

# Embodied Relational Process in P. Megan Andrews' the disorientation project

## Processus relationnel embodied dans le projet de désorientation de P. Megan Andrews

Angela Josse

Volume 14, numéro 2, 2023

Vibrant Materialities Across Media, Literature, and Theory  
Matérialités vibrantes à travers les médias, la littérature et la théorie

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1108887ar>  
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE29697>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

York University

ISSN

1918-8439 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Josse, A. (2023). Embodied Relational Process in P. Megan Andrews' the disorientation project. *Imaginations*, 14(2), 127–147.  
<https://doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE29697>

Résumé de l'article

Cet article propose des descriptions incarnées et phénoménologiques du projet de désorientation, une œuvre en solo de l'artiste de la danse P. Megan Andrews. Du point de vue d'un témoin permanent de la pratique de Megan, l'auteur réfléchit sur la manière dont les expériences de désorientation perceptuelle peuvent être puissantes et productives, ouvrant ainsi la voie à des relations de sollicitude.

© Angela Josse, 2023



Cet document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

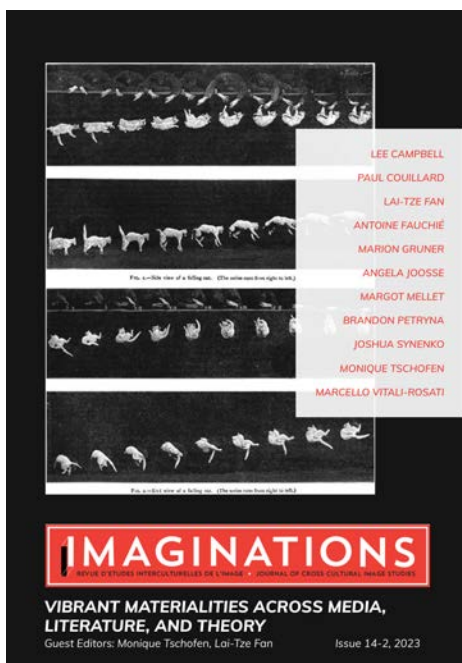
<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

**é**rudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>



IMAGINATIONS:  
JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES |  
REVUE D'ÉTUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE  
L'IMAGE

Publication details, including open access policy  
and instructions for contributors:  
<https://imaginationsjournal.ca>

**Vibrant Materialities Across  
Media, Literature, and Theory**  
**Guest Editors: Monique Tschofen,  
Lai-Tze Fan**  
**2023-12-15**

Cover image: Étienne-Jules Marey "Falling Cat."  
Public domain, 1894

To cite this article:

Joose, Angela. "Embodied Relational Process in P. Megan Andrews' the disorientation project." *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2023, pp. 127-147, doi: 10.17742/IMAGE29697.

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE29697>



The copyright for each article belongs to the author and has been published in this journal under a [Creative Commons 4.0 International Attribution NonCommercial NoDerivatives](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) license that allows others to share for non-commercial purposes the work with an acknowledgement of the work's authorship and initial publication in this journal. The content of this article represents the author's original work and any third-party content, either image or text, has been included under the Fair Dealing exception in the Canadian Copyright Act, or the author has provided the required publication permissions. Certain works referenced herein may be separately licensed, or the author has exercised their right to fair dealing under the Canadian Copyright Act.



## EMBODIED RELATIONAL PROCESS IN P. MEGAN ANDREWS' THE DISORIENTATION PROJECT

ANGELA JOOSSE

This article offers embodied, phenomenological descriptions of *the disorientation project*, a solo work by dance artist P. Megan Andrews. From the position of an ongoing witness of Megan's practice, the author reflects on how experiences of perceptual disorientation can be potent and productive, opening space for relations of care.

Cet article propose des descriptions incarnées et phénoménologiques du projet de *désorientation*, une œuvre en solo de l'artiste de la danse P. Megan Andrews. Du point de vue d'un témoin permanent de la pratique de Megan, l'auteur réfléchit sur la manière dont les expériences de désorientation perceptuelle peuvent être puissantes et productives, ouvrant ainsi la voie à des relations de sollicitude.

### INTRODUCTION

**T**he *disorientation project* is a solo work by dance artist P. Megan Andrews. The project premiered publicly as part of the “Dance in Vancouver” showcase in November 2021, though Megan had been cultivating the work as an embodied practice for over four years prior to this date. Though geographical distance and COVID-19 pandemic conditions prevented me from attending this public engagement of the piece, I had been witnessing Megan's weekly rehearsals via Zoom for six months leading up to the public presentation. Mediated in this way, I would “join” Megan each Friday at the Dance Centre in Vancouver to discuss the piece and witness her practice.



