



ERIN MANNING

RELATIONSCAPES

Movement, Art, Philosophy

"A groundbreaking work! There is currently no book I know of like it in its thoroughness, depth, and sweep. *Relationscapes* offers a unique approach to a central series of issues in both continental philosophy and cultural theory."

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"What commonalities do the Aboriginal paintings by Dorothy Napangardi, Emily Kame Kngwarreye, and Clifford Possum share with the Western images of Norman McLaren, Leni Riefenstahl, and David Spriggs? Each artist's production, as explored by Manning, unfolds a topology of the mind, an elasticity of movement between feeling and thinking. Manning's writing is itself a bath of sensory experiences as she brings these art pieces to life. *Relationscapes* creates ephemeral anchors for new journeys."

Barbara Glowczewski, author of the *Dream Trackers* digital project, Senior Researcher at the Laboratory of Social Anthropology, Collège de France

"*Relationscapes* proposes a new and systematic rethinking of movement that at the same time revitalizes classic questions in aesthetics and philosophy: how does force engender forms, how do forms capture force, how does movement engender itself, what is the space-time of movement's incipience, what is the new, what is a gesture? The analysis is subtle and finely woven. The author's movement of thought seamlessly unfolds before the reader, bringing into emergence a world of teeming intensities and forces. Movement, perception, body, image, time, space, rhythm, all of these notions are reformulated at the crossroads of art and philosophy. A scintillating book, of great power and originality."

José Gil, Department of Philosophy, New University of Lisbon

Cover art: Emily Kame Kngwarreye, *Wild Yam Dreaming*, 1995.

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Interlude: Of Force Fields and Rhythm Contours— David Spriggs's Animate Sculptures

We shall see the shape of the atmosphere where before was only emptiness.

—Umberto Boccioni, "Plastic Dynamism 1913"

David Spriggs's works are wonders in movement. They make you move. This is the feeling of what happens:

The glass box containing a work called *Blood Nebulae* (2002) stands before us. We look at the object to recognize its form as we move toward it in the gallery space. As with all objects, we tend toward a frontal view, giving in to the totality of appearance a frontal view usually provides. But the artwork doesn't appear in the way we expected. Its red feels blurry, its edges shifty. Yet it's there—we can feel it.

Curious, we move around to the side. We find the becoming-form of the work moves with us. What we feel: the force of perception. This force moves us to look again. The object is appearing now, but its appearance doesn't stabilize. We are moved to move again. Now we are looking from the side, where the hanging sheets of Mylar are exposed. The actualizing form eludes us again. Instead of the taking-form of the figure, we face the Mylar's plastic texture undulating with the color of almost-form. We are fascinated with the sheets: they seem to be the (un)making of perception. We move again, moved by the process of art taking form.

Allied to Boccioni's concept of dynamic form, David Spriggs's animate sculptures seem to create force lines for the emergence of perception. Boccioni



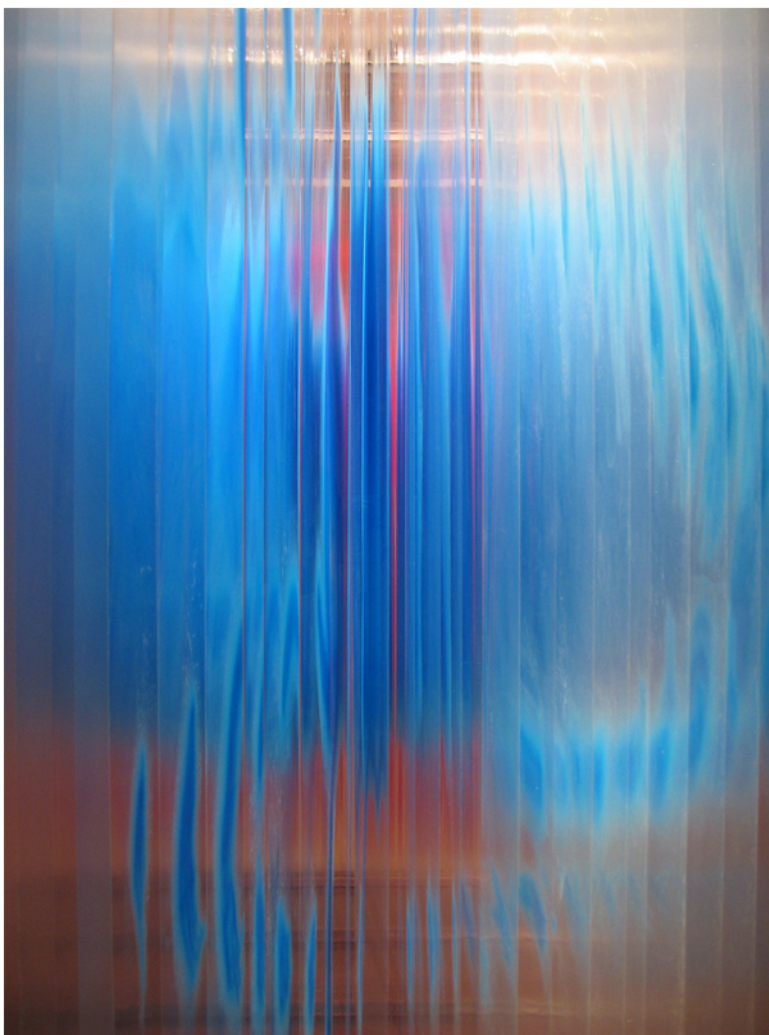
David Spriggs, *Incorporeal Movement* (courtesy David Spriggs).

writes: “No one still believes that an object finishes off where another begins, or that there is anything around us which cannot be cut up and sectionalized by an arabesque of straight curves” (1970b, 61). An arabesque of straight curves might be a way to speak of the affective tonality of the bursts of red on the hanging Mylar of *Blood Nebulae*. Whereas the front view gives us a sense of how the nebulae might appear, seen from the side, the hanging Mylar proposes a redness for the perception itself of nebulae. Taking a tour of the artwork becomes a trajectory in the force field of perception’s animated exploration of vision’s edge.

