



Fondation pour l'art contemporain  
Foundation for Contemporary Art

## ***Movements: Learning Through Artworks at DHC/ART***

*Movements* is a tool designed by the **DHC/ART – Education** team with the goal of encouraging visitors to develop and elaborate on the key ideas examined in our exhibitions. This document can be used before or after visiting an exhibition. *Movements* facilitates the sharing of concepts put forward by the educators with visitors, thus opening up new ideas and ways of thinking, both collectively and individually. When used prior to a visit, *Movements* aims to inspire and influence the visitor to experience the exhibition in a certain way, so that ideas presented may then evolve and move forward, giving rise over time to new ideas and thematics that can then also be shared. Used after a visit, *Movements* presents a critical perspective in regard to the works and exhibitions shown at **DHC/ART**, privileging a self-reflexive distancing that is necessary to all creative experimentation.

*Movements* also serves as a reminder that the aesthetic experience is not only an affair of the intellect - it also involves the body, its senses, and its movement through the exhibition space. Physical motion of the body is intimately linked to its movement on the emotional and affective planes. Moving through an exhibition space awakens our senses, and its pace, trajectories, and perspectives profoundly influence and mobilize our way of seeing: images take shape during a process wherein memory and imagination are affected and a visual mindscape is constructed. Sound also plays an important role in this process, allowing the visitor to be present in different ways; it is always changing and moving through us. While our ears and bodies capture some sonic material, others escape us - each visitor develops his or her own soundtrack. Ultimately, *Movements* will allow you to immerse yourself - mind and body - in the artworks, with the aim of developing a more rich and dynamic understanding of the exhibitions presented at **DHC/ART**.



***Movements:  
Ryoji Ikeda***

*Context*

**Mathematics and art**

Ikeda's works instill a dialogue between visual arts and pure mathematics, two disciplines that have usually been kept apart by modernity's insistence on the separation between logic and emotion, brought forward by theories of division of labor and rationalization. Throughout visual art history, math has been part of the tools used by artists to create. In ancient Greece, the golden ratio, a famous mathematical rule, was used by artists as a sort of canon to determine the most aesthetically pleasing proportions for sculpting the human form. Modern art movements like Bauhaus and the Russian constructivists<sup>1</sup> have used other mathematical equations and general principles of design and construction as basis for their works. Ikeda has said that one of his tasks, as an artist, is to narrow the gap between concept and material execution of the work itself, letting us see another side of pure mathematics often too abstract to fully comprehend; rather than to maintain a divide between mathematics and art, between the idea and the object, his projects tend to draw links, to build bridges, to bring together the seemingly irreconcilable notions, favoring a multidisciplinary and multisensory approach to artistic creation (Le Laboratoire 2008, 11).

*Can you think of other examples where visual art and mathematics seem to dialog with one another? Are these examples current or historical?*

*While accepted by a great majority, the divide between the logical left and creative right brain is contested by a number of thinkers who prefer to take a more holistic approach to thinking and organizing information. How do you perceive this notion? Do you believe that the left brain/right brain approach is useful/necessary, or is it insufficient? How?*

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<sup>1</sup> Bauhaus is a German art school founded in 1919 that offered classes in visual arts, crafts and design. The school developed a conception of the work of art as a collaborative project, based on the blurring of the distinctions between disciplines and on an integrative approach. Constructivism is a modern art movement first based in Russia, founded in the early twentieth century, which put forward a utilitarian vision of art as a vehicle for social change.

  
*Content***The tangible and the intangible**


Ikeda has said that one of the primal roles of artists working today is to assure a “materialization” of the creation process (Le Laboratoire 2008, 11). His perception of artistic creation is on par with the theories of many contemporary thinkers, like John Tresch, who argue that one of the roles of contemporary art is to make things visible, to generate public consciousness (2005). But a dichotomy between the material and the immaterial truly exists in Ikeda’s works. On one hand, he uses concrete material objects in his works; he displays early computer punch cards, film strips, piano rolls, screens and projectors, presented in often theatrical exhibition settings that exacerbate their visual and tangible aspect. By hanging them on walls, by projecting light through them, by carefully installing them in space, he gives practical objects, part of working machines or structures, a second life, revealing their minimal and quiet beauty. On the other hand, his work is heavily invested in the immaterial aspects of our society. For one thing, it uses data, this invisible information that circulates all around us, as a conceptual basis. It makes great use of light and sound, two immaterial manifestations that encourage a phenomenological approach to the work of art, a celebration of the experience rather than the object in itself.

*Do you think we live in a post-object world, or do you believe that we are more dependent than ever on objects?*

*Some of the objects used in Ikeda’s works have become or are becoming obsolete (computer punch cards, for example). Would you still qualify them as technological? What constitutes technology for you?*

*Composition***Sound and image**

Modern and contemporary art have emerged with new ways of questioning the separation of senses into five distinct categories and superiority of vision over other senses, arguing for a much more open vision of art that you can see, but also touch, smell, hear and even taste. In some of the pieces shown here at DHC/ART, Ikeda blurs the distinction between the senses. The artist seems to question the limits of what can be seen or heard and the traditional assumptions we have towards works of art in a museum or gallery setting. He encourages visitors to move around in the exhibition spaces, seeing the works not just as objects to view passively, but also as experiences dependent on our active participation to fully function. This is especially true of *data.tron [advanced version 2]*, an immersive installation that puts the visitor right into the work. In it, he successfully plays with the properties and the limits of sound: a recurring high-pitched frequency seems stretched to its limits while, at another time during the projection, a glowing sound seems to envelop the visitor. *The transcendental* series, displayed on the first floor of 451 St-Jean, shows pigment prints that seem to be monochromes, seemingly linking back to the modernist history of abstract painting and Clement Greenberg’s theories on the specificity of the



medium, essentially characterized by flatness and delimitation of flatness (1961). But, if viewers move closer to the images, they discern a wholly different picture plane, constituted of little rows of numbers. Throughout the exhibit, Ikeda successfully plays with our perception, making us realize how infinitely small and invisible data is by encircling us with it.

*John Cage was an experimental American composer and music and sound theorist who had a tremendous impact on contemporary art practices. In his early theories, he used five parameters with which he could define the qualities of sound: amplitude, duration, overtone structure, frequency (pitch) and point of occurrence. Do you think we could use these categories to describe and analyze visual works of art?*

*We often use terms linked to the visual to describe emotions (feeling blue, seeing red) or even to describe experiences linked to other senses, especially sound. Why do you think that is?*

*Considerations*

**Sound, noise and music**

*How would you define the three terms?*

*Do you think there is a distinction between them?*

*How would you use them in regard to Ikeda's works shown at DHC/ART?*

**Minimalism<sup>2</sup>**

*Would you qualify Ikeda's work as minimal, or minimalist?*

*If so, why?*

*Do you see a distinction between minimal and minimalist?*

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<sup>2</sup> Here, "minimalism" either refers to minimalist art, a 20<sup>th</sup> century movement observed in sculpture (Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Tony Smith, Anthony Caro) and in painting (Barnett Newman, Kenneth Noland, Ellsworth Kelly) or to a series of composers of minimal music in the United States (La Monte Young, Steve Reich, Phillip Glass).



## **Bibliography**

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