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► **To cite this version:**

Julie Perrin. The archeology of "Street Dance" by Lucinda Childs. *Danza e ricerca. Laboratorio di studi, scritture, visioni*, 2019, 11, pp.93-109. 10.6092/issn.2036-1599/10294 . hal-02455404

HAL Id: hal-02455404

<https://hal.science/hal-02455404>

Submitted on 26 Jan 2020

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Julie Perrin

The archeology of *Street Dance* by Lucinda Childs

The document is not the fortunate tool of a history that is primarily and fundamentally *memory*; history is one way in which a society recognizes and develops a mass of documentation with which it is inextricably linked.

Michel Foucault¹

The six-minute choreography takes place in front of Wells Fargo History Museum in Philadelphia. Two dancers, Janet Pilla and Michele Tantoco, wearing shorts and a brightly colored top, are clearly addressing an audience using strong mimicry, smiles, poses or large movements. They seem like graceful, athletic and cheerful receptionists. We can hear the audience laugh, probably positioned on the 1st floor of the opposite building. Three women do a voice over, describing architectural characteristics or markings that the dancers point out but that cannot necessarily be seen, talking about movements (yoga poses, jump, Terpsichore) and slipping in a little humor. The way the movements are performed is somewhat emphatic: they are effusive and descriptive and often belong to dance vocabulary – jumps, lifts, arched torso, lunge. The choreography ignores passers-by, sometimes only just avoiding them and it seems to unfold like an independent body indifferent to the urban context. Yet, passers-by sometimes stop to watch this strange event. What is going on? The description draws on Jorge Cousineau's film on the restaging of Lucinda Child's *Street Dance* by the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. This restaging, part of the project «A Steady Pulse. Restaging Lucinda Childs, 1963–78», supported by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage and visible on the website of the same name, took place on October 6th, 2013. It significantly shakes up my perception of this piece dating from 1964. Indeed, the style of the danced movement, the tone of the work as well as the way the choreography is part of its urban context never cease to surprise me.

1. Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir*, Gallimard, Paris 1969, p. 14.

This article will not judge the quality of the reenactment nor do I claim it to be the ultimate truth about the work. All reenactments bring with them the poetics of variation². Dance reenactment is a large field of study³ on its own and my purpose is not to bring that topic into focus, neither to deal with the perspective of reenacting a site-specific choreography⁴. I will, however, use the inconsistency that caused me such disappointment to reexamine more carefully the traces left by *Street Dance*. A new analysis of these traces is needed because *Street Dance* represents an important work not only for the history of American postmodern dance (Sally Banes gave it an important place in *Terpsichore in Sneakers* [1980], as has been done since by other researchers specialized in this period), but more specifically, for the history of Site Dance, as Victoria Hunter or Melanie Kloetzel and Carolyn Pavlik have claimed⁵. As part of my own research into site specific choreography, I wish to conduct a kind of dissection of *Street Dance*'s traces, to understand the existence of this work through its documentary material. Whilst the implications of site-specific choreography arise from the specific link between a work and a place, I will here study these documents from two angles. The first – important to dance research – concentrates on the nature of choreography and dance, questioning in more detail the way in which movement expresses a special relationship to place. This angle is based on the idea that the quality of a movement reflects, inter alia, a way of relating to the place in which it is performed, when we consider that perception (tangible and symbolic) of a setting involves a certain type of dance interpretation. In other words, what is this dance made of and in what way does it introduce a representation of the place itself? Which characteristics of the place does it highlight? The second angle concentrates on the place itself: what do the documents reveal about the place in which *Street Dance* takes place? This question is expanded in three ways. Firstly, it concerns the site and its perceptive setup. Once a theater no longer provides a framework for dance, how do we organize our way of looking at the choreography? In other

2. It will not be possible within this article to comment more on Lucinda Childs' report on the reenactment. Childs details the way in which she accompanied the restaging process: «Rather than relying on a score, I explained to the dancers how the dances were made and what sort of criteria they were based on rather than have them simply copy the work. That meant that the dancers could be involved in the original process of creation, and they were obliged to abide by the same rules and guidelines that I had set up for myself when I originally performed them. [...] It is important to make the choreography work and come alive for the dancers and be right for them, and it is also important to be ready to adapt». Lucinda Childs, *Notes on the Reconstructions*, August 14, 2014, online: <http://danceworkbook.pcah.us/asteadypulse/texts/reconstructions.html> (u.v. 19/11/2019). Neither will I be able within this article to analyze Cousineau's film and in particular the effects of the intensive use of the zoom and filming with two cameras (one in the street, the other amongst the audience).

3. See for instance: Mark Franko (edited by), *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Reenactment*, Oxford University Press, New York 2017; Isabelle Launay, *Cultures de l'oubli et citation. Les Danses d'après, II*, Centre national de la danse, Pantin 2019.

4. Site specific reenactment raises many particular questions, since the place where the choreography occurred was part of it: How can we reenact a place, or reenact the links between a place and a choreography?