Figure 1: P. Megan Andrews performing the *disorientation project*, at the Roundhouse Community Arts & Recreation Centre as part of the “Dance in Vancouver” showcase in November 2021. © P. Megan Andrews, 2021. Photograph by Alexandra Pickrell.

This paper focuses specifically on situations surrounding moments in *the disorientation project* when Megan prompts the question “Where am I now?” While the project contains many other phenomena worthy of discussion, I dwell on these “where am I now” situations to describe some of the potent disorientation experiences made present in the work. Specifically, some of the phenomena held present in these moments include somatic empathy, spatial levels, gestural sedimentations, opening to otherness, and being held in relation.

I come to this work through the Body Hermeneutic method, an embodied style of phenomenology which was first developed by Samuel Mallin and has since then been taken up and adapted by a range of scholars.<sup>1</sup> Through this method, one works on questions through extended, temporal studies of artworks, learning from the ways spe-

cific artworks modify one's gestures, perceptions, affects, and cognitive-linguistic capabilities. Body Hermeneutics starts from *experience* and accepts that all experience is embodied. Artworks have the capacity to entwine the perceiver and perceived in potent experiences. By holding us in these potent, embodied situations, artworks can also help deepen our understandings of some of the most pressing and challenging issues of our time. I remain true to the Body Hermeneutic method by spending many hours with the artwork and only working from writing that was done in the presence of the artwork. I also continue to extend this non-reductive method in this paper by reflecting on the highly mediated experience of witnessing *the disorientation project* through a portal of video streaming.

Additionally, I come to *the disorientation project* with a history of scholarly and creative collaboration with Megan Andrews. Thus, I enter the work already in relation, but also called to witness this work in its transition from a movement practice to a public presentation and installation. In this paper I heed the reminder that Fielding draws out from Irigaray's *To Be Two* that "cultivating perception requires attending not only to 'what is perceived' but also to 'the one who perceives'" (Fielding 14). As I aim to demonstrate, *the disorientation project* unfolds through embodied relational process, and being held in relation is a key phenomenon of the work. My phenomenological descriptions, written in the first person, foreground my own contributions to the relational unfolding of the work. However, the phenomena included in this paper are those that remained strong and present through many repeated sessions with the work, and are those that I think many others would agree are prominent experiences of the work.

Upon entering a studio at the Dance Centre, Megan first sets up her space by arranging any furniture, setting up her camera, and laying out the set of objects she uses for her work. The objects include a set of cards on which Megan has written movement prompts as well as quotes from theorists including Sara Ahmed, Jane Bennet, Erin Manning, and Martin Buber. Megan then gets into the work, which consists of movement, spoken word, and vocal sounding. Though the different prompts and practices of the work can layer in varying

ways and flow in any order, Megan always begins with an embodied land acknowledgement. Each time this process is imbued with the question of how to do so authentically. How can one acknowledge a settler position without merely paying lip service? Can this ever actually be a transformative process? As a movement practitioner, Megan turns to her body to ask and work out these questions. Rather than recite an acknowledgement, she prompts herself to try to “face” the Indigenous nation or community that she is naming with some part of her body, building a kind of bodily mapping. Accepting that often this will fail, she seeks an honest action of learning and working alongside processes of restoration. She invites the process to work on her, to change her through emergent gestures.

*The disorientation project* is an embodied practice. The work is as much interior as it is exterior. This means that it is not firstly a dance, or even a performance. That is, Megan is not there only to be looked at, but rather to enter into ethical relation with her situation, including with other people, objects, light, sound, space, and the political structures that habituate us in so many ways. Megan comes to the practice with a commitment to entering experiences of disorientation. She also commits to emergence, which is to say that the work is never the same one time to the next both in form and temporal duration. The different practices within the work overlap and interrupt each other, allowing for new permutations to emerge. Related to this, Megan brings a commitment to waiting. If one disorientation module has reached a close, and another has not yet emerged, Megan waits until a new module does present itself. This prevents rushing into something or falling into repeating something that is known or well-worn.

