

# 40

## THE CITY AS PERFORMATIVE OBJECT

*PolakVanBekkum*<sup>1</sup>

As artistic duo PolakVanBekkum, we have worked with the artistic potential of digital recordings routes since 2002, shortly after the Global Positioning System (GPS) became available for private use. We approach the technology as a new way of capturing reality, comparable with photography, film, or audio recording. In our work, we focus on different impacts: how does technology influence perception of space once the relocation of bodies becomes recordable and represented? What meanings do people give to their own and others' routes? How does that change their language? How are identities constructed around routes?



Figure 40.1 *The City as Performative Object* (2017), PolakVanBekkum, 21:23 min, Video-still. Photo credit: PolakVanBekkum

In this chapter—where the subjective “I” is attributed to artist duo PolakVanBekum—I investigate possibilities toward the construction of “flexible space” through the concept of the city (or landscape) as performative object. As a working method, I build on the concepts of feminist philosopher Judith Butler on the performativity of gender and speech theorist John Austin on performative speech. My fascination with space is my compass (see Figure 40.1).

Some years ago, I started to run. I started in my daily clothing: jeans, whatever. After building some shape in the nearby park, I joined a running group. My fellow participants dressed appropriately, and I decided to purchase a running outfit to blend in. Wearing my new sportswear, the environment was furnished with the familiar presence of pedestrians and cyclists became contested. Consecutively moving at 4 and 15 kilometers per hour, my speed was exactly in-between: 10 km/h. As if disclosed by the stretchy fabrics, this in-between speed made me glissade into a parallel world.

Some weeks later, at the shop that provided me with the running outfit, I also bought a small running-backpack designed to store a little water, keys, some money, and other small items. I realized that I could try something different—the backpack could contain my swimsuit and goggles. I could run to the swimming pool and even in winter, explore a mobile city swim. An off-season city swim and run. The doorstep of our house became the first step toward a swimming possibility. A Mini Duathlon.

As soon as I closed the front door and directed myself toward the swimming pool, the city in-between became a pathway toward the changing room at the pool: its destination. Or, to describe it in more radical terms, the city had stopped being a city. It had become a beach that I had to cross—buildings became beehive chairs; office workers became children with bucket and shovel that I meandered around. I aimed to get as fast as possible to the cool water. My swimming pool run made buildings, traffic, asphalt, and other hurdles of the road dissolve into grains of sand—all beach.<sup>2</sup>

The effect of my run to the pool was a city losing its fixedness. For a brief moment, I felt released from the discouraging conviction that the hardware of the city with its buildings, asphalt, and stones, is something that cannot be influenced. Apparently, I now have something powerful, which needs to be expanded.

I want to create an interface or toolset, that will open the door to this flexible space. Can this toolset change the experience of being mobile in the city? And if so, can one use it to look at works of art in a new way?

For this chapter, I begin with a brief introduction to John Austin’s work and speech theory. This influenced Judith Butler’s thinking around gender, and through exploration of her argumentation I distill a set of key concepts used to describe the performativity of gender. I then appropriate these concepts through the translation from gender concepts into ones that augment the performativity of space. The result is a lexicon that can be used to analyze the expression of space, for example, in the swimming pool-run narrative that introduced this chapter. The proposed lexicon can be used as a toolbox, as an interface into the flexible (now translated into performative) space. I then test this toolbox on two works of art, both feature films (*Inception* by Christoffer Nolan (2001) and *News from Home* by Chantal Akerman (1977)). Finally, I return to the swimming pool run and conclude with thoughts regarding the possible use of this creative experiment.

## Theory

The lectures of speech theorist John Austin provided Judith Butler with key insight for her work. For this reason and to provide clarity, I will elaborate on Austin’s reasoning. But there is also another reason: the step Butler made, to apply a method developed in speech theory to solve issues in gender studies was the source of inspiration that led to this chapter. It felt very liberating and gave me a kind of indirect permission to do the same: to use performativity for yet another field: that of our artistic approach of space, cityscape and mobility.

## Words

Austin defined his ideas on performativity in his 1962 book *How to do things with words* (the title of the book in itself is almost a poem). The book positions itself in the realm of speech theory. It takes as its starting point the difference between language that represents and language that performs. Representation is a situation where a symbol represents something in the real world. One can decide that a white sphere represents an apple. That is a symbolic act.

