

TRIALOGUE:

Thinking-Making in Relation

CdZ: [...] There are many points of connection within our work. For me, what is most apparent within each oeuvre is this attempt to reach out to the other; in their choreographic work Selma and Sofiane Ouissi speak of *'se projeter dans l'autre'*.² Trying to connect not by empathising but by not feeling alone in the relation.

EM: What I notice is that our thinking-making is made stronger *in relation*. And that's something I see in the artists who you surround yourself with, Catherine. What we encounter in this exhibition, *The Minor Gesture*, is less a set of artworks than the quality of an encounter. There are works, of course, but the works themselves orient toward the minor, opening up pathways for collective experimentation. What is being foregrounded is less the separated-out work of each artist than a collective conversation. To work at this level requires curiosity about the process of art, about the gestures that populate that process. This process that is gathered together is palpable both in the works that foreground process and in the quality of expression foregrounded by those which have found form, yet are still populated with the kind of uneasiness with form that I think of as the minor gesture. When you talk about the process of curating, you touch on an important difference between the *making of an exhibition*

WHERE: This trialogue between Catherine de Zegher (CdZ), Nikolaus Gansterer (NG) and Erin Manning (EM) took place in the nexus of the exhibition *The Minor Gesture* at MSK, Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent, Belgium, curated by Catherine de Zegher in 2016. It followed the performance *A Translecture on Minor Gestures in 16 Movements* combining spoken lecture (Manning) and expanded live drawing (Gansterer) further exploring the notion of *The Minor Gesture*.¹

WHEN: 23rd June 2016

HOW: The original conversation has been edited through focus specifically on ideas of translation, improvisation, collaboration, intuition and the micro-politics of the *minor gesture*.

and the *staging of a field of relation*. Perhaps what emerges from the second is that the 'exhibition' becomes a turning point, an opening toward new ways of participating in each others' processes, and, equally important, an attunement to the differential of the minor gestures populating not only the work but the emergent collaboration.

NG: For me, the notion of 'what an exhibition is' becomes really expanded in *The Minor Gesture*. More towards *exposition*, meaning 'putting forth something', more *ex-posing* than ex-hibiting, less showing what you already know rather than posing a question that you want to share with others. It needs these moments of activation. The work is actualised to become alive, in reference to what is 'here and now': through the space, through the visitors, through various presences. You said that the gesture of curating was also a form of caring?

CdZ: Yes, absolutely. For me it relates to *cura*.

NG: From *curare*. To cure.

CdZ: In all these practices, you can see forms of caring—whether in drawing, textiles, or the recording of primary gestures in dance and film—yet they are all different. But there is always a *gesture of reaching out to the other*. Perhaps the reason I am fascinated with drawing is because it captures this outward gesture incredibly well. In fact, your translecture, Nikolaus and Erin, materialises what I theorised for a while [...] Let me clarify: when a child reaches out for the mother and, for the first time, instead touches and marks the paper surface with a pencil given by the mother, the child can find a response her/himself. This time it is not the response from the mother but the child's own response. Consequently, the outward gesture binds you as much as it makes you independent. At the same time, the outward movement of the hand remains a gesture of the desire to connect, with the environment, with the other. It is always both binding and separating. You could think of this in relation to your translecture, where each artist has their own work, in keeping with their own individuality, but it happens in relation to the other. It is rather about subjectivity-in-relation. In the translecture, the abstract becomes materialised, words and thoughts become visible through the drawing—thus *through* the other, in the encounter, which is quite unique. I have never seen anybody doing this. It's a step further in art history.

EM: What also fascinates me about your concept of the translecture is the relationship between the choreographic and the improvisatory. One needs the other. Nikolaus, you're working with the materiality of the objects and the compositional propositions they potentialise, and I am working with the materiality of sound, of words, of concepts. And we're both being moved by those singular materialities which are connecting in the relational field of voice and movement. But even though my words are pre-scripted and your work is emergent, there is nonetheless a quality of transversality that is wholly emergent in the event. It was particularly rich, I think—having just done this for the first time—the way the words didn't take over, as language can be very determining in these kinds of situations.

CdZ: I was also fascinated by the way Nikolaus was showing us all his materials in the projection during the translecture. The form, the ink, the water—so for you there's a connection with different materials? How do you feel them? How do you know what you want to take at a certain moment?

NG: The translectures have developed from the act of drawing to bringing more and more material qualities into it. Recently, in a translecture in Vienna with the philosopher Dieter Mersch, there was a moment when he spoke about the Dionysian and the Apollonian principles, when the paper and every single item were flooded by ink and the whole thing became a real mess.³ So it turned into a real Dionysian moment happening in front of us. And it was not planned at all. So, for me it's better to have an ensemble or a register of materials at hand. And then I trust my intuition to take them and to work with them on the table as a model and from there to take things back into the space. This has become more elaborate in the last three years. Recently, I've been more interested in 'showing' that I'm not showing everything. Rather, in the mediated image things are always missing, remain un-shown. Together, the live experience and the projection form a kind of expanded drawing.

CdZ: It is drawing.

