

THE COLOUR GESTURES

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The Franco-British artist, Alice Anderson, unveils a new phase in her quest. Her 'lost gestures' are composed of brightly coloured drawings. They form a music of traces. They are punctuated by the spontaneous choreography conceived by each of the artist's performances. Whether or not they happen in the intimacy of the studio or before an audience, the performances give way to infra-events, absences and trances that break up, derail and re-orient the gesture, eventually losing it. Each micro-change is manifested by the replacement of one colour for the benefit of another, and by the sound of the obsolete pencil thrown into a copper bowl bolted to the floor. These performances last for a whole day, sometimes several days in a row. Endurance is the condition for a hypnotic passage.

These colour-gestures are a continued exploration of the copper-wire weavings in another form. In her performances, whether she uses pencils or wire, the aim is always to weave and remember our contemporary world – its objects as much as its practices: '[its] bits and [its] pieces as fossil witnesses to a society's history,' as the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss wrote.¹

The Lost Gestures memorise digital typographic signs using coloured pencils; the dots, the hashtags, the parentheses, the arrows, the dashes arranged on a computer keyboard. These signs preside over digital and dematerialised connections, making them possible and symbolising them. They are the clues of a world where artificial intelligence, nanotechnologies and biotechnologies are redefining the logic and alliances of human existence.

For each performance, Anderson selects a single typographic character. Colours animate it throughout the sequence, which ends once the palette has been exhausted. Each drawing holds the same colours but ends with a completely different weaving. All drawings will however be born from a rhythm that keeps on accelerating until it reaches its peak, a repetition-induced intoxication – such as with the lines in Louise Bourgeois' 'Je t'aime' (1994) or her rain of red silk-screened arrows in 'Untitled' (2002).

However, Anderson does not find herself in a field of charmed desire, but is rather looking to let herself be traversed by a flow, in the spirit of the American painter Cy Twombly and his expressionistic writings – for example 'Roman Notes 3' (1970). Both artists share this creative practice of letting themselves be influenced by the mystery of floating gestures, without any preconception. 'Gesture is the indefinite and inexhaustible sum of reason, impulses and idleness that surround the act of an atmosphere,' writes Roland Barthes about Cy Twombly's painting.² That is because the gesture is free. Unlike the action, it does not seek to produce anything, it simply exists, it self-realises and therefore liberates. 'These repeated gestures appease my need to be breathing, to inhabit the space, to take it in possession,' says Anderson.

‘During a performance, I forget about myself, which is a liberation and also a way to explore the unknown.’³ Her being comes alive with movements that she witnesses through colour. She is also the first one to be astonished by the result, discovering it in the form of an arrangement which occurred unbeknownst to herself.

Looking at the entangled linearity of the hashtags, the turbulence of the multiplied arrows, the harmonious leaps of parentheses, there is something primal and instinctual happening, something of an ancestral disposition coming to activate life. Without seeking to know specifically, Anderson intuitively goes backwards along the path of humans who, for the benefit of experiences and thoughts, were able to conceive the very notion of rhythm. By exploring the signs of the digital world, she reverts to the source of this concept.

As the linguist Emile Benveniste wrote, ‘nothing was less “natural” than this slow elaboration [...] of a notion that seems so intrinsically inherent to articulated forms of movement.’⁴ The word ‘rhythm’ was not born from observing the sea or a river. The term went from Heraclitus and Democritus’ atoms to Plato’s writings: ‘Harmony is a consonance, consonance a chord... The same way, rhythm results from the fast and the slow, which are first in contradiction, then become compatible.’⁵ And finally, rhythm reached its current definition: ‘The harmonious arrangement of bodily attitudes combined with a metre. [...] We can then speak of a dance, a walk, a song [...] and all that involves a continuous activity broken down by the metre in alternate times.’⁶

The Lost Gestures arise from a dance, that of Ino Riga's improvisations when responding to Anderson's gestures and rhythms. The contemporary dancer gets in tune with the artist's movements, and raw energy emanates from their choreography – a cosmic ballet reweaving a tie between all the living, those of today and those of the mists of time.

The same question encouraged them to invent, to create, to discover – what does it mean to exist? The answers and ideals sketch the future's horizons. Their Lost Gestures activate this questioning and specify it; what does it mean to exist in a digital and dematerialised world? Anderson is not looking for immediate answers. She experiments with opening a door into uncertainty - the creative energies will respond.

'I feel as if I were a material, I catch any sign and everything falls into place. I feel like I am exactly where I need to be to accomplish what must be accomplished,' she says. Her performances position her in the world and in history. She lets herself be overtaken by a flux, of whose origin and destination she is unaware.

Drawing is the most fitting technique for the situation because of its spontaneous nature. 'Drawing is energy, it is like fuel whose combustion is immediately resolved in ideas becoming objects,' ⁷ said the artist Joseph Beuys.

For Anderson, this alchemy, in tune with the here and now, is one of the conditions for the Lost Gestures. In fact, if she feels that the intensity of presence is not real enough during a given performance, she will discard the artwork. Every single drawing must be a lively testimony. It is an ethical question. For her, the 'here and now' is proof of authenticity as Walter Benjamin established it: 'Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art lacks one element: its presence in time and space – its unique existence at the place where it happens to be: the hic et nunc of the original work makes what one calls its authenticity.'⁸

The Lost Gestures performances embody digital typographical signs. When typesetters were still composing books with lead, the signs carried the imprint of the body projection. In fact, the technical vocabulary remains influenced to this day – one says the 'body' of a font, the 'eye', the 'head' of a typeface, its 'belly'... Anderson is not, however, looking to artificially plug some bodily matter to the digital world she explores, but rather to 'let things and the world speak for themselves.'⁹

This is actually how John Cage defines silence, a process that is the opposite of communication and its preconceived discourses. Because it is devoid of piled up intentions, silence enables us to listen to life as it offers itself to our body and senses. Silence is the sine qua non condition to put oneself in the right frame of mind and be open to perceive meaningful connections. It is always about re-weaving the world and its impulses, its spaces and its freedoms. It is what Alice Anderson dedicates her life to.

1 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, University of Chicago Press, 1966

2 Roland Barthes, *Cy Twombly*, Merve Verlag, 1983

3 All quotes by Alice Anderson are taken from an interview with the artist, in Paris on 24 October 2018 4 Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, University of Miami Press, 1971

5 Plato, *The Banquet of Plato*, Nabu Press, 2010

6 Benveniste, op. cit.

7 Lucrezia De Domizio Durini, *Beuys Voice*, Kunsthaus Zürich, Electa, 2011

8 Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Prism Key Press, 2010

9 John Cage, *For the Birds*. John Cage in conversation with Daniel Charles, Marion Boyars, 1981