Many of us can easily relate to experiencing disorientation at the historical moment of the writing of this text—specifically spring 2020 to summer 2023. Our daily routines and habits are continually being disrupted and adjusted by the conditions of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Extreme weather events associated with climate change are displacing people and changing our familiar landscapes. The events of the Black Lives Matter movement have provoked acute reckoning with the systemic racism which remains stubbornly pre-

sent in our institutions. And here in Canada, the discovery of over a thousand unmarked burials of Indigenous children at the sites of residential schools, with estimates that thousands more could be found, is awaking trauma and grief in many Indigenous communities while simultaneously demonstrating that Canada must more truthfully tell its history and find new, more ethical ways forward. These are just a few of the ways we may currently be finding ourselves disorientated in our lives and communities. Our familiar ways of relating socially and politically, but also perceptually and gesturally, have shifted.

We must adjust and reorient, but can we pause before we do so? Through *the disorientation project*, Megan gently asks us to linger in the experiences of disorientation without too quickly trying to put things back the way they were. By actively entering disorienting experiences and remaining there for as long as can be sustained, Megan leads us to explore the insightful and productive aspects of disorientation. Only after Megan has fully explored a particular module of disorientation does she pause and ask, “Where am I now?” With this question she tentatively and gradually moves into reorienting to her situation, carrying with her the richness of her extended experiences of disorientation. She senses out how her relationships with self, objects, environment, social situation, and political positioning may have shifted. Through the public presentation of this work, she invites and guides us to do the same.

### BACKWARDS WALKING AND LEVELS OF EXPERIENCE

I witness Megan walking backwards. Her movements are fluid as she cuts a “wake” through the space. Her arms are gently stretched out, simultaneously receiving and letting go of the past, the trail, the *after* to which she is now oriented. Megan speaks as she walks, “below, between, behind, beside, over, beyond ...” and I experience how all these orientation words shift their meanings as she moves in time and space. This is to say, I feel time moving as I witness Megan facing what is usually behind her; the meanings of the words she speaks shift contextually as she flows through the space-time of this situation. Slight concern that Megan may walk in-





Figure 2: P. Megan Andrews performing the *disorientation project*, at the Roundhouse Community Arts & Recreation Centre as part of the “Dance in Vancouver” showcase in November 2021. © P. Megan Andrews, 2021. Photograph by Alexandra Pickrell.

to a chair or a wall wells up in my body as I sense that she is giving up some of her agency by inverting her orientation to walking. Yet

her movements remain swift and flowing and there is even a tilt and torque to her movement as she leans into the winding paths she inscribes in the room.

Even through the layers of cameras and screens, I experience a strong sense of somatic empathy with Megan as she moves through the module. Her movements instill a bodily disequilibrium in me. The exploratory nature and even vulnerability of her embodied presence are felt in my interior even as I remain seated at my desk. At the same time, I regard her as an image, an inky black form, and I am impressed by her capacity and ability to move with such lucid agility. What I am trying to describe is how I am almost paradoxically held in flux between concerned care for her vulnerability and respectful regard for the virtuosity of her embodied articulations. A question emerges for me: How can one maintain care for oneself and others while holding open encounters with the unknown?

Megan pauses and asks, “Where am I now?” This question snaps me out of my somatic connection with her. I begin to observe and listen to her space with her, while simultaneously becoming aware of my own space and surrounding sounds here in southern Ontario, so far away from the studio. I feel the distance and sense out the layers of mediation between our spaces as I notice the sounds of a car moving by my home. Along with Megan, I reorient to my space, her space, and the audio-visual portal that connects us. I find myself split between, both here at my desk in my chair and there through the portal of the computer screen. My own frontal orientation to the screen becomes palpably present. My relation with both the space of Megan’s studio and my home office are changed following my perceptual and affective connection with Megan’s movement through the module.

With the question “Where am I now?” I am carried along with Megan as she modulates from one perceptual level to another. To further explicate the phenomenon of “level,” we can turn to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological reflection on one of Max Wertheimer’s experiments with spatial orientation. In the experiment, a subject is placed in a situation where they perceive their room reflected in a mirror at a 45-degree angle. At first the room appears oblique, tilt-

ed, but after a few minutes, perception of the oblique angle straightens out and the subject experiences a “redistribution of up and down” (259). They begin to perceive and move with ease again. With this adjustment, the subject has entered a new spatial level. As Merleau-Ponty works to describe this situation phenomenologically, he demonstrates how the senses are not merely passive receptors but are “geared” into the world, working to fully inhabit the givenness of the situation. The adjustment from one spatial level to another is not a choice, not something that can be turned on or off. Rather, this adjustment demonstrates the way the body is integrated with its situation. As Merleau-Ponty writes,

