straight through. How can one travel this path? This points to the unimaginable. And yet, that is precisely what *Topologie* asks, by positioning us as an audience without a work: to imagine, to project. Abandoning representation (in terms of presenting a performance to an audience) is not forsaking fiction. Rather, fiction springs from both the invitation of the map diverted into score—which is one part of the work (its essence, although not exclusively if we consider the care around the material and viewing conditions) —as well as the sound score—a trace of an invisible performance and nearly autonomous composition. “The audio piece is played over a free radio frequency usually broadcast in the area,” declares the statement.<sup>20</sup> Nicolas Martz is sometimes visible in the background at the end of the hallway, working live on his computer on previously recorded sounds.

In *A Sound Enclosed Land Area, Milano* (1969)—which consists of a box containing a map of Milan and a sound recording of footsteps—Denis Oppenheim signed the map from which he drew his itinerary, thus making it into an artwork. Here, *Les gens d’Uterpan* make us an audience despite the work’s invisibility.

## *A choreography without a stage*

The notion of the artwork may not be the most operative when speaking of *Topologie*. This artistic practice is amongst those that persistently engage with processes rather than products and invent situa-

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Marc Besse, “Cartographie et pensée visuelle. Réflexion sur la schématisation graphique,” 15.

<sup>18</sup> Certain artists working in site-specific art choose a site without having seen or experienced it directly. They work, for example, from a specific research proposal, as do Christo and Jeanne-Claude.

<sup>19</sup> Since 2010, *Topologie* has been presented in Belfort, Besançon, Paris, Villeneuve d’Ascq (France); Zurich (Switzerland); Vienna (Austria); and Lodz (Poland).

<sup>20</sup> No radio station agreed to host the project in New York, so the soundtrack was played on the website of the Chocolate Factory Theater.

tions rather than performances or objects for display. This contemporary “un-working of art,”<sup>21</sup> as named by Stephen Wright, leads to a deconstruction of “the modes [*dispositifs*] governing the appearing of art”<sup>22</sup> as defined by three premises: art is manifested through the work, it takes place via an author, and before spectators. If Les gens d’Uterpan are working on frameworks for action in performance, how do they address these premises? In terms of the spectator, they maintain the convention of the seated, static audience, even asserting it in certain projects like *Audience*. But they also isolate this entity in relation to the work, for example, by suspending the materiality of the site. For the dancer in *Topologie*, the site is very real; the red line defines it. For the spectator, however, as in many land artworks, the site appears as a concept. “The site is understood as the artwork’s location, ‘suspended’ between two sites: the site of creation and the site of exhibition,” explains Anne-Françoise Penders.<sup>23</sup> Les gens d’Uterpan attempt to blur the work’s boundaries or the possibility for the audience to fully grasp the work. Because of the scope of the work’s geography and temporality, *Topologie* makes the choreography intangible, and quite literally creates a choreography without a stage. A stage is a spatial and temporal conjunction. It emerges from the presence of performers and audience, and is also defined by a perimeter drawn by the performers’ paths or any other frame offered by the artistic intervention. Here, the audience can neither grasp the breadth of the choreography nor follow its duration. The choreography therefore exists without a stage, even if we displace our understanding of a dance piece.<sup>24</sup>

What is the material of this choreography? We can begin by describing what we imagine it to be. Aesthetic relationships defer to a fiction that the viewer is free to engage with. The choreography is the subject of this fiction, which implies the authors. I am drawn to the graph as an anchor, a first clue of choreographic logic. The geometric shape evokes a sophisticated choreographic design—it would not be surprising to find it on a contemporary dance stage floor (on a smaller scale). The specter of a stage seems to hover above this choreography without a stage. The work is in dialogue with the conventions of western contemporary dance forms: the dance is defined by its itinerary, an elegant geometric path. This shape deconstructs the orthogonal lines of a theater’s architecture and allows junctions, meetings, and circumventions. From an urban planning perspective, we are struck by the imperative nature of the straight-lined graph, which points to rationalist architecture. We also ponder Baron Haussmann’s obsession with axes. *Topologie*’s graph seems to spread over the territory, delineating it while appropriating it. On the contrary, many walking artists attempted to make “movement [...] a critique of the actions of line and geometry, of rationalizing itineraries, [...] abandoning the will to make territory geometric by encouraging intertwining paths, and circumstantial, floating, and unplanned journeys.”<sup>25</sup> Thierry Davila’s analysis of urban art walks reveals

<sup>21</sup> This un-working (“*désœuvrement*” in French) is then not specifically choreographic. It is not here a matter of defining the dance as an explicit absence of work, as proposed by Frédéric Pouillaude in *Le désœuvrement chorégraphique. Étude sur la notion d’œuvre en danse*, (Paris: Vrïn, Essais d’art et de philosophie, 2009). But rather to think of *Topologie* as belonging to an art that questions the norms of visibility and aesthetic relationships, along the lines of Stephen Wright in “Vers un art sans œuvre, sans auteur et sans spectateur,” *XV biennale de Paris: du 1er octobre 2006 au 30 septembre 2008* (Biennale de Paris, 2007), 17-24; or Claire Bishop in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012; or land-art theoreticians.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Wright, “Vers un art sans œuvre, sans auteur et sans spectateur,” 17.

