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Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy

Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy. *by Erin Manning. 2009. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. x + 268 pp., images, notes, bibliography, index. $32.00 hardcover.*
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Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy continues a project that began with Erin Manning's 2007 book, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*. In *Politics of Touch*, Manning used the relationship between sensation and the body in Tango as a site for re-articulating the body-politic, analyzing the coexistence between states and bodies, and conceptualizing a democracy that implies a flexible and unpredictable politics (Manning 2007, xxi). Just two years later, *Relationscapes* addresses relations in movement more generally. It lends a certain ubiquity to movement, which Manning defines broadly to include everyday movement, movement of thought, scientific experiments measuring motion, paintings that map movement, choreographed body movement, and choreography as it is represented on film. In each instance, emergent experience provides a framework for considering relation in terms of time and space. Manning discusses characteristics and qualities of various artistic practices, ranging from Étienne-Jules Marey's nineteenth century movement studies to Norman McLaren's contemporary animations; David Spriggs's animate sculptures to Aboriginal paintings by Dorothy Napangardi, Emily Kame Kngwarreye, and Clifford Possum; and Leni Riefenstahl's films to Thierry de Mey's film of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's choreography. Manning uses these practices to exemplify her articulation of movement as "relationscapes."

Manning spends the first half of *Relationscapes* building the philosophical premise for her more comprehensive discussion of relationscapes that culminates in Chapter 7, "Relationscapes: How Contemporary Aboriginal Art Moves Beyond the Map." A relationscape is a topological experience relating to non-representational, non-narrative, and non-illustrative movement diagrams such as Aboriginal painter Dorothy Napangardi's *Mina Mina*. This painting, one of several discussed in *Relationscapes*, consists of white dots that map salt lines on a black ground. The movement that Manning identifies in Napangardi's work begins with the artist's painting technique. Napangardi moves her paintbrush with the same digging motion that she would use to dig with Karlangu, which are digging sticks associated with Warlpiri women in Aboriginal culture (189). Manning explains how Napangardi puts herself in the digging movement rather than merely representing it.

The movement in Napangardi's work does not stop with her painting technique. Unlike a representational, narrative, or illustrative map, *Mina Mina* is a diagram "not of a territory but its passages, the trace it leaves in the landscapes it uncovers" (155). Manning suggests that this mapping "encourages us to look-across, to move-with the fragile dotted lines that compose its labyrinths" (153) and directs a viewing body to move in relation to the liveliness of an emergent location (155). I would argue, though, that most visual artworks beckon a viewer to "look-across" or scan with the eyes. How is *Mina Mina* different? Earlier in her argument, Manning explains how relational movement assumes a connection between a moving body, for example, and the environment that it creates. She relies heavily on the work of philosophers Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guatarri to conceptualize movements as events that create time and space (7), as opposed to a situation in which a body enters a preexisting environment (15). Of course any artwork requires scanning to some extent, and Manning is not the first scholar to suggest that bodies move to create time and space. What is distinctive about her argument is that Manning ultimately uses a philosophical groundwork to suggest movement practice as a different approach to relating to artworks. In the case of a viewer moving in relation to *Mina Mina*, the viewer and painting are two bodies moving together to create a relationscape. This approach leaves more room for

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alternate perspectives such as *Mina Mina's* non-Cartesian mapping.

"Relation" has been a buzzword in the art world for some time now. Neo-concretist Lygia Clark, for example, used "relational objects" in her 1960s performance art to incorporate viewers in her practice of experiencing sensation. Like Clark, Manning places an emphasis on the sensorial (226, 244n123). She uses her work on sense and experience to foreground movement practice as a methodological approach with significant implications for rethinking movement against Euclidean and Cartesian structures of relation. Instead of oversimplifying movement by relying on one form of experience or illustration, Manning urges her reader to move with "the complexity of the concurrent planes of thought, expression, conceptualization, articulation" to displace "identity as the point of departure of a body" (11). Just as she refers to flexibility and unpredictability in *Politics of Touch*, in *Relationscapes* Manning considers how complexity in movement leads to the experience of a certain instability that instigates a rethinking of time and space.