“My body is geared into the world when my perception provides me with the most varied and the most clearly articulated spectacle possible, and when my motor intentions, as they unfold, receive the responses they anticipate from the world. This maximum of clarity in perception and action specifies a perceptual ground, a background for my life, a general milieu for the coexistence of my body and the world.” (261)

Phenomenological reflection on the adjustment to a new spatial level brings Merleau-Ponty to describe how the body wants to gain as clear a grasp as possible on its situation and how the body is constantly maximizing its integration into the world. This perceptual movement of the body is integrated closely with the materiality of the world, while at the same time the world demands these sorts of integrations. The way the body adjusts to a new spatial level allows us to describe the primordial pact the body has with the world, how the body is always already there trying to make sense of its situation.

As a creative practice, *the disorientation project* foregrounds and attenuates processes of adjustment, of modulation—those in-betweens as the body inevitably works to integrate as fully as possible into its situation. The concept of “levels” helps us articulate how the perceptual body, without conscious choice, will work to “reorient” itself as fully as possible when it is thrown into a new level. Perceptual disorientation is challenging to maintain. In *the disorientation project* Megan is not performing or representing disorientation but commit-



Figure 3: P. Megan Andrews working on the *disorientation* project in studio at The Dance Centre, Vancouver. © P. Megan Andrews, 2021. Image captured from Zoom video.

ting to entering and remaining in disorientation for as long as it can be sustained. As I witness Megan move through different modules of the practice, I witness the emergence of different perceptual levels through her. The paused and interruptive question “Where am I now?” offers a gap for palpable awareness of and reflection on the potency of disorientation, the way the body both opens to alterity and gathers itself together as it moves between levels of experience.

### SPINNING/COUNTER-SPINNING AND SEDIMENTATIONS

Let me begin again to further describe the potency of disorientation. I witness Megan spinning and counter-spinning her torso while her feet remain planted. Her arms are flowing in sequences of gestures; a defined set of gestures made with her left arm phase with a different set of gestures made with her right arm.<sup>2</sup> I see her carving out space with her arms, “drawing” or “painting” lines in space. Simultaneously she is speaking rhythmic phrases that flow and intersect with each other. “Field of experience / cleaving /

depth of the water / time of the wind / field of the rock / surface of the wind / field of the water..." Through the collusion of Megan's gestures, the lilt of her voice, the set of vocabulary, and the torque of her spinning/counter-spinning movements, I feel Megan conjuring up a "magical" landscape. I begin to sense an imaginary locale emerge all around her. This is a poetic landscape where ancient layers of time and space are awakened, layering over a current place. I witness Megan as entranced in a vivid perceptual experience of a vast and distant landscape and I can almost begin to see it with her. Certainly, I feel this landscape as poetically and imaginatively present. Megan pauses and asks, "Where am I now?" With those words, I am yanked out of the faraway place I was with Megan and returned to the present. I feel a separation from Megan as she begins to explore the actual space of the dance studio. Megan opens herself to a renewed perceptual experience of the studio, attending to the light, sounds, shadows, and surfaces of the space.

Prior to this interruptive question, I was there *with* Megan, drawn into the "spell" of her movements. The elasticity of the connection remains, but it is now noticeably stretched through differing screens and rooms. I feel displacement with this abrupt shift, and I also feel resistance to Megan's exploration of her studio space. I feel there is nothing to see; it is a neutral space, designed to be background. Rather than filling the space, Megan foregrounds it, attends to it. I am accustomed to perceiving this space as neutral, there to accommodate different activities the way a classroom does. But through Megan's tentative, exploratory movements into the space, and even the vulnerability she shows in doing so, I begin to experience the inadequacy of the logic of neutrality. I sense this out as an extension of Western ideologies, a kind of attempt at spatial objectivity. I don't want to explore this space; it is not there to be seen. The dissonance between my habitual relation to this space and the way Megan is inviting me to relate to the space becomes palpable.

A pair of quotes from Sarah Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* are helpful in further describing the potency of disorientation encountered in *the disorientation project*, and how experiences of disorientation can help us attend to what commonly remains background. These quotes

are often spoken by Megan from within her embodied practice, particularly when she engages in “inter-reading,” a practice where she interweaves multiple theoretical passages while moving. Here I extract these quotes to help explicate some of the phenomena encountered in *the disorientation project*.