One can use words, “apple,” “manzana” (Spanish), or “jabolko” (Slovenian) to symbolize the fruit. By doing so, the words function as a representation. This is the most common way to look at language—the language describes. But Austin saw something else: the potential of language to change something in the real world. Situations where words gain an actual power of change. This he called “performative utterances” or “a performative.”<sup>3</sup>

The most famous example of a performative Austin gives are the words spoken at a marriage ceremony. When the priest says, “I now declare you man and wife” those words are not a representation, but the sentence brings something about, namely the marriage. This “performative effect” is dependent on context. If one says, “I now declare you man and wife” in a film or theatrical play, again it becomes a representation of the marriage act. Nothing has changed in the lives of the actors when they leave the stage.

For words to be performative, they must be spoken in a situation that is created by social rules. Rules that people know, trust, believe in, and repeat over time.

## Gender

Twenty-eight years later, in her book *Gender Trouble*,<sup>4</sup> Butler argues that although the majority of human infants are born with a clear and specific sex, people still have to create their gender identity. Like speech-act, there is also a gender-act.<sup>5</sup> People realize their gender identity on a day-to-day basis by repetitively stylizing their bodies, clothes, and gestures, so that they express and match their biological gender. Compared to the marriage ceremony, it is a kind of contract between humans that we all play out daily. The difference is that it happens to our subconscious, as opposed to consciously getting married.

Butler explains how the categories of male and female are still inescapable, although they are performative. We cannot change our gender on a daily basis like a set of clothes. The gender roles are deeply internalized, and their construction is hidden, even though it is a contract that humans have to renew every day. Butler, motivated by her feminist agenda, sees small opportunities to challenge them or at least experience them as unstable, through activities where the one gender starts to blend into the other, for example, in drag.

A crucial understanding for me was the way Butler removes genealogy from the discussion, the order of matters and phenomena where it is not the predetermined biological sex that produces gender, but rather a set of repeated and stylized acts. Confusing enough, those acts also are at the root of us assuming the biological given as a solid substance of gender specificity. Her argument is related to Nietzsche’s claim that there is “no doer behind the deed.”<sup>6</sup> There is no gender before we act gender. Although this mechanism is not very obvious or visible, according to Butler performativity does not only produce gender, but it also hides gender’s unstable nature.

## Move and Moving

Around 1990, Butler’s ideas were groundbreaking. They liberated existing feminist theory from its double bind—on the one hand, idealizing female qualities and, on the other, stressing the equality of the sexes.<sup>7</sup> For me, the idea of appropriation in itself was of inspiration. Butler borrows

ideas from the field of speech theory,<sup>8</sup> and appropriates them to an entirely different field, gender studies.

I see a possibility to apply performativity again—to landscape, mobility, and city-space. I suggest that the existence of architecture, pavement, and other seemingly fixed objects in public space is, like gender, both unstable, and at the same time, “hides” its instability. The previous example of the swimming pool run illustrates the city as a flexible landscape; once one runs through it intending to swim, the pavement transforms into a beach. Does architecture, like the biological gender, have a seemingly unquestionable existence?

Is it possible to unveil the city as constructed in a performative manner and to contemplate the order, where mobility precedes stones, asphalt, and buildings? Do the physical, day-to-day acts of moving play a role? Is the city produced by stylized acts of mobility? Is the stable existence of cities an illusion? (Figure 15, color insert).

Austin’s work explains the performative, and Butler is an inspiration for this appropriation. In her texts, she clearly uses core concepts that can be considered as tools, as appropriation stepping stones. As a thought experiment, I translate those fundamental concepts to the realm of mobility and space.

This quest results in a lexicon,<sup>9</sup> a set of translations.

## Lexicon

The following lexical items come into play for this experiment:

- 1 **Individual** translates to *Move-Entity*
- 2 **Gender-Act** translates to *Move-Act*
- 3 The two sexes, the **Gender-Categories** translate to several *Move-Categories*
- 4 **Gender-Drag** translates into *Move-Drag*

To summarize the method: The (gender performing) individual performs a gender act (wears a skirt) and therefore falls into a gender category (woman). If this act deviates, then there is a situation of drag (man with a skirt). When translated (appropriated) the “individual” becomes a moving unit (for example, a human being) and performs a *Move-Act* (runs fast in a jogging outfit), and by doing so belongs to a *Move-Category* (of runners). By deviating from this (running in daily clothes), we see the *Move-Drag* come into existence.