<sup>23</sup> Anne-Françoise Penders, *En chemin, le Land Art. Tome 1: Partir* (Brussels: La lettre volée, 1999), 30.

<sup>24</sup> Frédéric Pouillaude came to the conclusion that “dance has never been transmitted otherwise than from a *presence* to a *presence*, in a space of simultaneity to the self and to others. This is precisely what we call a *stage* [*scène*], which holds all the qualities of a structure of contemporaneity. [...] It is solely through the structure of a stage that dance can constitute and offer itself as work.” *Le désœuvrement chorégraphique. Étude sur la notion d’œuvre en danse*, 358.

<sup>25</sup> Thierry Davila, *Marcher, Créer. Déplacements, flâneries, dérives dans l’art de la fin du XXe siècle*, 168-169.



that few opt for a straight line, that is, for a planned and willful path, a “sharp exploration,”<sup>26</sup> such as Dennis Adams and Laurent Malone in *JFK* (1969), connecting Manhattan to the John F. Kennedy airport by walking in a straight line for eleven and a half hours. The daily practice in *Topologie* will be somewhere in-between—neither completely linear, because it is continuously swayed by obstacles or whimsical choices, nor aimlessly wandering. Imagining this choreography more closely shows that its sharp concept cannot hold its course. The performers will confront the authors’ statement with the reality of the terrain. A multitude of tricks will be required to commit to an impossible circuit. The gap between the embodied work and the drawing dictating it sways the status of the author between two opposites. On one hand, the choreographers, fairly true to convention, seem to create a world, taking on their role of inventors. On the other hand, they relinquish their action and leave the performers to invent their own solutions. In no way are Les gens d’Uterpan abandoning authorship, a role they sometimes isolate (as with the role of audience) to the point of reducing art to an exchange with the choreographers. “I first met Annie Vigier and Franck Apertet in 2011,” recounted Brian Rogers, artistic director of the Chocolate Factory Theater, “when they invited me to visit them in the basement of the White Box Gallery for an interview that, to my surprise, would be videotaped for use in an artistic project of some kind.”<sup>27</sup> This was for the piece *Présence*, also part of the re|action cycle. The almighty authorial figure dissolves in *Topologie*, but only in the invisible component of the work.

Confronted with absences—the invisibility of the work, the nonexistent stage—one might wonder if my fictional analysis of the choreography isn’t purely speculative. Are there actually any performers in *Topologie*? Should we believe the names in the program? They could simply be there through contractual agreements, which Les gens d’Uterpan commonly use. Aren’t passersby in the city themselves performers of a dance described in the statement by “simple acts: gestures and physical movements, social behavior, the speed of their movements, etc.”?

## *Of performers and narratives*

The program given at the Chocolate Factory Theater entrance announced a meeting with the choreographers and performers on May 10, 2014. I did, in fact, hear the choreographers and the performers—John Hoobyar, Inkyung Lee, Abigail Levine, Rebecca Patek, and Kristopher Pourzal—speak of the dance. This was an opportunity to reconsider the material of this invisible piece, to hear how the itineraries played out and how they resonated with the city. Jean-François Augoyard and Michel de Certeau put forward that we can draw parallels between journey and narrative. As such, the passage from a map to a story moves us closer to a certain reality of a practice. In the telling of a kinesthetic story, the place turns into space, into singular experiences. The “walking rhetoric”<sup>28</sup> that dancers embody, each in their own style or approach, reinvents the city; it is conveyed through narrative and becomes more specific through utterance. Over the ten days of *Topologie*, the choreographers relentlessly questioned the performers about their choices. Discourse seems to have been an integral part of the project at all stages of the process.

Besides the performers’ accounts, required by the project, there is the laconic statement that provides

<sup>26</sup> Thierry Davila, *Marcher, Créer. Déplacements, flâneries, dérives dans l’art de la fin du XXe siècle*, 170.

<sup>27</sup> “DANSE. A French-American Festival of Performances & Ideas” program, 9.