“We could say that history ‘happens’ in the very repetition of gestures, which is what gives bodies their tendencies. [...]”

“It is important that we think not only about what is repeated, but also about how the repetition of actions takes us in certain directions: we are also orientating ourselves toward some objects more than others, including not only physical objects [...] but also objects of thought, feeling, and judgment, as well as objects in the sense of aims, aspirations, and objectives.”  
(Ahmed 56)

The idea that history happens in the repetition of gestures, in what becomes habitual through repetition, is described in the language of phenomenology as sedimentation. That is, through repeated experiences, our bodies develop habitual ways of dealing with similar situations and these habits or tendencies become sedimented in our bodies. These sedimentations help us deal quickly and easily with similar situations over time—think of how the gestures of writing with a pen become easy with repetition over time. However, when we encounter novel situations, we still tend to draw on our sedimented habits, even though these sedimentations remain partial and inadequate for dealing with the newness of the situation. As Helen Fielding describes, “Imposing past structures gives us the sense of planning securely for the future, but it does not open the future to creative possibilities that might break those structures open” (Fielding 5). This helps describe how, though we may want to change, we find ourselves repeating past behaviours. At the institutional scale, sedimented structures such as racism, patriarchy, and classism become embodied and engrained and deeply challenging to break open and unlearn. Our embodied gestures carry and repeat sedimented ways of orienting to others, objects, and the world. Following Ahmed, we can consider how our sedimented concepts and structures orient us to the world

and impact the relative ease or difficulty with which we move in the worlds we inhabit. As Ahmed states, “When we are orientated, we might not even notice that we are orientated: we might not even think ‘to think’ about this point. When we experience disorientation, we might notice orientation as something we do not have” (56). From here, we can further comprehend disorientation as something potent and productive, a mode of experience that can help us grapple with what otherwise tends to remain hidden and background to the ways we organize the world. Witnessing Megan, I sense out some of the ways I *tend* to orient to the studio space and to my computer screen and interface. I also witness Megan extending and drawing out experiences of disorientation allowing gaps for emergent gestures.

### SHAKING: AN ART LINE OF OPENING TO ALTERITY AND GATHERING BACK

I witness Megan standing, shaking. Trembling movements convulse through her body, and I feel a loss of control or agency take over her body. She appears to be at the mercy of the shaking. It looks like fear, and it looks like anxiety. I also hear the trembling in her voice as she says, “We are vital materiality.” This quote from Jane Bennett takes on concrete, contingent meaning as it is rippled with the fleshiness of Megan’s embodied state. The shaking shapes her embodied and linguistic expression. As she bends and reaches with her arms, the shaking limits and sculpts the possibilities of her gestures. Even though I know Megan is capable of fluid, highly articulate, and composed movement, I feel myself bound in an affective experience of care for her. I want to sooth and comfort her while simultaneously becoming increasingly aware of the physical and mediated distance between us. I am a witness, a viewer, and in this position, I notice how my desire to comfort Megan is wrapped up in a desire to ease my own discomfort of watching a practice of something so unlike “dancing.” That is, I also become a viewer of my own expectations. Perhaps I can learn to see this as expression; perhaps this is a movement of shaking free of sedimented, habituated gestures. As Megan pauses and asks, “Where am I now?” I am pulled into a new present, and I feel myself adjusting to this new present. The shaking

has stopped, but I feel its residue shaping the field of experience around me here at my desk and around Megan as she opens herself to the space of the studio with palpable vulnerability. I am led to ask, “How does the world appear differently after crying? After suffering?”

As with the modules described above, I witness Megan both giving up agency and remaining highly adept in her practices of disorientation. Samuel Mallin’s concept of an “art line” can help articulate this phenomenon, which, at first, I paradoxically describe as Megan both losing *and* fully in control. How can she be both in possession and dispossession of agency? As Mallin demonstrates in multiple ways in *Art Line Thought*, describing an artwork’s “lines” helps sustain the confluence of supposedly contradictory concepts (Mallin 352). Each module in *the disorientation project* helps deepen its meditation on (dis)orientation, which I offer is a meditation on how one might open oneself to alteration while simultaneously maintaining respectful care for self and other. Deepening the concept of “level,” Mallin articulates the movement of an art line, how it holds its own integrity while also modulating and being modulated by its situation.