## Move-Entity (Beweeg-Eenheid)

In Butler’s work the individual human being is the starting point. Without an individual to be marked with gender, no gender division is possible. In this case though, the “individual” fails as a starting point, as within the concept of mobility a *group* of individuals can also act as one mobile unit, for example, a car that contains several people. As long as the “individual” is considered “one person,” this becomes problematic. Therefore, I translate the individual used by Butler (one individual = one person) into a more open term: *Move-Entity*.

The *Move-Entity* “car” may contain four people, and airplanes might hold hundreds of people. After landing crew and passengers leave the plane the *Move-Entity* splits itself up. *Move-Entities* exists on different levels and scales and might even overlap, even while still traveling. The crew and passengers can be considered as separate *Move-Entities*, while the *Move-Entity* of the airplane still exists. This term creates a starting point to talk about that which moves as forming diverse constellations, and how they each perform different types of space.

### Move-Act (Beweeg-Daad)

“Speech-act” from speech theory is translated by Butler into *gender-act*. This appropriation is a central step to build the idea of the performativity of gender. Following Butler’s footsteps again, I translate *Gender-Act* into *Move-Act*. *Move-Act* is the case whenever a *Move-Entity* walks, rides, floats, or otherwise has mobility.

While being in a car, I am in *Move-Act*, regardless of sitting at the wheel, or in a passenger’s seat.

As *Gender-Act* articulates that gender division is performed and not an anterior given, *Move-Act* does something similar: It articulates how movement, by any *Move-Entity*—by human, animal, or object—creates streets, cities, fields, and worlds. Following Butler, this would mean that streets, cities, fields, and worlds depend on *Move-Act* for their becoming.

### Move-Category (Beweeg-Categorie)

Butler works with male and female as a force that divides individuals into two main gender-categories. Now that I have established them, I can separate different *Move-Acts* of *Move-Entities* into categories: *Move-Categories*. As it turns out, there are more than just two: the performative appropriated to issues of space is not based around binary division but instead is enacted via a plurality.

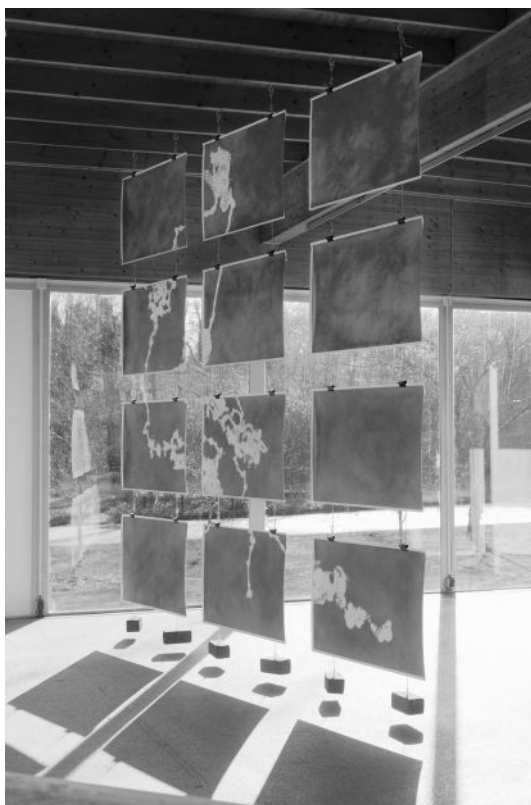


Figure 40.2 *NomadicMILK Robotprints* (2010) PolakVanBekkum, Spray-paint on Canvas, 3.4 × 3.4m. Photo Credit: Thomas Linden, Zone2Source, Amstelpark Pavillion

To start with, this division brings me to culturally “common” categories like walking, biking or car-driving. These are based on means of transportation and often also speed. Society and (visual) language apply them to traffic rules and they are pervasive, “dressing” *Move-Entities* with icons such as street signs or pavement. The same categorizations re-appear in cartography, again in signs or as color-coded entities.

One pedestrian is a *Move-Entity*, walking is a *Move-Category*.

Air travel as such is a *Move-Category*, divided again into business and economy class.

This now enables contemplation about *Move-Entities* on the level of shared qualities.