5. Hunter underlines that «Lucinda Childs' work *Street Dance* (1964) is often cited as an example of early site-specific dance performance as it exposed the choreographer's overt questioning of space, place and human engagement with the built environment in a particular manner». Victoria Hunter, *Introduction*, in Id. (edited by), *Moving Sites. Investigating Site-specific Dance Performance*, Routledge, London 2015, p. 9. Kloetzel and Pavlik consider the piece «in retrospect, [as] the first truly site-specific dance». (Melanie Kloetzel – Carolyn Pavlik, *Site Dance and the Lure of Alternative Spaces*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville 2013, p. 12).

words, where do dancers and spectators stand and what role does place play in the event's focus (or on the contrary diversion)? This is an important question in the history of art and dance: the question of (the norms of) visibility chosen by a work, or the way something could appear or disappear during the aesthetic experience⁶. Secondly, what do the documents tell us about the part of the city where *Street Dance* takes place, in terms of architecture, visitors, usage, atmosphere, etc.? In particular, can we imagine what a certain street in New York was like in 1964? Thirdly, what do the documents reveal about the emotional relationship to the place? What were the ties and also what was the imagination about the place that worked on both artists and spectators?

We therefore have to reassess the images of the work as described by witnesses and historians, considering them from the unique perspective of a history of site specific choreography. Cousineau's film which challenges assumptions – mine, but not only – makes us ask: What do we know about *Street Dance*? There is no film of the historic version of *Street Dance* in 1964, nor is there one of the following year's performance. The researcher has to do with the traces Lucinda Childs left – texts and sketches – as well as descriptions or pictures from direct or indirect witnesses of the event, and with historians' analyses. There is a large amount of material for a six-minute piece: it has left many more traces than other works from the same period. Ultimately, I am suggesting a kind of archeology in the Foucauldian sense, in other words not an «excavation or geological survey», nor «the return to the very secret of the origin» of the danced event, but a description of the comments and traces, of what has already been said and written into a system of archives⁷. This investigation will lead to revealing the repetitions, but also the additions and gaps in the documents. I suggest commenting on the documents which are here chronologically numbered from 1 to 12, the most of them registered in the Lucinda Childs Fund in the Library of Centre national de la danse (France)⁸.

A dissection of the traces

Document 1: «I went to the place and took notes» – site process and spatial logic

The first document (Document 1) is a pencil sketch drawn by Lucinda Childs in 1964, noted «I went to the place and took notes». The sketch is divided in two numbered parts, 1 then 2, probably showing the order of a planned score. Part 1 takes the form of a rough plan indicating the street thanks to the word STREET, the place of a car and geometric lines which could show a doorway as well as a sketched path indicated by three arrows along the geometric lines. A few verbs suggest actions: «lie»

6. Cf. Julie Perrin, *Figures de l'attention. Cinq essais sur la spatialité en danse*, Les presses du réel, Dijon 2012.

7. Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir*, cit., pp. 173, 183.

8. A reproduction of some of these documents has been available since 2015 thanks to the publishing work of the website «A Steady pulse». The originals were registered in 2016: Notes and sketches about *Street Dance* (1964). Lucinda Childs Fund, Media Library of the National Dance Centre (France).

appears four times between the arrows, but also «look right», «look left», «at curb step down» and «chew fingernails». Part 2 just carries this phrase: «squat at grating – [left] box»⁹. We can pick out three important aspects: firstly, Lucinda Childs works in the field, at street level, imagining a series of actions that take place in precise locations, in relation to a structure alongside which they are to be enacted. Secondly, she intends simple actions, without detailing the way in which they are to be done, some of which, although this is just hypothetical, have perhaps been seen in the field. Finally, the sketch is caught in a multi-directional logic since the text orientation changes and we have to turn the paper to read the words. Lucinda Childs seems to turn in circles or explore different directions during her site identification. In other words, the sketch does not favor one specific view, but indicates what Merce Cunningham said very well in his own way about urban spatiality: «I thought about street space: no-one thinks that, in the street, you will only be seen from the front»¹⁰.

Document 2: signs, colors, inscriptions and people in Chinatown

The second document (Document 2) is an undated pencil sketch by Lucinda Childs on a lined sheet from a landscape format, spiral-bound notebook. We can see the plan of the buildings' alignment and on the right, the same indentation as in Document 1. From left to right, we see the Fire Department (n. 55), Cannon Bedsreadtst [sic] Draperies (n. 53) with its fire hydrant, then Trio Dry Goods Corp opposite which there is a «No Parking» space with its meter and a tow away zone. The location of this street in New York is not clear but the Fire Department gives instructions to «turn in alarm from box located at E. B'way [East Broadway] and Catherine Street», when the company is out. We can therefore deduce that we are in Chinatown. Lucinda Childs also notes various inscriptions («That's what's written»): opening or parking times, instructions in case of fire, or «warning wooden chute», «Drive carefully, save a life!». She is mindful of two colors: «letters (white)», «sign (red)», «red lettering», «white sign». And the mention of people's names no doubt provides evidence of meetings made during this observation time: «Alexander Stevens superintendent of Buildings», «Thomas Sturgis commissioner», etc. On the back of the sheet, other colors appear: «red doors, yellow windows» or: «letters white and gold when fire escape was painted black paints spilled on the letters». And Lucinda Childs marks off an area between two signs that do not appear on the sketch: «the area between H. Blooms Sons & Soft Touch Coctail [sic] Lounge».

9. A mark on the document makes the reading uncertain. Another phrase in part 1 is difficult to grasp: «If [Moore] steps on us».

10. Isabelle Ginot, *Entretien avec Merce Cunningham: montrer et laisser les gens se faire une opinion*, in «Mobiles. Danse et utopie», n. 1, 1999, p. 204.