Manning writes of embodied knowledge to draw her reader into an experience that highlights the complexity of potential relations in movement:

> I begin by taking her in my arms. We embrace, her left arm around my neck and over my left shoulder, right hand in my left hand, her cheek barely grazing mine. Our upper bodies are connected with a sense of horizontal intensity, not a pressure, not a weight, but a texture of commitment. This first embrace signals to both of us that we are open to invitation, and that we will move to the constraint of the walk's structural parameters. (30)

This description is indicative of Manning's philosophy of movement. She focuses on the moment before a dancer moves in the walking structure to bring her reader's attention to the potential that precedes a set structure. While this facilitates and, perhaps, necessitates two peoples' acknowledgment of and agreement to move together within the structure, it is not universal. This is clear in Manning's discussion of Napangardi's culturally specific practice. The fact that Napangardi's work requires relationality outside of Euclidian and Cartesian systems reflects Manning's proposition that relationality gives access to various modes of relating, or various perspectives. Paintings of Aboriginal landscapes provide relationality distinct from the Western tradition of landscape art. Manning explains how different modes of relating to land, mapping, and movement are important to understanding, for example, political battles over land rights (163–170).

Integral to the political stakes that drive Manning's claims, the dancer's body "provides a glimpse into the ways in which movement creates the potential for unthinking dichotomies that populate our worlds: abstract-concrete, organic-prosthetic, alive-dead, mind-body, actual-virtual, man-woman" (14). Manning does not argue that movement implicitly undermines these dialectical concepts; she suggests that it allows approaches from other perspectives as illustrated by relationscapes such as Napangardi's paintings: "I propose that we move toward a notion of a becoming-body that is a sensing body in movement, a body that resists predefinition in terms of subjectivity or identity, a body that is involved in a reciprocal reaching-toward that in-gathers the world even as it worlds" (6). Manning describes movement experiences to preserve the complexity inherent in experience and, she argues, lost in representation. "Reciprocal reaching-toward," distinct from other structures of experience such as Merleau-Ponty's chiasmic reversal (Merleau-Ponty 1969), places import on movement as it engenders subjectivity and identity specific to cultural situations and politics.[1]

The crux of Manning's argument on the "becoming-body" emerges in chapter 4, "Dancing the Technogenetic Body," when she brings her movement theory to bear on interactions between dance performance and technology. The machine has played a significant role in the history of analyzing movement and politics in dance. Dance scholars Ramsay Burt (1998) and Mark Franko (2002) acknowledge how mechanization influenced the ways society related to the body and dance in the 1930s. Felicia McCarren has considered the historical

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relationship between machines and moving bodies (2003). In the contemporary moment, this history has manifested itself in the possibilities that digital technologies bring to proscenium dance performance. Scholars including Johannes Birringer, Scott deLahunta, Susan Kozel, Susan Broadhaust, and Steve Dixon have explored the practical and artistic potential for contemporary media in dance experiments. In dialogue with this discipline, Manning observes, "What we see in dance/new technology performance is often a prosthetically enhanced body where the prosthetic 'makes the difference,' contributing technologically to the stage-space" (64). She laments that work on dance and new technology too often falls short of what she calls "new ecologies of experience," instead settling for interaction at the level of representation (64):

> To simply watch an event—to remain a passive spectator to its inner workings—does not result in experiential transformation. Transformation entails a shift in affective tone such that the participating spectator feels the performance, responding to it through an emphasis as much on its duration—its capacity to create experiential space-times—as through its content—its micro movements in the making. (64)

Manning looks at experiments with technology as one opportunity for new relations toward experiential transformation. She describes an experience similar to the ones Clark strives for in her performance work. Manning, however, chooses not to use artwork to illustrate this claim in *Relationscapes*. Instead, she makes a call for dance to work in her philosophical framework and to use technologies to foreground the complexity of sensing and feeling movement in practice. This necessitates working outside of traditional spectator–performer models of relation. The aim in this performance tactic is to bring the performing body to a new level of sensation. Manning uses technology as one potential relation.

