



Mardon + Mitsuhashi, still from *whereverever* (2023). Courtesy of the artists.

Or a question about movement that isn't oriented around leaving something behind

The opening subtitles to Mardon + Mitsuhashi's dance performance and film *whereverever* read "[pulse, glitch, shore]." They show up gently on the bottom of the image, momentarily surfacing a word, then fading away. These subtitles have a poetic function, putting ideas and sensations into language and in turn into movement, into sound, and into place. They attend to things that exist elsewhere and outside the centre of an image. In other instances, they foreground the efforts of their speaker, their writer, and their reader. They situate a meandering positionality, an unfixed point of view. Turning the viewer's attention to the edges, what's beyond the frame and things in the distance, these words ground and unground the viewer with language, with sound, with poetry. They make legible a score.

How to watch. How to listen.
How to orient yourself – with a shore?

I'm thinking about questions. What questions we ask and who they are for. I ask myself questions to know what I think and how I feel. I ask myself questions to build a story of how I see, think and write myself in relation to personal histories and collective ones, my affinities, my loved ones, and the places I inhabit and move through. Central to *whereverever* is a version of a question that I've asked myself many times. *How did you get here?* I ask myself this question as a migrant to and settler on unceded Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh land. To me, this question brings forward a lineage of histories and decisions that's organized around leaving a place, a life, and coming to another.

Use a question to orient yourself.

Orient yourself with a question mark.

Something that struck me when this question entered the film portion of *whereverever* was its transfer, from a question that Mardon + Mitsunashi asked themselves and each other into one that they ask the faraway elders and relatives they were visiting. Transposed to the lives of their family in their ancestral homelands, I see this question shifting from one that I always thought was about immigration and migration histories into a question about movement that isn't oriented around leaving.¹ In the relatives' replies, they describe a long series of events² and feelings.³ A sequence of actions and emotions is a dance. The actions and emotions that Mardon + Mitsunashi's relatives share describe a sequence that isn't defined by the break that immigration creates in the timeline and composition of a person's life.⁴ The movement that the relatives describe in these ambivalent responses are incidental, forgotten, misremembered, and distant. Their recollection feels akin to seeing a blurred image, perhaps before, or out of focus, perhaps exposed for a long instant. I pay attention to the labour of their remembering. The relatives "[efforting]."⁵



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I borrow the word *blur* from how Mardon + Mitsuhashi describe the movement quality and the shared dance practice they developed for *whereverever*. They speak about it in relation to time travel and occupying the past, the present and the future all at the same time. For them, these histories are held by their bodies and activated through its movement, their dance. In the performance, Mardon + Mitsuhashi's self-reflexive inquiries and dances run parallel. They occupy opposite ends of the room, with their own choreographic trajectories following the shared question. They dance restlessly, continuously moving from one task into another. They attend to everything that comes up, dancing through their impulses, desires, and thoughts in the edges of the space that they are occupying. In the simultaneity and all-overness of their composition, I remember the texts and subtitles that accompanied their film and ground their homecomings. I use those scores to orient myself and the dance that's happening in front of me. There is joy and virtuosity when their parallel trajectories finally intertwine. Their choreographies and personal inquiries meet each other's bodies and all that they carry in unison. In the middle of the room, they perform a dance of coming apart and coming together. The space between them opening and closing and opening and closing again and again. The dance rotates, showing many facets from these meetings and separations. It felt like watching a bond materialize into an object through dance. I found a queerness and a sense of kinship in how they shared and

involved each other in their inquiries into their familial histories and lineages and the challenges of those dialogues. Families met and expanded in the space of a big but shared question. Beyond the artists in the duo, Mardon + Mitsuhashi's work and research was also accompanied by artists Alysha Seriani and Sasha Langford, who they collaborated with and contributed film, sound, and texts to the work.

I read the title *whereverever* as an answer or another question in response to the question that Mardon + Mitsuhashi asked in their film and research. After seeing the performance, I vaguely recalled a line about an ancestor and a descendant from a poem that I had read months before. I re-read Bhanu Kapil's sprawling poem, "Pinky Agarwalia: Biography of a Child Saint in Ten Parts" (2020) to help me orient myself as a reader of the texts, dances, and questions of *whereverever*. The line I was looking for describes a discord and a gap between a distant and quiet ancestor and a speaking, writing, storytelling descendant.⁶ The place where one comes from and the place where one thinks from. Later in the poem, Kapil writes through the fictional journey of Agarwalia leaving their home(land), "I never imagined being here. Did you?"⁷ I thought about Mardon + Mitsuhashi's airy portmanteau *whereverever* in response.

The last subtitle of the film reads "[return]." There is longing and a reach for something in this final word. I read it as an open ended beckon, addressed to an unspecified person, reader or listener, and to an indeterminate future place to come back to. It is a confluence of the connection and loss, and the grief and belonging that come from meetings, (re)unions – new and old – dialogues, and misalignments.



Mardon + Mitsuhashi, *whereverever* (2023). Photo by Rachel Topham Photography.

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Christian Vistan is an artist and curator originally from the peninsula now known as Bataan, The Philippines, living and working on Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh territories, colonially known as Vancouver, British Columbia. In their artworks, they translate experiences of distance and diaspora into hybrid forms that fold together various elements, including memory, place, poetry, and abstraction. They are particularly interested in thinking about and working with water as a material in painting and in personal, familial and migrant histories. They make paintings, texts, and exhibitions, and often collaborate with other artists, writers, and curators.

Notes

- 1 Or, for Mardon + Mitsuhashi, a question about movement that isn't oriented around leaving *something behind* - in their own reach and attempts at recollection.
- 2 Mardon's relative replies, "A long series of coincidences that aren't coincidences."
- 3 Mitsuhashi's grandpa replies, "I can no longer speak to what I felt when I was young."
- 4 In his autobiography *Speak, Memory* (1951), Vladimir Nabokov writes about immigration as a *syncopal kick*. I understand this "break in [one's] destiny [that] affords [one] in retrospect a syncopal kick" to be a significant disruption of the trajectory and syncopation of one's life. Is this where colour separates - into two anaglyphic views?
- 5 As described in the subtitles.
- 6 "If an ancestor is someone you can still tell a story of, then perhaps I am not a descendant." Bhanu Kapil, "Pinky Agarwalia: Biography of a Child Saint in Ten Parts," (2020). <https://granta.com/pinky-agarwalia/>
- 7 Ibid.