“‘Level’ helps us understand a little better how the line must hold to itself even while it is outside itself. Its level, which is its orienting shape or direction, is not only a marker or ‘measure’ for its capacity to encounter other beings but also for the way it can develop or evolve within itself and remain itself. That is to say, a line sets its own levels of future delineation, and its traits as much keep it bound to itself as open it to alterity.”  
(Mallin 250)

Through the arc of this module, I witness Megan’s shaking, speaking, gesturing body being shaped and modulated by the strangeness and alterity of the situation. At the same time, I witness her holding her *self*, her integrity, through encountering alterity, setting a new level that flows into the future. The pause and question “Where am I now?” makes phenomenologically present the flux between opening to otherness and gathering back into the wholeness and integrity of the situated body.



“THIS IS THE KITCHEN”: CULTIVATING PERCEPTION

I witness Megan walk purposefully into the centre of the room, make a specific gesture, and declare, “This is the kitchen.” I note a slight burst of joy in me; I have witnessed this module before, and even though it varies each time, I recognize my enjoyment of both the familiarity and exploratory nature of the module. Megan walks to another part of the room, makes a distinct gesture, and states, “This is the front door.” She is conjuring up a domestic space. “This is the fireplace.” With each declaration of a room in the house, she takes up a specific posture and gesture. “This is the dining room.” Each distinct gesture becomes associated with each distinct room. “Stairs going down.” As Megan states, “This is the kitchen,” I note that she repeats the same gesture as when she first declared the kitchen. Thus, I also feel Megan designating a gestural vocabulary where each domestic room is associated with a specific, repeatable gesture. “This is a different kitchen.” She introduces yet another distinctive gesture, now indexed to this different kitchen. I witness Megan walking through and exploring the different rooms of this imagined house. “This is a different living room.” As the “different” spaces are introduced amidst the first set of rooms, I begin to perceive a mash-up of two different domestic spaces. “This is the front door.” “This is a different front door.” The pace of Megan’s gestures begins to speed up, and the intonations in her voice become frantic. I witness Megan trying to find her way through a collision of two familiar spaces. She appears disoriented between the rooms and gestures of the initial house that she conjured up, and the discrete rooms and gestures of the different house. I feel the two domesticities layered or mapped on top of each other, and Megan becomes increasingly frantic as she tries to navigate the dizzying disruption of a space that was originally so clearly declared and assigned. I also witness Megan lost between the concrete, embodied realm of the situation, and the imaginative-cognitive realm. Her set of embodied gestures keeps her in the material present, but it remains indexically tied to imagined places through each linguistic assertion.

Many of us can relate to the ways our gestures become habitual within our familiar, domestic spaces. We can reach for objects without looking and walk without paying conscious attention to the contours of the space. If we move to a different domestic space, we may find our sedimented, habitual gestures failing us. We can become disoriented, reaching or looking for objects in the wrong places, and moving with less ease. The habitual gestures cultivated by one domestic space are made strange and unfitting in another domestic space. In this module, Megan uses this kind of disorientation of habitual, familiar, “domesticated” gestures as creative material. Each time she repeats the module, the gestures associated with the distinctive spaces are different and thus collide and modulate each other in differing ways, but the slippage and failure of specified gestures to fittingly hold their claims continually emerges.

One of the situations where we can experience sustained, potent “disorientation” is through encounters with artworks. As our bodies work to integrate with the unique situations of artworks, we can experience the inadequacy of our sedimentations and begin to expand our habitual ways of relating to others and our worlds. As Helen Fielding demonstrates in *Cultivating Perception Through Artworks*, perception itself can be cultivated:

“Perception is the making sense of a sensible world; it takes place in the gap between the sensible and sensing where meaning is made in the act of perceiving. This gap, which provides the possibility of making sense in new ways, is where, as we shall see, the political, ethical, and cultural possibilities of perception can be found.” (Fielding 5).

Through detailed phenomenological descriptions of artworks, Fielding goes on to demonstrate how artworks can work on the perceiver, cultivating perception and opening it up to new creative possibilities.

By continually returning to and expanding her own capacities for perceptual disorientation, I offer that through *the disorientation project* Megan has developed a practice of perceptual cultivation. Megan’s experience of disorientation lingers in the gap between the

sensible and sensing. By tarrying here, the inadequacies of certain sedimented meanings can begin to show themselves, while strange, perhaps yet unnamed meanings can begin to emerge. Furthermore, by entering into relation with Megan as she explores and expands the art lines of the movement practice, my own perception too is cultivated. As mentioned above, my own expectations become part of what I witness in the project. Even in my witness position, Megan carries me into the gap between the sensible and sensing, though it may be subtle and quiet.