Document 3: field investigation and visuality

The third document (Document 3) is a little story written in pencil, on the back of the medical form. It puts Lucinda Childs in her role as a field investigator: «I was across the street yesterday and some men from the fire dpt [department] came out they wanted to know if I was ~~making a movie~~ drawing a picture I said no I was making a movie I don't know why I said that – reflex». This unexpected reply perhaps illustrates the visual scan that is taking place, like a camera movement. The document does not explain the exact nature of this movement but guiding and directing the spectator's view of the place will be one of the major concerns of the piece.

Document 4 and 12: admiring accounts from peers, or inside/outside work and pedestrian movements

The fourth document (Document 4) is a letter from Steve Paxton sent from London where he was on tour with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, dated from 1964 (probably the beginning of August):

Dear Cindy,

Yvonne [Rainer] tells us you have made a new work, the one detailing architecture and signs whilst performing pedestrianly on the street. Just want to express admiration at this – was moved by description of its simplicity – could in minds eyes see you and Tony [Holder] performing it and I hope to really see it someday next winter.

Robert Rauschenberg adds this note at the end of the letter: «I got a big charge out of your street inside/outside work. I just said for a couple of days Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes». *Street Dance* made a mark on the artists' community and brought admiring accounts as much from direct witnesses – Yvonne Rainer, Robert Ellis Dunn (we will see this later) as from friends who had to imagine the piece (Steve Paxton and Robert Rauschenberg, at least). Let us remember that the duo was presented within Robert Ellis Dunn's composition workshop, as an answer to the assignment to create a dance that lasted six minutes. The 1964 summer workshop brought together, amongst others: Yvonne Rainer, Meredith Monk, Phoebe Neville, Sally Gross, Robert Morris. The presentation of *Street Dance* took place most probably on July 23rd, 1964¹¹ in Judith Dunn's studio on 53 East Broadway¹² (Chinatown).

11. The date of July 23rd, 1964 is given by the website «A Steady pulse» and seems to be in line with the dates of Dunn's workshop. The period of «spring 1964» indicated by Ann Livet therefore seems mistaken. Cfr. Ann Livet – Lucinda Childs, *Lucinda Childs*, in Ann Livet (edited by), *Contemporary Dance*, Abbeville Press, New York 1978, p. 60. Even Jill Johnston who attended the presentation mentions another date: June 1964. Jill Johnston, *Judson '64: II*, in «The Village Voice», January 28th, 1965, p. 11.

12. Confirmed by Lucinda Childs, *Email to Julie Perrin* May 18th, 2018. Dunn's studio was possibly located at number 53, namely between Catherine Street and Market Street, if we are to believe an address mentioned in Lucinda Childs' text *Apartment history* (1974): «53 East Broadway / a loft on the 6th floor overlooking Trio Dry Goods and the Soft Touch Cocktail Lounge». Indeed, Lucinda Childs told me that this very lounge can be seen from Dunn's studio (Lucinda Childs, *Email to Julie Perrin*, cit.). That would mean that the n°53 noted on Document 2 is the number opposite.

This letter reveals two points that will be the basis of the coming analyses: on the one hand, Rauschenberg insists on alternating between the interior (studio) and exterior (street), underlining the very unique set-up (as did later Robert Ellis Dunn in 1980, Carrie Lambert-Beatty in 2008 or Corinne Rondeau in 2013¹³). On the other hand, the dance is described as «pedestrian» (a position that can be found in all later analyses¹⁴). Of course, this term must be set in its historical context since the everyday attitude of a passer-by is relative to a period and a cultural context. Furthermore, the use of this term in the dance scene does in fact correspond to the esthetics of daily life, and, no matter what artists say, to a certain form of stylization of daily life – as such, the term is less able to qualify the exact nature of movement than the spirit, attitude and choreographic culture in which it is performed¹⁵. And what about the idea of pedestrian movements for dancers in Philadelphia in 2013? In 1964, this culture did indeed have something to do with the link between art and life which was so important at that time – it was, for example, during the night of July 25th to 26th, 1964, that Warhol filmed in real time, *Empire*, another view of New York¹⁶. The historian Marcia B. Siegel specifies the way in which we must understand this term for *Street Dance*: «All the downtown dancers were determined not to look like dancers —neither formal dance technique, stagey attitudes, nor accepted artistic structures were to be used»¹⁷. Nevertheless, it is not easy for a dancer to free him/herself from the posture and gestural coordination that were part of his/her training.

Finally, we can question the «whilst»: Steve Paxton seems to put two independent aspects side by side, on one side, highlighting the architecture and signs (and we will later see that this aspect is certainly covered by the tape played inside), and on the other, pedestrian movement. At this stage, there is no evidence that the movement itself covers the highlighting of the signs and architecture. Indeed, it is known that, in her earlier pieces, Lucinda Childs played with the contrast between the soundtrack and the dance.

A later account from Yvonne Rainer – who is a source of information for the letter (or Document 4) – clarifies certain points. Carrie Lambert-Beatty recounts the content of a telephone conversation with her on May 18th, 2005 (Document 12):

13. Robert Ellis Dunn, *Judson Days* [1980], in «Contact Quarterly», vol. XIV, n. 1, Winter 1989, pp. 9-13; Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched. Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2008; Corinne Rondeau, *Lucinda Childs. Temps/Danse*, Centre national de la danse, Pantin 2013.

14. See for instance: Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers. Post-modern Dance*, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover [1980] 1987; Nick Kaye, *Postmodernism and Performance*, MacMillan, Basingstoke 1994.