Let me explain: what we see when we look is the emergence of contour from an interplay of edges. We don’t actually see an image—the image composes itself through the force of a relational dynamic. All vision works this way, our eyes at any given moment proposing nothing close to final form. What we experience as final form is in fact an appearance of the composed relation across moments. We see this composition, and even as we see it, it recomposes. Blinking, readjusting for saccadic bursts, reorganizing for stereoscopic vision, our field of perception is a play of movement yielding rhythmic contours. Stability is vision’s illusion. The challenge is de-animation, not the contrary.

This paradox of vision is made palpable in David Spriggs’s work. Think of *Paradox of Power* (2007). The paradox here is not the idea of the bull per se (and what the multiple bulls might represent) but the way the bull comes into vision. Let’s begin with a side-view: what we see is compelling—a strange permutation of red through blue. Looking again, we find we cannot really differentiate the blue, the red, the light seeping through, the plastic hanging, the edges of the glass box. It’s as though we see each of these qualities in their very emergence, caught in a prearticulation of the image. Blue is blue-on-blue, red is red-on-red-on-blue, colors intermixing at the edges of our vision, their inmixing singular, our perception of them continuously shifting through the amodal experience of seeing-feeling the rhythmic contours of the almost-image. We cannot quite bear this view—it pulls us toward another angle, toward the image itself as it comes to expression. We’ve moved again.

And this is what we see, standing in front of the image (although we are not sure now if this is in fact the front, or whether this is just another mode of appearance of the multiheaded bull): we see blue and red, lines gleaming into light, their edges melting into a kind of emanation. This is not simply a multiple-bull: it is an image extending beyond its coming to form into the light of its own quasi appearance.



David Spriggs, *Paradox of Power* (courtesy David Spriggs).

The blue quivers in a quietness the red does not propose. The blue calms the one side of the animate sculpture, inviting us to view again the inverted body-legs of the becoming-bull. But we can't distance ourselves from the red, which catches our eye in an incessant calling. We find the blue cannot be seen without the appearance of red. Red here expresses itself as an active multiplicity. This multiplicity rears its four heads, each head a play of forces of appearance and disappearance, a coming forward and moving back into the colored light of perception perceiving. We feel the threshold here, insistent and persuasive, between color, light, and movement.

David Spriggs's animate sculptures are experiments with the concreteness of abstraction. Their intensity is felt through the very evanescence of their almost-form passing into multiplicity, a concreteness allied always with mutations that are abstract, almost-there for vision, but not quite perceivable. This paradoxical relation between the abstract and the concrete, between the virtual and the material, between the perceptible and the imperceptible, is at stake in each of Spriggs's animate sculptures. The theory-in-movement of the work: abstraction is what makes them concrete. As concrete as a vision. Robert Irwin suggests we call this movement toward the concrete "the process of a



David Spriggs, *Paradox of Power* (courtesy David Spriggs).

becoming-environment of the space-times of experience we cocreate as we move-with the sculptures' animate form.

This is not an easy task. An animate sculpture is a dynamic form that remains dynamic. To do so, it must keep moving (without moving). How? By creating a relational environment. Similarly to Irwin's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue*, whose vertigo of appearance gets people moving and talking, Spriggs's work creates openings for engagement. What his work proposes is that we create a movement-with that fosters the emergence of animate form. This play with emergence is an inventive pact between art and participant. It proposes relation without telling us in advance how to move.

Spriggs's work invites us to see-with what is not actually there and to move-with the constellation of what we're beginning to see. Moving-with perception composing itself, we experience the dynamics of form. We no longer simply observe—we are moved by the experience of watching, and we move with it. We note the contours but feel the colors. We see the lines but feel the rhythm. We see-with the becoming-work. We participate in the activity of plastic dynamism expressing itself through the emergence of a body-sculpture constellation. Plastic dynamism is not simply about how we see an object but also about how an object appears for our embodied perception: "Plastic dynamism is the simultaneous action of the motion characteristic of an object (its absolute motion), mixed with the transformation which the object undergoes in relation to its mobile and immobile environment (its relative motion)" (Boccioni 1970a, 92).

Entropy (2007). Look at it and feel its force. Your eyes refuse to focus. Even when you try to see the distinctness of form, what you see is blurriness—the becoming-form's absolute motion. Flatten your gaze, and what you feel is the relative motion of *Entropy*'s force. You feel its spiral as a centrifugal rhythm. You see the droplets of water as they recombine with the force of *Entropy*'s movement. You find it impossible to stand still. You move to the side, to where the sheets of Mylar themselves begin to curve. The animate form follows your movement moving: you realize your vision has curved in the process of feeling the force of the rhythm's contours. You see rhythm contouring.



David Spriggs, *Entropy* (courtesy David Spriggs).