### STICK AND MARBLE: RELATIONAL PRACTICE

“**H**ere,” Megan says, and I witness her place a stick on the floor. She walks to another spot in the room and says “there,” as she places two sticks in an “x” on the floor. The process continues; Megan moves to different “heres” and “theres” in the room, marking discrete lines and “x’s” with sticks and vocal designations. I notice Megan move out of the frame of my view through the laptop camera, but I can still see her in the studio mirror. She comes back into frame, and I see two of her, though for me both are flat images on my monitor. Megan places a stick in front of my “stand-in,” the laptop in the studio, and says, “here.” I feel the gesture as a gift and an invitation to play. And yet, even as my body longs to step into the studio and move amidst all the designated “heres” and “theres,” I am locked in my own “here” in my chair at the other end of the Zoom call.

Now I witness Megan take a crystal marble and say “here,” as she brings it to the floor; a warbled sound of the marble rolling across the wooden floor then fills the space. “There,” Megan says as it nears the end of its trajectory. Her movements become playful as she animates multiple marbles, rolling them out along intersecting pathways between “here” and “there.” For me, the translucent marbles are barely visible on the pale wood floor, and so the experience is more aural than visual. I speculate that the webcam algorithm is biased to provide clearer detailed representation of human faces and figures rather than background planes like floors and walls. Again, I want to

be there and play with Megan; even so, through the layers of mediation, I can feel a lively charge in my own body. I begin to witness how the spatial game Megan plays with the marbles, also becomes a play with time. Each trajectory of a rolling marble becomes a path forward not only in space but also in time. Thus, I feel the “objective” of the game is to play with spatial-temporal lines, creating webs of paths that shift and fade in time.

“Where am I now?” Megan asks, and suddenly releases from the world of the game. She begins moving slowly and carefully through the space, verbalizing her exploratory process. “Orienting to the shadow... orienting to the sound of the space ... orienting to light ... orienting to breath ... orienting to sound outside the space ... orienting to pulse ... orienting to gravity.” I find myself orienting with her, allowing her to lead, allowing her to be my perceptual avatar in the space. I recognize she is in a perceptually unique state, yet I am invited in and invited along through her gentle exploratory movements and articulations. As Megan steps around and between the marbles and sticks, I feel we have now entered a new temporal present. The situation of the game has slipped away even though the objects of play remain on the floor. The meaning of the objects has shifted. They have lost the animated presence they held while caught up in play, yet they are transformed, holding a kind of agential integrity in the “wake” of the game. As I witness Megan emerge from this module, I recall another iteration of the same module where she vocalized a quote from Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter*, “The ethical task at hand here is to cultivate the ability to discern nonhuman vitality” (14).

Witnessing this module brings me to a meditation on care. The cultivation of perception I encounter in *the disorientation project* expands in *care*-full ways, helping me experience and describe disorientation as potent and productive. While many lived experiences of disorientation can be distressing and even traumatic, I experience disorientation with Megan in this artistic practice as a kind of tender opening. Throughout development of *the disorientation project* Megan integrates practices of care which help cultivate opening to otherness through disorientation without doing harm. Those who are invited in to witness the piece are given a “Score for Practice,” a card con-

taining textual invitations and prompts for encountering the work. The first phrase in the score reads, “enter when ready, leave when needed.” Through this gentle invitation and throughout the vulnerability Megan exposes in the work, care is generated for self and other by cultivating perception in non-appropriative ways and respectfully relational ways.

Let me describe this relational process further and describe how it is imbued with care. In her essay, “To Paint the Invisible,” Irigaray describes how perception is altered when it is shared with an other. Our body is always intertwined with other bodies and our perceptions alter and are altered by the other bodies with whom we share experiences (403). Embodied perception is always in relation. Irigaray goes on to describe this as “A being-in-relation-with which is modulated differently according to whether the relation is with an other human, an other living being or a fabricated thing, be it material or mental” (403). Helen Fielding describes the phenomenological presence of being with and being in relation that she encounters in the paintings of Joan Mitchell. “Her [Mitchell’s] works reveal the expansiveness of perception to the possibilities of these alternate and invisible metabolisms for opening up our relation to nature. They reveal how she bends into the lines of nature and how nature opens her up to new and generative forms of expression. It is not just a way of seeing; it is a relational practice” (Fielding 71).