15. See for instance Julie Perrin, *Du quotidien. Une impasse critique*, in Barbara Formis (edited by), *Gestes à l'œuvre*, de l'Incidence éditions, Paris 2008, pp. 86-97 and *Our Bodies are not readymades: The Ordinary in Steve Paxton's Dance Pieces from the 1960s*, in Romain Bigé (edited by), *Steve Paxton/Drafting Interior Techniques*, Culturgest, Lisbon 2019, pp. 28-40.

16. Marcia B. Siegel (who does not mention Warhol) records the meditative nature of *Street Dance*: «It could be thought of as a discipline for the dancers, who had to carry out their tasks unperturbed by the ongoing street life, or as an exercise for the audience in focusing attention, a meditation». Marcia B. Siegel, *Dancing on the Outside*, in «The Hudson Review», vol. 60, n. 1, Spring 2007, p. 112.

17. *Ibidem*.

The dancers were literally far away, and, in Rainer's recollection, had their backs to the studio window most, if not all, of the time they were performing. The sense of spontaneity that would otherwise obtain as the dancers casually pointed at things and stood talking in the street was belied by the tape-recorded descriptions with which their movements were precisely timed to coincide¹⁸.

This memory explains the way in which the dancers addressed the audience: they rarely faced them, and their body movements were rarely directed at them (we are a long way from the choices made for the 2013 reenactment). It would have been difficult to distinguish between the apparently spontaneous movement of pointing to and discussing things and the activities of the site, since the act of pointing itself was not clearly obvious. This is why Marcia B. Siegel said: «In *Street Dance*, the people in the loft had the advantage of a guided tour, but the pedestrians down below simply encountered two ordinary-looking women [sic] doing slightly strange things»¹⁹.

Document 5: relocating the piece – second performance of *Street Dance* (1965)

The following two documents were produced by Lucinda Childs and date from 1964. As confirmed by Document 7, they deal with the second performance of *Street Dance* which took place on Broadway in the autumn of 1965²⁰. Indeed, there are two successive versions and as Marcia B. Siegel²¹ points out, several analyses continue to confuse the two performances of the work, with the 1965 performance being mistaken for the one from July 1964. The location of a site dance isn't however a detail. And the question of relocating a piece is not a side issue²².

The first document (Document 5), a blue ink drawing of a quite detailed plan of the performance site, mentions the position of the audience at number 809 on Broadway (where Rauschenberg's studio is located). The stylized drawing shows the pavement between 11th and 12th Streets where the performance takes place and the ground floor of three buildings called: «OLD EUROPE ANTIQUES», «FLEA MARKET» and «814 CALTYPE». Stairs and an aluminum pillar are mentioned. The buildings' height is not drawn: we can assume that Lucinda Childs conveys the view of the façade from pedestrian height, or that she represents an elevated view that involves the spectators refocusing their field of vision towards the pavement. New York is, therefore, shown in landscape format, rather than showing the height of the buildings. Lucinda Childs sets up a closely framed image that favors street level and not city level, nor a skyline's depth of field, as other choreographers will do later. In so doing,

18. Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched. Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s*, cit., p. 39.

19. Marcia B. Siegel, *Dancing on the Outside*, cit., p. 113.

20. At this stage of the investigation, the precise date has not been found.

21. «Such was the ephemerality and profusion of events during this period that the two *Street Dances* have become historicized into one» (Marcia B. Siegel, *Dancing on the Outside*, cit., p. 111). This is the case, for example in Melanie Kloetzel – Carolyn Pavlik, *Site Dance and the Lure of alternative Spaces*, cit.

22. On the debate on site-adaptive, site-generic or site-specific piece see for instance Victoria Hunter (edited by), *Moving Sites. Investigating site-specific dance performance*, cit.

she comes close to the representation that Elaine Summers leaves of Downtown New York in her film *Judson Fragments*, presented in February 1964 at Judson Church.

Document 6: timing and spatial score

The second sheet from 1964 entitled *Score for 'Street Dance'* (Document 6) presents the score of the duo as a timed sequence²³ mentioning elements from the site: window, B103, door-license, grating, padlock, aluminum column, etc. To the right of this sequence we can find 13 pairs of arrows (no doubt to indicate the duo), in horizontal or vertical positions, accompanied most of the time by some indication of movement («arrive, still, move to right, move, move, back up, look down, move, move, move, face»): we can assume that they indicate the dancers' orientation or perhaps the direction of a move. With one exception, where the two arrows are facing each other (which, in the left column, corresponds to «3:22 face each other»²⁴), the pairs of arrows are parallel, perhaps showing that the two dancers move side by side in the same direction and/or orientation (a configuration encouraging conversations indicated by Yvonne Rainer in Document 12). On six occasions, one is slightly out of line with the other. Of course, interpretation of this score is very uncertain. If the bottom of the sheet indicates the audience's position, the duo would indeed be seen from behind at six different moments of the dance, the rest of the time being seen from the side (the right side on five occasions, and left side once), and only at the end, would they be seen face on (which is confirmed by the text «face» alongside the last arrows).

