

# WEAVING LIFE

## ESSAY BY ANNABELLE GUGNON

Humanity has shifted into another period of its history. Technological innovations and the digital evolution have redesigned our existences. The world has become immaterial. But how to memorise this real world, that is gradually vanishing? How to keep track of a contemporary humanity that is at the edge of transhumanism? Alice Anderson is making these questions her artistic quest.

Anderson chose copper as an ally. This metal was one of the first used by mankind. With the help of metallic thread, Anderson records her relationships with objects, crystallising them through ritualistic performance. She memorises. She weaves. She mummifies. Like Mnemosyne, the Titaness mother of the nine Muses, Anderson preserves memory and creates tangible marks and signifiers through movement. Guitar, cable, camera, wheel-barrow, hard-drive, car, sneakers, computers... A thousand and one objects are “woven” with copper-coloured wire to create a cosmology of life-style, ways of thinking, navigation, playing music, moving, eating, living.

The memorisation ritual - or “performance” - is a moment of shared intensity, either alone or in conjunction with participants. Sometimes the public is invited to choose an object that each wishes to memorise as with Anderson’s ‘Travelling Studio’ at the Wellcome Collection, London in 2015. Through the repetitive action of winding thread around objects, Anderson’s performance transports to trance.

The body and the object become one. The spirit floats. Human energy transfers into the object through performance, reaching a symbolic level as if it were transubstantiation. However, says Anderson, “The process of the weaving is not nostalgic. It is a routine action, but the extended repetition leads to another space, a spiritual space.” The result astonishes. Elevator cables seem to float gracefully in the air; floor-boards bend through the memorisation process until they become perfect circles; ladders adjust themselves into musical staves, lighting-tracks mix like Mikado sticks.

Copper offers the power of metamorphosis. Of this, Anderson has said, “It is a remarkable material. Objects distort under the micro-tension of the metallic thread. Sometimes, when I arrive at my studio in the morning, I notice that the outlines of objects that have been memorised by thread have changed from how they looked the day before.” The example of the metal shelves is very telling (‘Metallic Shelves’, 2013). At the beginning, the shelves were identical. Once “woven” in metallic thread, each one became singular, as if they had followed different physical destinies. The copper had worked: a range of abstract shapes were invented by the materials themselves. The same process applies to architectural sites. Once memorised with wire, places seem to be translated into a new figural language. According to Alice Anderson, the spirit of the site relies on the architectural elements. She intervenes in situ. “It means that the work completely depends on the site in which it is created”, in accordance with the artist Daniel Buren, who introduced this concept.

In 2015, Anderson was invited to exhibit at Espace Culturel Louis Vuitton, in Paris. For the exhibition 'Data Space', she chose several elements from the space to memorise with the help of the Travelling Studio. The site became an avatar of itself. Stairs, sky-lights, the lift and its cables transformed... just like the imposing columns of the Eiffel Historical Building in 2016 once memorised. These metamorphoses are the result of a kind of magic "When I perform, it is as if I were the material itself" says Anderson. The wire is so thin that one can barely see it. Thus, the performance resembles a dance. The actions of weaving become choreographed: each object composes its own music. Metallic thread memorising a canoe plays a different score from the short and fast movements around a smaller object such as an ashtray or a shovel. To allow the wire to continue its movement freely, copper reels are placed in a container (a glass jar, a teapot)... as the wire unrolls, the reel bounces, creating a hypnotic sonority. Each performance is at the intersection of fine art, music and choreography.

The 'Pulse Paintings' (2016) depict rhythm. They are composed of traces of pastel that echo the pulsation of the artist's body as she 'dances' from one foot to another, moving between two horizontal surfaces. With this instinctive rocking, she experiments with her inner rhythm. The paintings are a visual representation of this rhythm in red pastel, a colour that Anderson is receptive to due to its vibrational properties.

John Cage is not far from this. The contemporary music composer, initiator of the Fluxus movement, and musical director of Merce Cunningham Dance Company says: “When I was introduced to Oscar Fischinger, he began telling me about the spirit to be found in every object in the world. The object has to be touched in order to release its spirit and to liberate its sound. This is the idea, which led me to the percussion. I never ceased during all the years following this encounter [...] to explore the palpation of objects, to bring them into resonance, to find out which sounds they contained.” Alice Anderson also draws the virtual rhythms of the objects by reproducing their barcodes (‘Amazon Parcel’, 2016). This ensemble of empty and full spaces is their digital identity (‘Objects Portraits’, 2015). The relationship between barcode and object is intellectual; the strategy identifies one object singularly, eradicating it from any other.