<sup>28</sup> “Rhétorique cheminatoire,” in Jean-François Augoyard, *Pas à pas. Essai sur le cheminement quotidien en milieu urbain* (Paris: À la Croisée, 2010), 45.

relatively little information about the quality of their physical gestures. Much of the choreography is said to have consisted of ordinary or simple gestures, yet these can appear so differently. There was also the potential exchange with our host or hosts on site, a mediator or the choreographers themselves, available for questions and with whom I had a long conversation. And after ten days, there was a rendezvous for a public exchange. Does choreography without a stage give way to a discursive art, familiar to us for several decades now through performance and visual art? Revisiting this tendency, Stephen Wright remarks that “beyond the trivial explanation that this is because the artist’s presence evidences an existential engagement in the work that is not otherwise tangible, [artists talking] may also reveal that the site of art itself has undergone a historical shift; that art itself is not immediately present, but withdrawn, its coefficient of specific visibility too low for it to be detected and identified as such.”<sup>29</sup> *Topologie* definitely answers to this “low coefficient of artistic visibility,” but the choreographers’ discourse is not the artwork’s only site. We must consider the interweaving narratives that progressively build *Topologie* like a rumor (Francis Alÿs was a proponent of rumors.)<sup>30</sup> Performer narratives, sponsor narratives, the narratives of the audience engaging with the map and sound score, radio listener narratives, and also citizen narratives—those persons intersecting with the dancers, witnessing the same people wearing the same thing performing the same actions for ten days. These inhabitants achieved a certain audience status.<sup>31</sup> Following to the dictates of the choreographers,<sup>32</sup> for the first two days, the performers could explain to those they encountered their wish to cross through a building, a factory, or a store, without necessarily using art as a reason.<sup>33</sup> If a situation became difficult, they warned the choreographers, who, in turn, met with those concerned by the performers’ actions to discuss the issue. Dialogue is not a goal of the work, but a means to render the choreography possible. In addition, daily discussions between performers about their experimentations and choices counterbalance their isolation in building and performing the choreography. These incidentally form and inform the supposed quintet. The rumor becomes descriptions and accounts leading to individual interpretations and possible echoes to actions told but not seen.

The circulating narratives thus serve multiple functions but I tend to think that they indicate the site of the work—a site with very blurry boundaries—as well as the relationship between the journey and the story. Through narrative, the movement of *Topologie* unfolds and asserts itself. “Where the map cuts up, the story cuts across,” explains Michel de Certeau, “it establishes an itinerary (it ‘guides’) and passes through (it ‘transgresses’). The space of operations it travels in is made of movements: it is *topological*, concerning the deformations of figures, rather than *topical*, defining places.”<sup>34</sup> What do we know about this deformation of figures (i.e. usages, projected traffic, and urban plans) that are the foundations of topology? Other than narrative, what are the means by which the performers cross through the housing units, factories,

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Wright, *Towards a Lexicon of Usership* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2013), 43.

<sup>30</sup> In *Urban Rumor* (2000), for example, the artist introduced a fictitious narrative that triggered real effects. See Thierry Davila, *Marcher, Créer. Déplacements, flâneries, dérives dans l’art de la fin du XXe siècle*, chap. II.

<sup>31</sup> *Topologie* seems concerned with different qualities of spectatorship rather than audience size. The lone chair set up at the Chocolate Factory Theater is indicative of this, and only three people were present at the public discussion on May 10, 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Unless otherwise specified and from this point on, information about the invisible choreography comes from an interview I held with Annie Vigier and Franck Apertet on May 6, 2014, in New York City.

<sup>33</sup> In these conversations, the performers did not always reveal that they were artists. Defining art seemed less important to them than their relation to the other, or capturing the aesthetic reality of the moment.

<sup>34</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984 [1980]), 189.

and railroads on their paths? Am I to be contented with a general definition, remembering “all journey, all dwelling is not only structures and figures, but also configuring and structuring, meaning troubling the concept of what is built and recreating space through sensation and motility”<sup>35</sup>? In the public exchange with the choreographers and performers, I try in vain to understand the singularity of this dance I will not see, how it is different than so many other urban projects based on simple actions in relation to the city and the moment. I gather snippets that move through their accounts as they moved through the city:

*Dancers each have two hours to complete their individual itinerary of about 9km. At different intersections on the circuit (which is 18km in total), they will cross paths with another dancer. They can highlight this encounter however they wish. They all make a loop. /*