Document 7: a late report by Lucinda Childs (1973) – a dialogue on tape

The following document (Document 7) is an article by Lucinda Childs, entitled «Lucinda Childs: A Portfolio», published in 1973 in «Artforum»²⁵. The choreographer mentions *Street Dance* as part of a wider presentation of her work since 1962. *Street Dance* was created following works which develop a «movement exploration with objects» where dialogues accompany action (and do not dictate it) and where Lucinda Childs is interested in varying the viewpoints on danced activity:

In one instance, I performed a section of a dance on a city street within an area visible from the sixth-floor window of a loft populated by a group of spectators whom I temporarily abandoned. The dialogue, a detailed description of the facade of the buildings on the street where the dance was taking place, was taped and left with the audience so that they could remain tuned in to what was happening²⁶.

23. A second document exists with almost exactly the same timing. It does not have any arrows on the right.

24. In the recorded dialogue, this refers to «two wooden owls fac[ing] each other», cfr. Document 7.

25. Republished in Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, cit.; it is the best-known document.

26. Lucinda Childs, *Lucinda Childs: A Portfolio*, in «Artforum», vol. XI, n. 6, February 1973, pp. 50-56: 50.

This short description, which effectively describes the viewing device imagined for an audience located in a loft, interestingly says nothing about the nature of the performed movements and on the choice of the street. We learn that Lucinda Childs greeted the public alone, before disappearing. She therefore travelled between the interior and the exterior, creating a link between the two places.

Three pages later, Childs published the score of the 1965 version of *Street Dance*. This score is in fact the text of the «dialogue on tape» to which is added the timing of the 1964 sheet (Document 6), but without the right-hand column and its arrows. In place of this notation which is difficult to read, Childs inserts the wording «(Action of performers)» four times: the comment in brackets is too cryptic to infer the essence of the performed moves, but it does confirm that several performers were involved. The name of the only performer who in fact accompanies Childs does not appear in this article and critics sometimes generate confusion (for example, Sally Banes seems not to know the name of the performer, the website «A Steady pulse» only mentions Lucinda Childs).

By comparing the score and the transcript we understand that the words in the score are taken from the dialogue, making it clear how the text is divided up throughout the duration of the performance. It must be read relatively quickly to correspond to the timing indicated and this provides information about the flow of verbal messages received by the spectator, whilst the choreography was unfolding below. It is not possible to identify the change from one voice to another in the transcribed dialogue. This is probably what leads the historian Nick Kaye to talk of a monologue²⁷. One single narrator is present at the beginning of the text, indicated by the «I»: «I am concerned with the area between the Bon Vivant Delicacy Store and Surplus Materials of Norbert and Hausknecht»²⁸. This narrator quickly disappears and gives way to a meticulous description of certain details of the façades and windows. Indeed, the dialogue firstly concerns the site: a pavement enclosed by 11th and 12th Streets and, in particular – with a first close-up – by the two above mentioned shops that mark off the wide shot for the spectator. A traveling is then organized from North to South (left to right for the spectator – supporting the supposition that arises from Document 6 of a side movement from left to right), along three consecutive buildings. We can note a series of close-ups either of inscriptions on the façade, with particular attention given to the lettering, objects in shop-windows (two antique shops and an office supply wholesaler), or the buildings' structure (for example at 814 Broadway, the Gurbob architectural style, the presence of a fire escape ladder, a square pillar, a broken arch). The precise geography of the 1965 performance revealed in the text is centered around 816 and 814 Broadway, confirming the information contained in the 1964 sketch (Document 5). Sidney Philips' photograph from 1973, which accompanies the score published in «Artforum», does not illustrate the text as well: indeed, Caltype Wholesale Office Machines, which occupies a large part of the text, is not visible in

27. Nick Kaye, *Postmodernism and Performance*, cit., p. 108.

28. Lucinda Childs, *Lucinda Childs: A Portfolio*, cit., p. 52.

it, indicating the rapid development of this district between West and East Village. From this document, we can note Lucinda Childs' meticulous care: a careful and detailed examination of small sized elements that the spectator cannot see from the sixth-floor loft.

Document 8: a later report by Lucinda Childs (1975) – a discrete activity

In March 1975, «The Drama Review» published a new article by Lucinda Childs about her work (Document 8), in which she mentions *Street Dance*.

In 1964, one of my dances took place on a street in lower Manhattan. It was observable to an audience from the windows of a loft located on the opposite side of the street. The dance was entirely based on its found surroundings, and performers, myself and one other, essentially blended in with the other activity that was going on in the street. From time to time, however, during the six-minute duration of the dance, we were engaged in pointing out various details of displays in the store front (sheets, pillow cases, etc.). While the spectators were not able to see in as great detail as this dancer what it was that we were pointing to, they could hear the information on a tape that played to them while the dance was taking place. [...] The result was that the spectator was called upon to envision, in an imagined sort of way, information that in fact existed beyond the range of actual perception, so that a sort of cross-reference of perception tended to take place in which one mode of perceiving had to reconcile itself with the other to rule out the built-in discrepancy that the situation created.

Here Lucinda Childs confirms the correspondence between tape and movements through the presence of deictic gestures but only «from time to time». In other words, the rest of the time, the choreography unfolds in a form of independence in relation to deictic demands. This is what Sally Banes summarizes with these words: «The performers acted as markers, not altering the environment, but facilitating the spectator's discovery of it»²⁹.