Categorizations are culturally constructed, depending on codes. Using this lemma, I think in terms of collections and pluralities of categories. This plurality unveils a difference between mobility and gender as a focus point, where space and the performance of space are not dualistic. Whether this problematizes my appropriation or instead becomes an affluence is a question that I intend to answer further into this chapter. For now, I continue exploring regardless (Figure 40.2).

### Move-Categories: New-Tread and After-Tread

Given their multiplicity, I can refine between possible *Move-Categories*, for example, one based on repetition. In Butler’s work, reiteration plays a vital role describing how the performative works. Repetition also plays a distinctive role in routes. Routes that I take for the first time produce a different space than that of everyday routes I take repeatedly. When I decide upon a route for the first time, my awareness of “how I produce/construct space” is more noticeable. The more often I repeat the same route, the harder it becomes to maintain awareness. To name the repetition, I coin the *Move-Category After-Tread* and its counterpart, a route that is run for the first time I define as *New-Tread*.

A child goes to school every day. The first time, the trajectory is full of expectation and surprise (*New-Tread*). After a while, the trajectory becomes part of the daily routine, (*After-Tread*) and is therefore depleted of the affective experience of surprise.

*Move-Categories* differ not only because of their geographical trajectory, but also based on the means of transportation or speed. In addition, difference occurs because of the frequency with which a specific *Move-Entity* has taken them.

### Move-Drag

For Butler, an escape from gender as an absolute given is relevant from a feminist perspective. The dualism between the sexes and its hierarchy hurts the humanity of both women and men. Still, she recognizes that gender is inevitable. The fact that it is performative does not mean that one can take it off, like changing clothes, as mentioned earlier. At its most feasible, it is possible to disrupt gender categories by revealing their unstable nature. Butler understands that one of the most effective ways to do so is through “drag.” The playful approach, the shift, and the caricature are all important attributes, and liberate within the possible scope. The drag-queen does not ridicule women per se but instead ridicules the performativity of femininity. The way Butler suggests dealing with restrictions of gender binary is specific. She sees the binary inescapable as such but finds an optimistic opening to create permeability in “drag.”<sup>10</sup> Following her consistently, I therefore translate **Gender-Drag** into *Move-Drag*.

This leaves me to wonder how one might undermine *Move-Categories*, or at least destabilize them through specific *Move-Acts*, that might be considered as *Move-Drag*. This strategy would be a practice that in effect blur the boundaries between the different *Move-Categories* and result

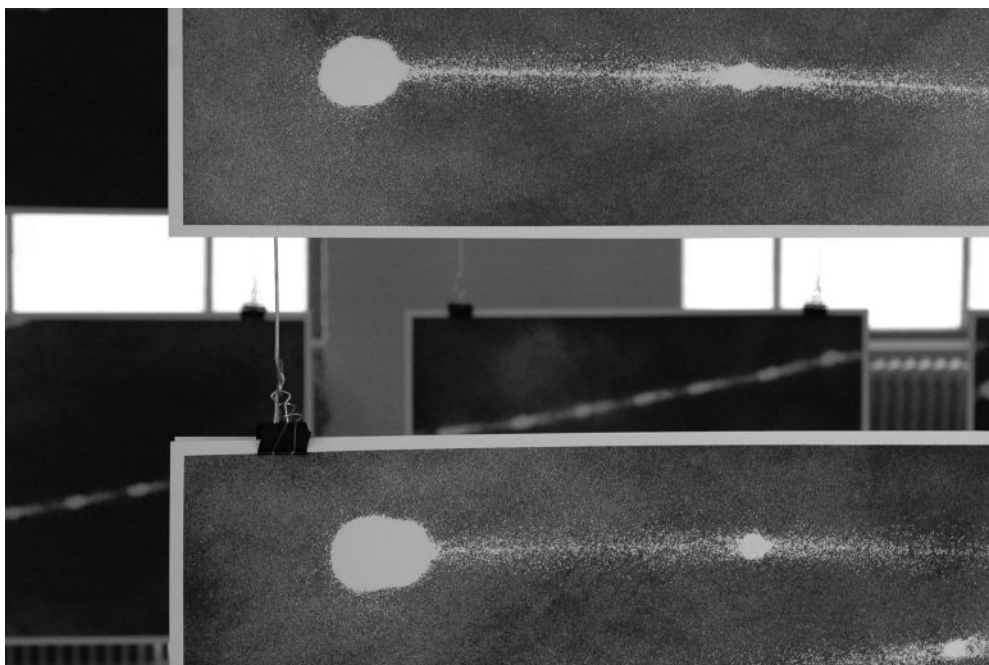


Figure 40.3 Detail of *Souvenir Zeeland Robot Prints* (2008), PolakVanBekum, Spray-paint on Paper, 70 × 100 cm. Photo credit: PolakVanBekum

in unexpected experiences of (city)space. This process should, if my appropriation makes sense, reveal its unstable nature.