*The performers are free to travel, stop, and accelerate each at their own speed, but must respect the two-hour duration. / After a while, the performers integrate themselves into the neighborhood: at the textile factory, they wait for Rebecca and acknowledge her when she passes by. / Each dancer chooses his or her actions. One can climb a wall. One can pick up a dog turd before the owner gets to it. Inkyung crumples a Topologie map and throws it out. Abigail gives away a dollar in a little shop, or a transit ticket at the bus stop. / It is not simply about walking; it is also about surveying current norms in public space and understanding one’s relationship to these.<sup>36</sup>*

*Performers are afraid in certain areas of the city. Some of them go beyond their own comfort zones in knowing the city, particularly with regard to their racial perceptions of areas. The team is comprised of dancers based in New York who auditioned for the project. They already have a certain knowledge of the city.<sup>37</sup> /*

*Repetition (going into a shop several times) and aimless action can cause confrontation and discomfort, even though they are authorized. / One can sit at a table in a bar and leave when the waiter arrives, hail a cab and not take it, move an item in a store or change the flow of traffic and passersby. These kinds of actions produce a second choreography through the reaction, reorganization, or movement of the people encountered. This eventually modifies the “city’s choreography” that leads people to be in the same place at the same time every day, and that we could also name “social topology.” /*

*Actions are not performed to provoke or show a certain fantasy, but rather to demonstrate that they are possible and acceptable. /*

*Topologie questions boundaries between public and private spaces and notions of property. / The dancers are reminded that they are foremost working—practicing rather than seeking applause. They need to unlearn representation. They have a big responsibility, building a two-hour score in only ten days: memorizing actions and durations; repeating these daily without altering qualities of presence; and sustaining attention to contexts through sensation and perception rather than symbolism, emotion, and psychology. They are solitary workers writing dances. /*

*Meanings should not be overt. We should not be able to identify the dancers. Ideally, they reveal and make obvious their surroundings. /*

<sup>35</sup> Jean-François Augoyard, *Pas à pas. Essai sur le cheminement quotidien en milieu urbain*, 143.

<sup>36</sup> “Walking is the choreographic base of this project. Beyond the intrinsic value of walking, related to the space covered and the time taken, I wonder about how my body is positioned in the project; what is its shape, intensity, and rhythm. [...] Looking for different states: running, meandering, dreaming, and being winded, watchful, discreet.” This is an excerpt of “Partition de Stève Paulet pour *Topologie* à Zurich, 3-12 août 2012.” I want to thank Stève Paulet for sharing his score and analysis. The choreographers ask performers to formalize their scores in writing. These writings remain invisible, like the choreography. Generally, few photos are taken but in New York, the Chocolate Factory Theater published a series of photographs by Angela Bedekovic online.

<sup>37</sup> Company dancers sometimes also participate.

Listening to the artists and performers, I understood that the art of *Topologie* finds itself in the infinite narratives. These are composed of excerpts of experience and silences. There is something secret and intimate in these solitary travels. Strung together, the accounts, including the omissions within them, are akin to Nicolas Martz' composition. Martz strung together sound bites from the dancers' journeys, respecting locations in their two-hour itineraries, and never layering two sources. Thus, each moment of sound silenced four other realities and the recomposed journey is spatially fragmented.

One must be satisfied with the narrative that raises new questions, particularly about a relationship to labor: with the city becoming the rehearsal space for a choreography written daily and performed only once; about the relevance and resonance of the actions performed and their impact on the city; and about property and boundaries.<sup>38</sup>

One must be satisfied with the (fragmented) narrative that doesn't quite exhaust or delineate the work because it changes direction according to individual experiences, reminding me of the impossibility of a site or a stage. Finally, what matters lies in the ways in which these accounts produce an imaginary of the city, and how they invite us to re-appropriate it— through our own journeys.

In the Plexiglas covering the map, I see my own reflection and, behind me, the street. I am in a complex space, as if I had slipped between modes of representation and superimposed myself onto different spatial realities. I am here, at the Chocolate Factory Theater, and there, in the map, moving through the red line. I am soon outside, behind myself. Because I still think that the dancers have the most beautiful role in *Topologie*—through movement, they experiment New York otherwise and build an experience. And because I still feel like walking.

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*To quote from this article : Julie Perrin, "New York Topologie", in Noémie Solomon (ed.), Dance. A Catalog, Les Presses du réel, New York, 2015, p. 71-88 (trans. Marie-Claire Forté). Taken from a digital version published on the website Paris 8 Danse: [www.danse.univ-paris8.fr](http://www.danse.univ-paris8.fr)*

<sup>38</sup> Land artists questioned American interests in land via land claiming. See Anne Volvey, "Spatialités d'une *land* activité: le *Land Art* à travers l'œuvre de Christo et Jeanne-Claude."