Lucinda Childs also reveals her thinking about how movement becomes part of the urban context: it is a discrete activity, almost invisible amongst other activities. The difficulty we are faced with, as part of Site Dance history, is that many choreographers describe in a very similar way to Lucinda Childs, how to create site-specific choreography: based on observation of context, fitting the movements around it. Experience shows, however, that degrees of invisibility are relative and that in many cases, there is an important gap between the artist's expressed intention and the reality of the production. Working on stealthy moves can take many forms – forms that stay marked by artists' choreographic and gestural cultures. Yet, in 1964, the reception (by Yvonne Rainer, in particular) seems to coincide fully with the intentions. Furthermore, it is on this basis that many analyses to come will build their study:

The literally pedestrian activity of *Street Dance* challenges, comments Lambert-Beatty, the idea that dance is defined by anything internal to it at all. While the viewers from above watched the activity as dance, passers-by at street level did not find the dancer's activity in the least remarka-

29. Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, cit., p. 136.

ble, and so the work redirects the question of what counts as dance: away from specific types of movements and towards the mode or condition of its viewing³⁰.

Document 9: a clarification on indeterminacy

In 1978, in the book directed by Ann Livet (Document 9), Lucinda Childs revives almost word for word her comments on *Street Dance* published in «The Drama Review». She does nevertheless add one important clarification:

Some of the activities that happened where not planned; for instance, a pedestrian asked me a question, so I stopped what I was doing to answer him. But I liked that, the fact the dance could fit into the self-contained setting where everybody, including me, was going about their business³¹.

This story (which took place in 1964) shows Childs' openness to an unexpected event: the choreography can adapt to whatever happens, which is quite remarkable, given the timed recording with which she has to fit (the use of a stopwatch during the performance ensured the accuracy of the timings). This story also confirms that Lucinda Childs' presence was sufficiently insignificant that a passer-by could stop to talk to her.

Document 10: a late first-hand account by Robert Ellis Dunn (1980)

Document 10 is an account by Robert Ellis Dunn from March 30th, 1980, and published in «Contact Quarterly» (in Winter 1989):

I find the experience of the first performance of *Street Dance* quite unforgettable. Lucinda [Childs] and another dancer (who??) turned on a tape and began some simple activities leading³² them to the freight elevator, in which they disappeared downward out of sight. The tape kept us company in our bereavement and after a while said, "Go to the window... Go to the window." We did and looked up and down rather grungy East Broadway, until someone, myself or another, suddenly sang out on sighting Lucinda standing still in the recessed doorway of a storefront far over to our left. After actions coordinated between the tape and the small figures some four or five³³ floors below (stopwatches were involved), the dancers crossed the street again to our side, going out of sight, the tape continued, and after a while they re-arrived on the elevator and went over to turn off the tape, to wild applause. This dance remains one of the most mysteriously beautiful events I have seen, perhaps because of the distance and the glass-separated soundlessness in which we experienced Lucinda's miniaturized physical presence, in the same moment with the immediacy of her somewhat flattened but sensuous voice on the tape in the room with us³⁴.

This memory from a direct witness confirms several earlier elements: the duration of six minutes; the enthusiasm of its reception (and Dunn finding it completely bewitching); the effect of distance

30. Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched. Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s*, cit., p. 38

31. Ann Livet – Lucinda Childs, *Lucinda Childs*, cit., p. 63.

32. Lucinda Childs gave later that precision: «I turned on the tape recorder and went directly to the elevator» (Lucinda Childs, *Email to Julie Perrin*, cit.)

33. Sixth floor according to Lucinda Childs, *Lucinda Childs: A Portfolio*, cit. Significantly, Rauschenberg's studio was on the same floor (Lucinda Childs, *Email to Julie Perrin*, cit.).

34. Robert Ellis Dunn, *Judson Days*, cit., p. 12.

or miniaturization contrasting with the presence of the voice (only Lucinda Childs' is mentioned). Robert Ellis Dunn highlights the dancers' disappearance from sight at the beginning and the end. He mentions the existence of a final part where the recording runs alone while the dancers have left the field of vision. (This aspect seems to have disappeared from the 1965 version, cfr. Document 7).

Document 11: a late first-hand account by Steve Paxton (2000) – emotional link to the site

In 2000, Steve Paxton gives us one last first-hand account of the 1965 version at which he was present (Document 11).

[Lucinda Childs] and the artist James Byars³⁵ dressed unexceptionally in shabby black raincoats, made gestures toward a display window, gestures timed to coincide with an audiotape of Child's voice describing the building they faced. The phone connection identified the pair as performers: presumably conscious of that, and to some degree self-conscious.

By chance another man in a black raincoat walked by, and he stopped for a moment at the window. In the moment when I wondered if she had arranged this or not, my world was illuminated. Nothing changed, except my attitude. People on the street continued to walk. But now, I doubted them. Were they 'real'? Of course, they were!... A distant siren went oooh. The whole city joined the duet Childs made. This was the moment I had been looking for. (Thank you)³⁶

Steve Paxton gives information about a costume common to both dancers, that nevertheless does not allow them to be identified as performers, but on the contrary creates confusion as to the possible intervention of other performers. The critic Jill Johnston who attended the presentation of the first performance of *Street Dance* in 1964 reports in «The Village Voice» of January 28th, 1965:

There was a curious anomaly, a studio-street dance that any Yamor Fluxus champion would appreciate [...], given by Childs at Dunn's course in June [sic]. The observers were instructed by a voice on tape to look out the sixth-floor windows while Childs descended in the elevator and cross the street to stand or sit (on a convenient car fender) in the area designated by "the voice" as the area to look at. [...] The amazing things that happened, from behind closed windows, was that this plebian tract, much like any other stretch of jammed buildings that people ordinarily have no reason to notice, became not only fascinating in its static details, but also a frame, stage, screen, or whatever for normal activities intensified by the theatrical illusion. A woman passing by was caught in the act. She didn't know it and either did a fire engine which emerged at the last moment³⁷.