A friend of mine became lost in an unfamiliar city. By car, she found herself in a pedestrian area. To find her way out, she needed help from the pedestrians around her, but still had to leave by car. She tried to change into a pedestrian as much as possible—opened all her car windows, slowed down to the slowest pace her vehicle allowed her, and smiled ridiculously wide before she dared to speak to another human.

This brings to mind the example in the beginning of this chapter, where I run in daily clothes, or use running clothes to get to the swimming pool. This can also be considered a form of *Move-Drag*, where the city changes into a strange kind of beach.

A possible way of getting to know the performativity of the city is by mixing *Move-Categories* and by making hybrids. Using this word, I can start to look for situations of possible *Move-Drag*. Once I find them, I can deliberately place myself in *Move-Drag* to investigate the liberating pleasure of unstable city space (Figure 40.3).

### The Swimming Pool Run

Recalling the swimming pool run, described at the beginning of this chapter, a question surfaces: Was that, in effect, an example of *Move-Drag*? Was it a situation where Butler's reference to Nietzsche's "there is no doer behind the deed," can be translated into a "there is no architecture before movement?"

To test this hypothesis, I dressed as a runner, but I intended to swim. The swimsuit that I carried in my runner's backpack embodied this secret identity, enveloped by the runner's pack, the jogging clothes that I was wearing and my pace. I blended the characters of runner and swimmer.

The common swimmer is a person that hops on a bike, public transport, or car to get to the pool, lake, or sea. But the concept of a runner that is also a swimmer is new to me. May I consider this combination a form of *Move-Drag*? When entering into *Move-Drag*, the evident and stable city space becomes flexible. The “taken for granted city” with its “natural state of streets and buildings” starts to collapse. What kind of engagement and responsibility does that bring?

Does it mean that as soon as one enters into such form of *Move-Drag*, this falling apart will always be perceivable? And will the city rebuild itself appearing as solid again, as soon as one leaves this position of *Move-Drag*?

Without my longing for the swimming pool, I would not have left the house. And because of the way I traveled, the swimming pool turned into a sea and the streets into a beach. The city as repetitive a practice is created over and over again while moving through it.

The best way to ascertain this assumed position of *Move-Drag* is to apply the new vocabulary to further examples. The experiment following aims to re-describe two works of art (films). What kind of new insights will that bring? The notion of performativity and the lexicon create other ways of understanding those films as articulating flexible space. In the next section, I will (re-) visit the two earlier mentioned films *Inception* and *News from Home* and attempt to analyze how they unintentionally express the performativity of city space by describing them using the words of the lexicon.

These four lemmas will be our associates and fellow travelers:

- 1 **Individual** translated to *Move-Entity*
- 2 **The Gender-Categories** translated to *Move-Categories (and sub categories)*
- 3 **Gender-Act** translated to *Move-Act*
- 4 **Gender-Drag** translated to *Move-Drag*

## Inception

The film *Inception* (2010) by Christopher Nolan is famous for its stunning visual effects—characters with the ability to create architecture in dreams, streets folding over in Paris, or a bridge assembling itself. Watching the film, I experienced those effects as the hidden yet central protagonist of the film. The effects enter the stage of the storyline at the very moment that the two human main characters start to collaborate as Dominick Cobb, a fugitive “dream thief” and Ariadne (no surname given), a brilliant architecture student. Ariadne is approached to help Cobb, who is entangled in a problematic web of layered dreams and personal obsessions. Combining the power of his dreams (Cobb) and her imagined architecture (Ariadne), flexible spaces emerge.

