

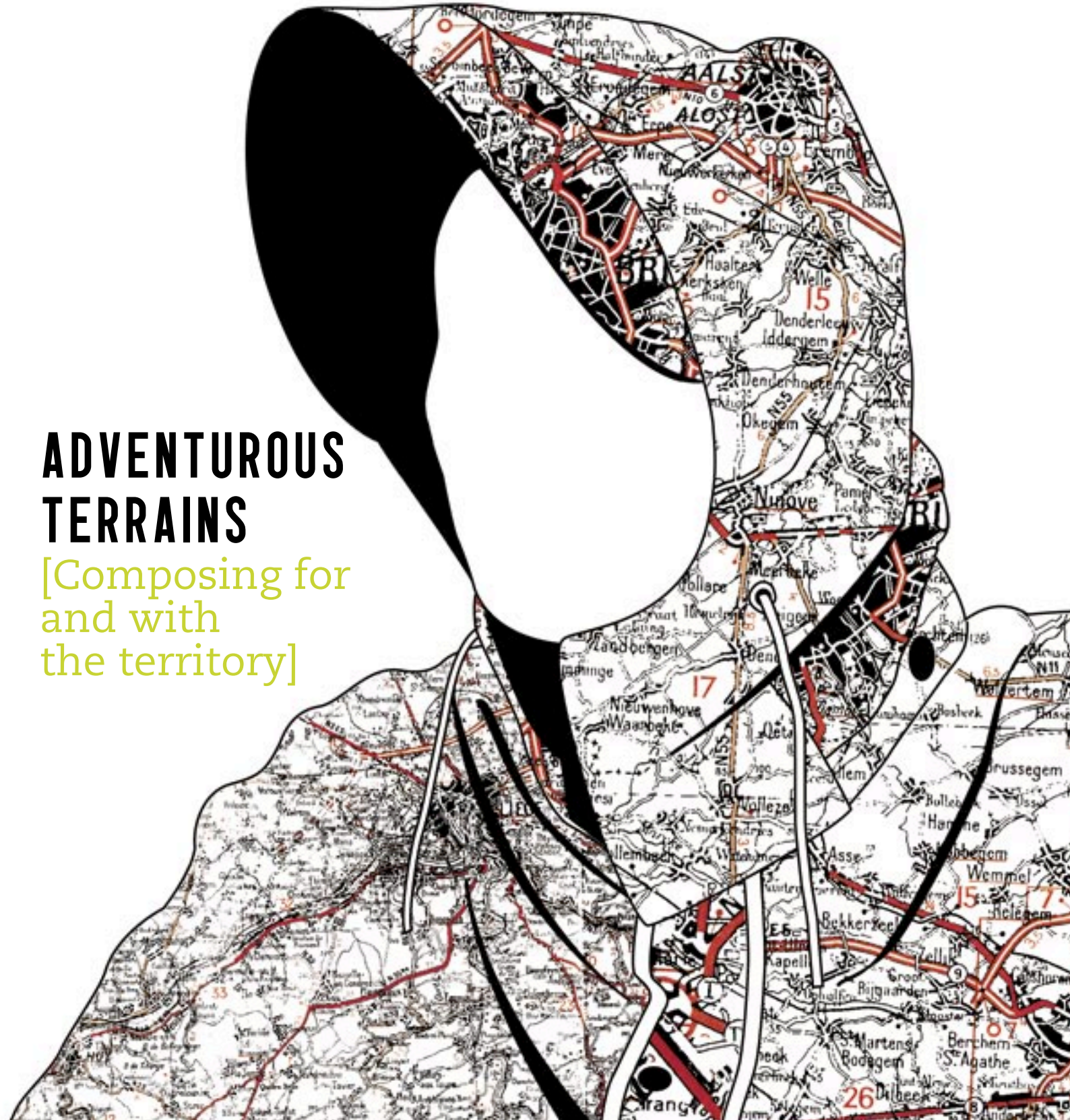
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# stradda

LE MAGAZINE DE LA CRÉATION HORS LES MURS

## ADVENTUROUS TERRAINS

[Composing for  
and with  
the territory]



# Circostrada Network

**Territory.** Designates both a geographical space – city, municipality, country... – and those who inhabit it. The territory can be the setting in which the artistic project takes place or the fertile ground for creation, a substratum over which the artists take possession.

# Did you say territory?

This has recently become a common buzzword in cultural circles. But what does it really mean, and precisely what is it that artists who work "with" territory do?

**N**o one uses this word in real life. I live in a neighbourhood, a city or a town, but not a "territory". Culture professionals have been using this word incessantly at least since the neighbourhood Culture Projects, put forth by the Ministry of Culture in 1995 at a time when the 'territorializing' of cultural politics had already been an overreaching phenomenon. The word became increasingly popular in 2001, when wastelands were named "new artistic territories", and we have since seen the word appear in the title of countless conferences and research programmes. Google provides further proof of this semantic success story: 600,000 hits result from a Google search of "art and territory".

This symptomatic term's repeated use follows the statistical proof of the failure of democratizing culture. It is a common buzzword in the newspeak of cultural policy. It is never precisely defined and one always imagines that it implies a certain link to "reality" and that it manifests the desire to create in closer contact with "the public". Territory therefore refers to both a geographical space – city, country, municipality... - and those who inhabit it. Other key words are often associated with this term: residency, cultural action, or sometimes "relational aesthetics" or "contextual art"<sup>1</sup>.

**Creation material.** There are two ways of envisioning the joining of territory and creation. The territory can be the setting in which the artistic project takes place. A link exists with the place, but it is tenuous and secondary: theatre *in* the street and art *in* the local scenery. Another possible configuration is the territory as a fertile breeding ground for creation, or a substratum of

which the artists take possession. Theatre, dance and music that is *of* the street or art *of* the local scenery are a few examples of this view whereby words, sounds and scenery become the source of an artistic project.