Like Steve Paxton or Lucinda Childs (cfr. Document 9), Jill Johnston mentions other passers-by. These are in no way stopped by the choreography (unlike the 2013 reenactment).

35. Paxton is the only one to mention the name of the second performer. On the drawings by Steve Paxton representing *Street Dance* and reproduced in «Contact Quarterly», vol. XIV, n. 1, Winter 1989, p. 12, the two named performers are drawn.

36. Steve Paxton in Sally Banes (edited by), *Reinventing dance in the 1960s. Everything was possible*, Wisconsin Press, Madison 2003, p. 207.

37. Jill Johnston, *Judson '64: II*, cit., p. 11.

Finally, Paxton is no doubt the one who best explains the emotional link to the site: his text acknowledges a work which can make a whole city take part and is accompanied by undisguised emotion («This was the moment I had been looking for. (thank you)»). We have moved from a «rather grungy East Broadway» seen by Robert Ellis Dunn in 1964 through the loft window («the glass-separated soundlessness») or «jammed buildings that people ordinarily have no reason to notice» according to Jill Johnston in 1965, to a form of union with the city on a large scale. In 1965, the city enters the studio by means of sound («a distant siren»). If the other documents and analyses talk more of the separation, Susan Sontag talking of «doubling»³⁸ to name an action taking place on two levels simultaneously, or Corinne Rondeau emphasizing the role of the recorded voice to make the link between the two separate places³⁹, Paxton evokes the New York sirens inviting themselves inside. He thereby underlines the way in which the link between the interior and the exterior could also operate through the unique architecture of the Downtown buildings.

Emotional geography, imagination and oblivion

There is indeed something here that the twelve documents barely mention, other than «Yes, Yes, Yes...» by Robert Rauschenberg (Document 4) or some emphatic adjectives («this plebeian tract [...] became fascinating», wrote Johnston): the emotional and esthetic relationship that this artist community (also called the «loft generation»⁴⁰) was building with New York. While these Downtown districts were being threatened with destruction by Moses' urban projects (particularly the project of the Lower Manhattan Expressway that would tear up the neighborhood), the defense for the recognition of industrial heritage, for the legalization of the loft residents and for a different philosophy of the city was being organized, under the leadership of the militant urbanist Jane Jacobs and a committee of artists and citizens. Rauschenberg and Rainer, amongst others, belonged to the committee «Artists against the Expressway». From 1963, cooperatives began to be set up to save the buildings and guarantee the artists' housing. It was only in 1973 that SoHo was declared Historic District⁴¹. While Lucinda Childs, who was born in New York, did not participate directly in this activism, her text *Apartment History* (1974) states her attachment to the sites: she lists thirteen successive apartments where she has lived since her childhood, six of which are located Downtown. It is probable that the small commu-

38. Susan Sontag, *A Lexicon for Available Light*, in «Art in America», n. 71, 1983, pp. 100-110: 102.

39. «L'expérience sensible accueille l'entremêlement des corps *là-bas* et des corps *ici*, alors qu'il y a séparation des deux: la fenêtre est un seuil qui rend impossible le fait de se réunir. La voix, elle, suture la séparation» [«The experience of senses embraces the entwinement of bodies *over there* and bodies *here*, when the two are separated: the window is a limit that makes it impossible to reunite them. The voice closes the separation»], Corinne Rondeau, *Lucinda Childs. Temps/Danse*, cit., p. 35).

40. See the article *The Loft generation* by Tom Wolfe in «New York Herald Tribune» (February 1964) as mentioned by Pauline Chevalier, *Une histoire des espaces alternatifs à New York de Soho au South Bronx (1969-1985)*, Les presses du réel, Dijon 2017, p. 26.

41. Cfr. Pauline Chevalier, *Une histoire des espaces alternatifs*, cit.

nity of artists that joined together to see *Street Dance* experienced the complicity of shared topophilia, and above all that *Street Dance* had suddenly created the possibility of a choreographic expression of this topophilia. Indeed, whilst Fluxus was able to organize twelve *Street Events* (including *Photographic Ballet* by Maciunas) from March to May 1964, using SoHo as a backdrop, choreographers had not developed so much urban experiences with New York (to the point of being able to give shape to a piece of site urban choreography⁴²). It was not the case for choreography on the West Coast⁴³ neither in other arts in New York: for instance, Rauschenberg and Cage created in 1953 *Performance 1* in the street of New York or Yoko Ono *City Piece* in 1961. The part of a choreographic move that expresses the relation to place still had to be invented in New York. Lucinda Childs opened the way. And she did not choose to make the city the set for her action; she did not juxtapose a preexisting choreography (as Merce Cunningham started to do with his first *Event* in Vienna, on June 24th, 1964). She invented a choreographic form inseparable from place.