A good example is found in the Paris fragment.<sup>11</sup> Here you can view cinematically how the *Move-Entity* Cobb–Ariadne, during their first walk together (*Move-Act*), are able to tilt streets. The architecture around them becomes flexible depending on the *Move-Act* of Cobb–Ariadne. It all becomes possible within the hybridization of the real and the dream states.

The plot of the film circles around the capacity to disguise real from unreal, that is, real from dream, and actual movements from cinematographic movements. The director is genuinely interested in blurring the dividing line. Christopher Nolan says himself about this:

I’m very interested in the similarities or analogies between the way in which we experience a three-dimensional space that an architect has created and the way in which an audience experiences a cinematic narrative that constructs a three-dimensional -reality from a two-dimensional medium—sembled shot by shot. I think there’s a narrative component to architecture that’s kind of fascinating.<sup>12</sup>



Within the official storyline, however, the potential and flexible architecture remains grounded in the “dream” state. In the flexible space that Ariadne and Cobb create, deliberate clues are built in as plot devices, clues that expose the flexible as “unreal,” so as to keep the dividing line manageable.

A vital engine within the plot of *Inception* is the route taken, observable not in space, but through “dream” layers. The bodies of the personages used as “portals” or “doors” into those new spaces are constructed as dreams within dreams. The move category of *Dream-Travel* is a driving force of the plot. As soon as the characters embark on these journeys, their dreaming bodies begin to perform flexible city space. I would argue that the film hesitates to enter hybridization (*Move-Drag*), yet the decision to frame it as dream can be seen as an ambivalent attempt to address alternative ways of understanding the performing of city-scape.

As inspiring as *Inception* for me is, the plot still sits within the realm of the conventional. To “read” it as a work that engages with the performativity of architecture and city space, one has to allow oneself to read the subtext. Only though this detour can one read the film as revealing the performativity of city space while denying it at the same time.<sup>13</sup> Only in the fundamentally conflicted final scene of the film, evident *Drag* between flexible space and the notion of the fixed real is allowed and expressed by the never-ending spinning top at the end of the film. Nolan himself states that “Reality matters.” But earlier in the same interview he also comments that “perhaps all levels of reality are valid.”<sup>14</sup>

### News from Home

In Chantal Akerman’s meditative and avant-garde documentary *News from Home*<sup>15</sup> (1977), the city is the protagonist rather than a set or stage from which to act. The movie consists of long shots of New York, mostly with a static camera, recorded in an indexical way—plain and without special effects. There are two layers of sound at play here. One track with ambient sounds of the city that are out of sync with the imagery, which must have been recorded either before or after the filming. The second track consists of Akerman’s voice reading all the letters she received from her hometown of Brussels, from her mother supporting the young filmmaker. In *News from Home*, the letters travel from Brussels to New York and perform the *Move-Entity* which creates the city.

Akerman was still very young in 1971 when she started to build her career as a filmmaker. She moved from Brussels to New York, living as a “vagabond” while being supported by her parents. Only years later, after her success with the film *Jeanne Dielman* (1975)—by then an established film director—Akerman creates *News from Home* and shows New York as emerging from a smoldering mixture of homesickness and escape drift, returning to her position as an immigrant. I read the movie as a radical meditation on the *Move-Category of New-Tread*. The streets we see seem vacant: empty spaces that are filled with dreams, poetry, dread and, in this case, letters from home. We hear Akerman’s voice, reading in chronological order the complete collection of maudlin letters that she receives and that emphasize distant layers of time and space and a nomadic state of being.

Akerman’s voice sucks up the streets of New York and spits them out again, articulating the emptiness of the seventies. The slowness of voice further augments the evenly spaced slow shots and camera movements. The distance between New York and Brussels is somehow wrought into the distance between the camera and architectural surface, passing pedestrians, cars, and an occasional dog. The wormhole of the metro plays an important role too. New York hardly allows for long shots, and it is only until the film’s end where we leave Manhattan by boat that slowly the distances are getting air and space to breath. Akerman comments:

[The way] I would like to film . . . corresponds . . . to the idea that the land one possesses is always a sign of barbarism and blood, while the land one traverses without taking it reminds us of a book.<sup>16</sup>

## Landscape and Plot

These two filmic examples have one thing in common: both Nolan and Akerman suggest a relation between architecture, city-space, and text. As Nolan contemplates, “I think there’s a narrative component to architecture that’s fascinating.”<sup>17</sup>

This narrative suggests the use of language or even speech, and if so, should this architectural narrative be considered a performative or rather a symbolic or representational language?