As I witness, I am perceiving-with Megan and I enter into a relational process with her. Megan is not trying to capture my attention. She is not trying to perform for or impress me. Rather, she is holding open a perceptually unique present and inviting me in. The goal is not for me to lose myself in the “performance,” but rather that I enter as myself and contribute as a self just by being there as a witness in the multiple layers of disorientation.

Following Fielding, we can understand this as cultivation of perception with the “coparticipation” of what is perceived: “Cultivating perception requires not only developing an ability to reflect upon seeing as well as hearing and touching, but it also requires the coparticipation of that which is perceived” (Fielding 77). Indeed, the sticks, the

marbles, the studio space, and I all participate with Megan in the unfolding of the module. Even amidst my own sedimentations that set me up to overlook the space of the studio as “neutral” background, and even amidst the Zoom algorithms that work to dismiss the sticks and marbles as non-figuratively inconsequential as the floors and walls, Megan gently holds all this in the vitality of the situation. Developing our capacities for coparticipation, for co-looking, and co-perceiving opens up space for alterity and resists the appropriation of others (Irigaray “Paint the Invisible” 397; Fielding 77-78). In the case of *the disorientation project*, its procedures work to resist our Western tendency to appropriate all things and beings into a singular perspective while simultaneously working to open a space where we bend to and alter each other without attempting to incorporate the other into our own. In this way, I experience *the disorientation project* as an embodied relational process imbued with care, where care is understood as perceiving-with, altering and being altered without appropriating the other bodies with whom I am situated.

#### WORKS CITED

- Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press, 2006.
- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Duke University Press, 2010.
- Fielding, Helen. *Cultivating Perception through Artworks: Phenomenological Enactments of Ethics, Politics, and Culture*. Indiana University Press, 2021.
- Irigaray, Luce. *To Be Two*. Routledge, 2001.
- Irigaray, Luce. “To Paint the Invisible.” *Continental Philosophy Review*, translated by Helen A. Fielding, vol. 37, no. 4, Dec. 2004, pp. 389-405.
- King, Matthew. *Heidegger and Happiness: Dwelling on Fitting and Being*. Continuum, 2009.
- Mallin, Samuel B. *Art Line Thought*. Springer, 1996.

- Marshall, John. "Mallin and Philip Glass's 'The Grid.'" *Philosophical Apprenticeships: Contemporary Continental Philosophy in Canada*, edited by Jay Lampert and Jason Robinson, University of Ottawa Press, 2009.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald A. Landes, Routledge, 2014.
- Miller, Ellen. *Releasing Philosophy, Thinking Art: A Phenomenological Study of Sylvia Plath's Poetry*. Davies Group Publishers, 2008.
- Svarnyk, Mar'yana. *Heidegger's Holy and Quiet Joy: Body Hermeneutics of Two Paintings by Lawren S. Harris*. 2022. York University, <https://york-space.library.yorku.ca/items/98ed61fa-4553-48c2-8f28-8e2be6c5efd2>.
- Wynn, Francine. "Art as Measure: Nursing as Safeguarding." *Nursing Philosophy*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2006.

## IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: P. Megan Andrews performing *the disorientation project*, at the Roundhouse Community Arts & Recreation Centre as part of the "Dance in Vancouver" showcase in November 2021. © P. Megan Andrews, 2021. Photograph by Alexandra Pickrell.

Figure 2: P. Megan Andrews performing *the disorientation project*, at the Roundhouse Community Arts & Recreation Centre as part of the "Dance in Vancouver" showcase in November 2021. © P. Megan Andrews, 2021. Photograph by Alexandra Pickrell.

Figure 3: P. Megan Andrews working on *the disorientation project* in studio at The Dance Centre, Vancouver. © P. Megan Andrews, 2021. Image captured from Zoom video.

Figure 4: P. Megan Andrews working on *the disorientation project* in studio at The Dance Centre, Vancouver. © P. Megan Andrews, 2021. Image captured from Zoom video.

## NOTES

1. For more on Body Hermeneutics see Fielding, King, Mallin, Marshall, Miller, Svarnyk, Wynn.<sup>1</sup>
2. The set of gestures Megan uses in this module were choreographed by Canadian independent dancer and choreographer, Sarah Chase. For an

example of Chase's use of phasing in dance, see Chase, Sarah. "Sarah Chase film Bridges July 2013 short version." *Vimeo*, uploaded by Susan Gerofsky, July 2013, <https://vimeo.com/68811119>.<sup>4</sup>