We could indeed be tempted to say that *Street Dance* falls into an architectural history that has contributed to turning buildings into apparatuses that produce our attention, by providing frames, viewpoints and composition⁴⁴. Today we are to imagine how this emotional geography has been composed as much by the surveying of streets⁴⁵ as by the gazing or daydreaming from views through the window. «The notion of using the exterior-interior window spaces, in galleries or elsewhere [Downtown,] has produced some provocative tensions between art and life contexts», confirmed Lucy Lippard in a text on the *Street Works* that took place in Downtown New York between 1964 and 1969⁴⁶. In her text *Apartment History*, Lucinda Childs mentions the floors or the view several times. She remembers, in a typed script from 1973 called *Relationship+Merce C*, John Cage's command to escape from a tradition of looking dating back to the Renaissance (the scene, the painting) and to test new ways of perception that relate to our lives. Later, through Babette Mangolte's or Cynthia Hampton's camera, Lucinda Childs chooses to show her dances from a zenithal point of view, exploring their cartographic dimension. But, at this stage, *Street Dance* refused one unique viewpoint. Lucinda Childs' use of the

42. Paxton created *Afternoon (a forest concert)* in the New Jersey Forest, on October 6th, 1963. The most famous urban pieces in New York are from 1970s: the Trisha Brown's *equipment pieces*. For an overview, see for instance Rossella Mazzaglia, *Danza e spazio. Le metamorfosi dell'esperienza artistica contemporanea*, Mucchi Editore, Modena 2012.

43. The situation was quite different in the West Coast, since Anna Halprin started experiencing outdoor during the 1950s, for instance in a San Francisco Street for *People on a Slant* (1953), and later the with her husband Lawrence Halprin, during workshops. See Julie Perrin, *Anna Halprin: expérimenter avec l'environnement sur la côte ouest en 1968*, in Isabelle Launay – Sylviane Pagès – Mélanie Papin, Guillaume Sintès (sous la direction de), *Danser en 68. Perspectives internationales*, Seconde époque, Montpellier 2018, pp. 109-129.

44. Cfr. Michael Jakob, *Cette ville qui nous regarde. De la promenade plantée au High Line Park*, Éditions B2, Paris 2015.

45. Trisha Brown recounts that in about 1965, she «was walking for long hours pushing her child's pushchair through Downtown» to observe and reflect on the city which had become her place of work. Cfr. Trisha Brown in Emmanuelle Huynh – Denise Luccioni – Julie Perrin (edited by), *Histoire(s) et lectures: Trisha Brown / Emmanuelle Huynh*, Les presses du réel, Dijon 2012, p. 124.

46. Lucy Lippard, *The Geography of Street Time: A Survey of Streetworks Downtown*, in Id., *Get the Message. A Decade of Art for Social Change*, E.P. Dutton, Boston [1976] 1984, p. 63.

window does not transform the spectator into a voyeur. Indeed, *Street Dance*'s strength lies in having tried to maintain a form of equality between three viewpoints: the spectator's, the dancer's and the passer's-by. In other words, architecture has been used to intensify life.

We can now evaluate how much imagination is needed for a historian to envisage this site-specific choreography. Information is tenuous. On one side, information concerning movement: perhaps the style of the recorded descriptions – lapidary, without lyricism, colorless writing – rubs off on what we imagine to be quality of the dance. On the other, information concerning the site, in its architectural dimension, flow, atmosphere and activities. So, the historian has to dream, invent, guess, sometimes risking over-interpreting: a recording that could be «a commentary on the architecture and weather»⁴⁷; «the bustle of the street»⁴⁸ which, according to Lucinda Childs, is reduced to a few passers-by⁴⁹; or, in a form of assumed anachronism, «the kind of scene New Yorkers pass through every day without a glance»⁵⁰... But what, essentially, do we know about the posture and moves of these dancers? Of the spectators' attention? Of the day light that lit up the event? Of the activity on these two afternoons⁵¹ of 1964 and 1965? How can we then imagine reviving *Street Dance* today? What transpositions of this emotional geography could be invented? While this piece was easily moved from Chinatown to 809 Broadway (two relatively similar contexts), its reenactment in Philadelphia in 2013 and then in Pantin in 2016⁵² raises many questions, relating to the possibilities of reenacting a site-specific choreography.

To conclude, we could deplore that the objects behind shop windows remained silent: alongside those pertaining to the passage of time (clocks, chandeliers), there were indeed several objects dedicated to recording techniques – typewriters, photocopy, mimeograph, dictation machines, four miniature cameras, ... Is this ironic? But what would photographs or films taken from one of the windows have brought us? Without doubt, additional views of the work that the choreography had not foreseen, in other words removed from the daily perceptive modalities on which Lucinda Childs had worked. Yes, a danced posture could have been caught, showing the sensory relationship with the environment. But the archeology I have used is far from a lamentation on loss or oblivion. It does not as much seek to restore what has happened, as to observe what the traces teach us, traces which the historian uses to invent, in other words to rewrite, using «an adjusted transformation of what has already been written»⁵³.

47. Judith Mackrell, *Postmodern dance in Britain*, in «Dance Research», vol. 19, n. 1, Spring 1991, p. 42.

48. Melanie Kloetzel – Carolyn Pavlik, *Site Dance and the Lure of alternative Spaces*, cit., p. 12.

49. Lucinda Childs, *Email to Julie Perrin*, cit.

50. Marcia B. Siegel, *Dancing on the Outside*, cit., p. 111.

51. A clarification by Lucinda Childs, *Email to Julie Perrin*, cit.

52. The piece has been reenacted under the direction of Ruth Childs, November 19th, 2016, Centre National de la Danse, Pantin, with the students of the CND application classes: Côme Baert, Astrid Boucherat, Fanny Dubois, Théo Ndiaye, Octave Novel, Anaïs Rouas, Céline Rouas, Ambre Treguer, Marine Wu.

53. Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir*, cit., p. 183.

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