This process participates in the dematerialisation of the world. Through the obsessive performance of these drawings, Anderson re-embodies objects that have lost their shape. As the tangible universe becomes intangible, human beings run the risk of vanishing with this. “It is more likely that human degeneration won’t be the cause [...] of the robots [...] but of our submission and our muscular and neuronal passivity” writes the paleoanthropologist and teacher at the Collège de France Pascal Picq. Moving, walking and thinking will save humanity. This intuition lies at the heart of Anderson’s practice. One of her major works, ‘181 Kilometres’ (2015), is a sphere two-metres in diameter. Anderson wanted to memorise geometrical shapes and started with this form. For this purpose, she walked in a circle for

'181 kilometres', keeping the copper wire taut, stopping the ritual only to sleep. Through the performance, Anderson exceeded a state of dizziness and entered into a state of extra-ordinary consciousness. "In the body, there is something extremely ungraspable" she says, "Through such a walk, every seemingly minor event achieves full resonance." Looking at this monumental sphere, it is hard to imagine that everything started from a small bobbin that Anderson found in a clock, at a time when she was a video artist.

One day in 2010, Anderson disassembled an alarm clock to explore its mechanism. She discovered a small reel of copper wire which, to her, represented a new kind of conductivity. This was the turning point in Anderson's practice. Directly after this encounter, the artist wove her computer without saving its data. This was a founding act. There is a before and an after. A new artistic space opened itself to Anderson. At the same time, whilst Anderson was invited to present an exhibition for the Freud Museum in London, she went into a room usually closed to the public. There she discovered the loom of Anna Freud, the daughter of the inventor of psychoanalysis. This confrontation marked a new turning point. Alice Anderson was inspired to memorise the museum. With a team of performers, she climbed onto the rooftop, descended and re-ascended the building, allowing herself to be guided by its architecture. The result was astonishing. ('Housebound', 2011). Starting from these founding events, Anderson began to weave objects and to deeply explore the mechanics of memory and the functioning of the brain, neurotransmitters and synaptic connections. The artwork

'Bound' (2011) represents a gigantic reel around which undersea cables that create the planet's Internet are woven.

Questions surrounding the function of the brain meet those of artificial intelligence, transhumanism, and the fate of humanity. This led Anderson to the Arhuaco Indians of Columbia, in the Sierra Nevada. In their sacred mountain, weaving is a cosmogony, a ritual, and means of meditation. For the community, living is weaving life. Like Jackson Pollock, who found a creative inspiration from the Navajos Indians, Alice Anderson finds a cosmic orientation to her work within the practices of the Arhuaco Indians. This is made visible with the series 'Itinéraires d'un corps', 2018 ('Bodily Itineraries') - squares that float in space like an abstraction. Anderson selected the great Nave of La Patinoire Royale for the inaugural presentation of this new body of work.

Under the building's glass roof, several human-scale totems consisting of memorised mechanical objects float as 'Spiritual Machines'. This world of spirits and sacred powers is made from computers, Blackberry® and other instruments from the numerical and digital worlds. The copper-coloured wire used in the work has energetic and symbolic capacities, being the conductor of both heat and light. Like the spider-weaver of Louise Bourgeois ('Maman', 1999), Anderson weaves and re-weaves the world.

She repairs it also. When an object is wounded or broken, she places it in a cor-ten steel capsule. Exposed to air, oxidisation happens. The artist then weaves a series of gestures around the capsule and

dances around the object to re-establish contact with it. After the terror attacks of the 13th of November 2015 in Paris, Anderson applied the same ritual to emblematic objects from the terraces of Parisian cafés that were targeted by terrorists. Bistro tables, parasols, ashtrays and other objects were encapsulated, ritualised, and then installed in a broken sequence. This series of “Time Capsules” is titled ‘Insouciance’ (2016). Ritual dance is used by Anderson as a means of summoning energy and strength. This binds her to Pina Bausch. The sculptor gives gestures to objects. The choreographer incorporates objects into dance. At the end of her life, Bausch pronounced these words like a prayer: “Dance, Dance, or we are lost.”

<sup>1</sup> John Cage, « For the Birds : John Cage in Conversation with Daniel Charles », Marion Boyars, London, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Pascal Picq, « Qui va prendre le pouvoir ? », Odile Jacob, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Documentary movie of Wim Wenders, « Pina », 2011, Les Films du losange.