Akerman guides us toward the performative when she states, “The land one traverses without taking it, reminds us of a book.”<sup>18</sup> A land that needs traversing to open up its text suggests that the role of traversing precedes its presence as a book. Here the traversing becomes creative to the point that it produces a particular kind of *land*, one that reminds us of a book. Does the approach and techniques of both directors open up something—like an author—that is relevant to the existence of architecture and land? In *Inception*, this appears to be achieved almost literally by Nolan, in the designs of the architect-protagonist. Akerman’s position implies that with the occurrence of a book-like-land, a kind of agency—perhaps even a traversing *Move-Entity* or a book author?—emerges that replaces the traditional powers of land ownership.

## Conclusion

During the swim/run *Move-Drag* at the beginning of this chapter, buildings change into a beach-like landscape, and passer-by’s in office clothes become children playing with sand. The city becomes, for a moment, elastic. It is the newness and the slight weirdness of this *Move-Drag* that makes the fluidity all-ready tangible and visible. From the moment, I start to do a swim-run like this routinely, or should this become a widespread practice among people, the swim/run will become a *Move-Category* within itself. The experience of the city as beach will normalize, and the experience of the underlying unstableness of the city becomes more and more difficult. With every repetitive move, the *Move-Drag* evolves into a new *Move-Category*. In the process, this builds a new city space whereby the translucence of its construction further obscures.

As a working method and by appropriating Judith Butler’s thoughts on the performativity of gender to the city space, I attempted to distil some core concepts around gender from Butler’s work and translate them literally into the realm of mobility and space. This results in a vocabulary that can be used to describe how our environment does not pre-exist movements. This chronological reversal is made tangible through experiences that play with the *Move-Categorisations* that are culturally common and reiterate. This I coined *Move-Drag*. Throughout the article, I used a run to the swimming pool as the primary test case, where I applied the lexicon to amplify the mobility of environment. To investigate this further, the vocabulary was applied to the art works, in this case two feature films produced in the seventies, *Inception* and *News from Home*.

Butler’s motivation was political. Her thoughts were motivated by frustration about the trap feminism found itself in during the eighties: fighting gender inequality by stressing how equal women are, denying or downplaying differences, or a move toward glorification of substantial female qualities. Both strategies created severe problems, enhancing either a denial of the self and its history, or an unescapable ghettoization within the category of femininity. Performativity was Butler’s answer to this dilemma.

The hierarchy between the sexes exists as an undercurrent in the body of Butler’s work on performativity. There is still space to explore in more depth how this translates to the performativity of mobility.

Developing a lexicon for mobility, a move-theory, gave me a language to connect the relatively new field of mobile media art to its artistic predecessors. Artists who had no knowledge of mobile media in the contemporary sense, but were inspired by concepts of mobility, go back further

in time than the emergence of mobile media itself. From my involvement in GPS and location media-related art since 2001, I have been able to draw from my lived experience over time and develop the lexicon described above. Alongside an alternative way to describe the city, it also became a language to explore links to earlier works in the art-historical landscape. Mobile technology, as a repeated and embodied experience, has been indispensable to make this “bringing together” possible. A mutual and even circular way of attaching meaning.

I long for diminishing the power of stones, pavement, and buildings and contribute to that of the moving. Developing the lexicon felt like a possibility to restore that balance. By doing so, I hope to be of inspiration to others. I invite readers to explore the city, using the suggested lemma. You as a reader could write them on (mental) cards and take them with you while exploring by foot, bike, car, or any hybrid in-between.

### Credits

The research that led to this writing was made possible through the kind support of Stimuleringsfonds<sup>19</sup> and my participation in *The knowledge network* of LAPS<sup>20</sup> (Lectoraat Art & Public Space) at the Gerrit Rietveld academie in Amsterdam. Thanks to Joris Landman who suggested the use of a lexicon and pointed me to the inspirational example of Stephen Wright’s *Towards a Lexicon of Usership*. Special thanks to Jeroen Boomgaard and Michiel de Lange for their feedback on this text.