Manning proposes movement in time and space as a way to conceptualize relation outside of representation, narrative, and illustration in a contemporary moment. Looking across artistic disciplines, she reads artwork, writes philosophy, and describes movement experiences. Whether or not Manning succeeds in defying representation is up for debate. While *Mina Mina* maps a trace, painting ultimately mediates and represents the movement of salt. Similarly, it is not immediately obvious that Manning's descriptions of relationscapes manage to reflect her political claims; as she herself acknowledges, movement does not necessarily escape representation. While subaltern artistic practice is crucial to addressing identity and cultural specificity in Manning's argument, her movement descriptions suggest universal access to relation. And while Manning identifies cultural specificity in artistic practice and subsequent relationscapes, she does not address the privilege of access to this relation. Thus, Manning assumes an unmarked viewer. Still, this book does important work by offering an approach to artistic practice that undoubtedly places pressure on the dichotomies that Manning challenges and proposes one method for relating to movement.

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Notes

1. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, quintessential phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes the chiasm as a way to articulate experiencing the world—as a coupling that responds to the inability to be simultaneously self and other. The chiasm is the structure of reversal in experience (Merleau-Ponty 1969).

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Reworking the Ballet: Counter-Narratives and Alternative Bodies

Reworking the Ballet: Counter-Narratives and Alternative Bodies. *by Vida L. Midgelow. 2007. London: Routledge. xiv + 223 pp, illustrations. $33.95 paper.*
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In her book, Vida L. Midgelow discusses the ways in which so-called reworkings of ballets can display attitudes towards gender, sexuality, and cultural difference. She concentrates mainly on dances that were made after 1980, and especially reworkings of *Swan Lake* and *Giselle* by contemporary choreographers. At first I was thrilled that someone had taken on this fascinating and important subject, since reworkings have been such a phenomenon during the last several decades. But soon the book's central argument began to unravel.

The text is composed of two parts. The first begins with an introduction of the theoretical framework and establishes the research field. It also gives an overview of terms, such as "reworking," "reconstruction," and "adaptation," along with the ways they are used in dance and other arts. This part also outlines some of the features of the well-known reworkings made by such choreographers as Mats Ek, Matthew Bourne, and Mark Morris, noting how they remolded dance vocabulary, retold narrative in new contexts, and used cross-dressing. The second part consists of more extensive dance analyses of works by Susan Foster, Javier de Frutos, Raimund Hoghe, Shakti, and Masaki Iwana, and Midgelow herself. The central elements in these reworkings are erotic representations of female and male bodies and how they express a multiplicity of sexual and cultural identities.

Reworking the Ballet is based on Midgelow's doctoral thesis at the University of Surrey, which may account for its rigid and repetitive structure and style. Each chapter ends with a brief recap, and the final conclusion repeats what is said earlier, without expanding on it. In the beginning there is a promise to discuss the context and politics of reworkings, but the former, in particular, would require more exploration. For example, it would have been interesting to consider the larger social and cultural context of England during the 1990s when Bourne made his *Swan Lake*, or of Sweden in the 1980s when Ek choreographed his *Giselle* and *Swan Lake*. What was happening in the society and in the field of dance in those countries that helped produce such reworkings?

The strength of the book lies in its recognition of the intertextual nature of the reworkings being considered and discussion of their diverse connections with their source(s). Midgelow includes a number of different types of dance in her analyses, some of which depart radically from their sources, mixing different dance genres and cultures. The sections discussing dances at the crossroads of Butoh (classical Indian dancing), ballet, and gender in the works of Masaki Iwana and Shakti provide the most interesting reading. Analyses also show how de Frutos, Hoghe, and Foster all used self-conscious fragmenting and deconstructing in their works, creating ambiguous relationships with source texts. Midgelow justly asks what makes Foster's *Lac de Signes* (1983) and *Ballerina's Phallic Pointe* (1994) reworkings, since they do not follow the form, style, narrative, or aesthetic of *Swan Lake* or *Giselle*. The answer is that "they are fundamentally based on these pre-existing dances. Her dances exist because of them and remark upon them" (84).

At the heart of reworkings is always the complex relationship with the "original"; that is why they are particularly intriguing. It is important to remember that one cannot revisit a historical dance source, that is, a nineteenth-century ballet, because we lack the original work. What the choreographers are now reworking is our contemporary ideas of these ballets. For some time, the idea of originality has been questioned in the ballet classics. The ballets' "texts" are unstable: few in dance research today presuppose ballets as authoritative, universal, and unchanging. Still, Midgelow represents reworkings as fighting against the seeming illusion of fixed form and meanings.

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