The "word" of the "inhabitants" is particularly sought after and is at the centre of numerous artistic creations. It is taken down during artistic residencies and reproduced as is, interpreted and reworked by artists and contrasted with other testimonies. This was the case in *Les Veillées*, conceived by Guy Allouche of the HVDZ<sup>2</sup> company: "*The idea is for the circus, dance, theatre and video arts to do all that it can to encounter people, to gather their testimony and to invent art forms that people feel will include them (...). Les Veillées are made up of encounters, walks in the street and artistic interventions that allow local inhabitants to play along with the company's employees at the time of our residencies.*" These private words made public, these socially inaudible words which are finally receiving due attention, will thus take on a political and aesthetic dimension and often resonate strongly within the inner city.

The sounds also nourish a great deal of *in situ* creations. We remember the MU<sup>3</sup> collective, which provided a new way of hearing the community of Goutte d'Or in Paris for pedestrians equipped with headsets and walkmen. We may also think of the composer Nicolas Frize, who from the factories of Billancourt to the Post Offices of Marseille, probed the social corpus so as to "*once again give attention to the sounds that remind us of the existence of the other*"<sup>4</sup>.

The space of everyday, urban life or natural scenery, is also eligible to become a source of material for artists. The visual artist Stefan Shankland<sup>5</sup>, in residency for several years with the stage ZAC (*zone d'aménagement concerté*, or urban development zone) of Ivry-sur-Seine, turns this territory into a laboratory whose "*visual and cultural potential*" he explores by displacing a series of emblematic urban objects, creating atypical billboards... The collective of architects and artists called Pixel<sup>6</sup> also works with the city and its metamorphoses and created the Bulb: a half sphere set up in a public



In 2006, aboard the *Cargo Sofia-Ljubljana*, the passenger spectators have embarked on the "road theatre" of Stefan Kaegi.

square where images are projected and sounds are recorded and remixed for a two-week period of immersion in a neighbourhood or town.

Another possible link between creation and the territory is the one offered by Le Phun last May at Martin-Pêcheur Island, along the Marne, in Champigny. In typical Land Art style, the Le Phun<sup>7</sup> team settled on the site for a couple of weeks to make way for about one hundred *Pheuillus*, fragile characters covered with dead leaves, along with moving and subtle images of the human condition. Under a bridge, in the trees, or under water, these transitory travellers were thus able to engage in silent dialogue with the countryside as well as with the passers-by.

**On the road.** As far as Stefan Kaegi of the Rimini Protokoll collective is concerned, he is inventing a genre: "road theatre". His *Cargo Sofia-X* takes spectators from Avignon, Paris or Bordeaux into a trailer for two hours and takes them around their city. One of the inner walls is made of glass. The scenery rolls by, juxtaposed with filmed images, which the drivers comment upon. The journey actually lasts several days and passes through Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Germany, Switzerland... This captivating trip throughout the Europe of road transportation and rogue capitalism is part of an innovative form of the theatre of the real that is both of a documentary and fictional nature. Its political and poetic effectiveness is increased tenfold by the juxtaposition of the covered terrains: the one in which the two Bulgarians' tale takes place and the one in which the truck is actually driving. This immersive and lively realistic piece of fiction explores in a powerfully original way the troubling, unreal quality of the visible world.

If the territory can nourish creation, as these examples show, it is also partly an artist's invention. For the inhabitants of Champigny, the Martin-

Pêcheur island is no longer quite the same since the *Pheuillus* appeared. For many residents of Ivry, the stage ZAC has become more of a zone of cultural activity than a zone of urban development, thanks to the activity of Stefan Shankland. And the inhabitants of the neighbourhoods traversed by Guy Alloucherie and his troupe no longer have quite the same image of themselves and of their city. Through these transplants of the real, this porosity between art and life, these new poetic spaces in the hollow space of everyday life, through the displacement of mundane representations, these artistic projects anchored and composed within the territory contribute slightly and temporarily to taking one out of the territory. Confronted with the formatted tales of urban storytelling, glorifying the identity and centrality of cities, this provisional deemphasising of place and identity are eminently enjoyable. They also confirm the fact that an alternate kind of cultural policy is possible, aiming less at *creating for* – an audience or a performance season – than at *inventing with* – people or a territory – fusing both creation and distribution and bringing together cultural action and artistic creation. ● PASCAL LE BRUN-CORDIER

1. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle*, Les Presses du réel, 1998. Paul Ardenne, *Un art contextuel*. Flammarion, 2004.
2. [hvdz.org/blog](http://hvdz.org/blog)
3. [mu.asso.fr](http://mu.asso.fr)
4. Nicolas Frize can be read and heard at <http://artw-espacepublic.c.la>
5. [trans305.org](http://trans305.org)
6. <http://pixel.asso.free.fr>
7. [lephun.net](http://lephun.net)
8. [rimini-protokoll.de](http://rimini-protokoll.de)

## THE ART OF AWAKENING

Giving, receiving, recreating: *Les Veillées* by the HVDZ company is divided into three parts. Two weeks are set aside to settle into the city and to forge relationships with the inhabitants, simply being there to listen, talk, walk, dance, film the neighbourhood, its streets, its activities, drink and eat with the people. Then it is time to reconstruct, with a show and eventually a film in which the city and its inhabitants play the main roles. Guy Alloucherie, Artistic Director of HVDZ explains, "After that night, we hope that the anonymous faces (...) will no longer be anonymous, and that traces will remain. In taking this step, we have participated in our own way to forging relationships and bringing people together." ● T.V.