### Notes

- 1 PolakVanBekum is the alias of artist duo Esther Polak and Ivar van Bekkum.
- 2 Nicholas Lezard, “The Beach Beneath the Street by McKenzie Wark Review—A Situationist Work in Itself,” *The Guardian*, 28 April 2015, [www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/28/beach-beneath-street-mckenzie-wark-review](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/28/beach-beneath-street-mckenzie-wark-review). The mentioning of the beach is reminiscent of “*Sous les pavés, la plage*,” one of the great slogans of the 1968 demonstrations and riots in Paris: a promise of carnivalesque freedom coined by the Situationists.
- 3 John Austin, *How To Do Things with Words. The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955 [1962]), 12. “What are we to call a sentence or an utterance of this type? I propose to call it a performative sentence or a performative utterance, or, for short, ‘a performative.’”
- 4 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, second edition (New York; London: Routledge, 1999 [1990]).
- 5 I could not find Butler using this term “gender act” herself, but instead found it used in descriptions of her theories. For example, “Gender here is the effect of reiterated acting, producing the effect of a static or normal gender, at the same time obscuring the instability of any single ‘gender act;’” n.p. [https://introducing-performativity.fandom.com/wiki/Judith\\_Butler\\_and\\_%27Performativity%27](https://introducing-performativity.fandom.com/wiki/Judith_Butler_and_%27Performativity%27).
- 6 Butler, *Gender*, 33. “The challenge for rethinking gender categories outside of the metaphysics of substance will have to consider the relevance of Nietzsche’s claim in *On the Genealogy of Morals* that ‘there is no “being” behind doing, effecting, becoming; “the doer” is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything.’ In an application that Nietzsche himself would not have anticipated or condoned, we might state as a corollary: There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender but that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.”
- 7 Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Judith Butler, “Critically Queer.” *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 1, no. 1 (1993): 17–32, <https://read.dukeupress.edu/glq/article-abstract/1/1/17/9896/Critically-Queer?redirectedFrom=fulltext>.
- 8 Austin, *How To Do Things with Words*.
- 9 Stephen Wright, *Towards a Lexicon of Usership* (Eindhoven: The Van Abbe Museum, 2013). This publication was an inspirational example, showing how a self-produced lexicon can be a tool for developing a line of thinking.
- 10 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 175. “In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency. Indeed, part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary. In the place of the

- law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity.”
- 11 Christoffer Nolan, *Inception*—*City Bending*, 6 November 2011, YouTube excerpt, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG22TcpiRnY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG22TcpiRnY).
  - 12 Robert Capps, “Q&A: Christopher Nolan on Dreams, Architecture, and Ambiguity,” *Wired*, 29 November 2010, [www.wired.com/2010/11/pl\\_inception\\_nolan/](http://www.wired.com/2010/11/pl_inception_nolan/).
  - 13 Laura Mulvey, *Laura Mulvey #244* Radio Web Macba, podcast produced by SON[II]A, 45:59, <https://rwm.macba.cat/ca/sonia/laura-mulvey/capsula>. Comparable to how Douglas Sirk’s films starring Rock Hudson have been watched by queer communities and seen as ‘about’ homosexuality but denying it at the same time.
  - 14 Helena Horton, “Christopher Nolan explains the spinning top in *Inception*,” *DAZEDDIGITAL*, 2 June 2015, [www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/24949/1/christopher-nolan-explains-the-spinning-top-in-inception](http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/24949/1/christopher-nolan-explains-the-spinning-top-in-inception).
  - 15 Fragment “News From Home,” 2 November 2016, <https://vimeo.com/189916826/7fcd0a3ac3>.
  - 16 Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso 2002), 75.
  - 17 Robert Capps, “Q&A: Christopher Nolan on Dreams, Architecture, and Ambiguity,” *WIRED Magazine*, 29 November 2010, [www.wired.com/2010/11/pl\\_inception\\_nolan/](http://www.wired.com/2010/11/pl_inception_nolan/).
  - 18 Bruno, *Atlas of Emotions*.
  - 19 “Grant Programme for Digital Culture,” Creative Industries Fund NL, [https://stimuleringsfonds.nl/en/grants/grant\\_programme\\_for\\_digital\\_culture/](https://stimuleringsfonds.nl/en/grants/grant_programme_for_digital_culture/).
  - 20 “Research at the Rietveld,” The Lectoraat Art & Public Space (LAPS), [http://laps-rietveld.nl/?page\\_id=5](http://laps-rietveld.nl/?page_id=5).