EM: I think this relates to the concept of intuition in Bergson's writing, which is associated with the rigour of a process.⁴ And there's an incredible rigour to that intuition that you both have. It comes from years and years of modes of perception and modes of feeling, qualities of experience.

CdZ: Well, intuition is linked to the environment: to time and space, and to flow. To let it flow and not stop it. You have to follow the intuition—you cannot stop it, because then it doesn't work anymore.

EM: I would say that in this exhibition you feel the quality of that intuition very strongly: your sense of composition across minor gestures is

very strong. The qualities across the works resonate—qualities of listening, the care for the relation, the curiosity about other tendencies and gestures.

NG: The practice of translecturing is also guided by the question of how to translate one reality into another ... how to bring it to a form of being in the moment ... drawing live-diagrams of the now.

EM: The drawing of diagrams is very interesting in the context of my work *Threadways*, which I also think of as drawing. This rethinking of what drawing can do has come from our collaborations, Catherine—you've expanded drawing for me to include movement, which has given me a keener sense of how drawing can also hold a certain quality of orientation. The technique that I used for *Threadways* is an old Belgian technique called *drawing thread*, which involves pulling thread from an existing weave and then creating patterns in the weave from the thread's absence. While I didn't reproduce the technique faithfully, it remains interesting to note the connection between drawing as a kind of pulling and reorienting by subtraction and drawing the collective movement of creating new pathways. In a sense, all of our works activate orientations that come into relation through the exhibition, for example, through adding, pulling, subtracting. What your way of creating an exhibition allows for, I think, is this two-phased orientation that invites us to come with an orienting gesture but without a full sense of how it will move us collectively?

CdZ: And to do the same thing again—it's never finished and it's never complete.

EM: So it carries its flow with it, and that's the fragility that I like in art.

CdZ: Exactly, and this is what I often find problematic about exhibitions: the idea of completion. Of course, they are not complete. Once exhibitions open to the public, they are over and again interpreted by audiences; they become the subject of alteration, because everybody has their own interpretation. Do you know that the word

'drawing' in English has a myriad of meanings? Drawing in. Drawing out. Drawing from ... many, many definitions. The Flemish *tekenen* is more like the German, right?

NG: In the verb *zeichnen*, there is *das Zeichen*, the 'sign' in it carrying the meaning of a mark, a sign, a signal, a symbol, a figure, a token, a note and even an omen. Maybe drawing as something assuming shape whilst appearing, *ap-paraitre* literally means *etwas er-scheint*, or 'is coming into view', which seems to shine and shimmer, that plays with appearances and oscillates between seeing, thinking, remembering and imagining. But in German, *zeichnen* also has the meaning of *zeigen*, to show something—a gesture of showing. Drawing as showing is also carries the meaning of *zeihen*, to accuse or *anklagen*: to put the finger on something or somebody—to raise or lift a finger—to point out, to question, to search, *chercher* and *re-chercher*, again and again.

EM: This allows us to think of the materiality of drawing: how drawing orients the material itself.

CdZ: I have learnt to look at the material differently because of artists like Annie Albers or Anna Maria Maiolino who work intensely 'with' the materials. They allow the materials to reciprocate; it is as if they speak: 'Let us also do our thing!' It's almost close to the animate. But we lost this connection in the twentieth century; nothing is animate any longer.

EM: But everything is animate, alive with a certain quality of the *more-than* that populates it.

CdZ: I think what you are all trying to do is to show that the material is alive.

NG: That is exactly the state of mind I sink into when doing a translecture. Suddenly, the meaning of objects is shifting and objects start to communicate with me. This awareness for *the other* comes through that other state of mind where I am a bit *ent-rückt*. The German word for being engrossed, or absorbed in a situation, like a form

of trance, entering something. I have to create this *interspace* in me where *we* meet.

CdZ: So it's even *ex*, out of the body, or reaching towards?

NG: Not so much *out of* the body, more *becoming the body*. This is something I learnt from the philosopher Arno Böhler referring to Nietzsche's concept of *über*, in the *Über-mensch*, where he was not at all talking about a Super-man! It's not the big, and the ever bigger, the superior, it is the very minor. It's something inside and between us. Immanence. Here and now. It's becoming aware of all the capabilities and materials that you have, which is your potential.

CdZ: But it's also the capability of touch.

NG: Exactly ... and being touched.

CdZ: To me the translecture was very physical, where you touch *the other* ... I think, for me at least, I always saw things more literally and now I can see them, not to say on another level, but in an enriching way.

EM: I often think about our scales of experience. Our bodies give us a certain account of experience because they have a very particular scale. They make it appear to us, for example, that the spaces around us are stable because the scale of movement in our bodies is much quicker than the concrete around us. But if we're capable of experimenting across different scales, then we begin to go into the place where you can *phase in and out* of different kinds of scales, which we do anyway. And children do it absolutely intuitively. You know, they get close to the earth with their eyes, they get close to things. The question for me would be: what are the conditions that allow this shift in scale? There's something about the voice being capable of activating a scale of experience. This museum is also very interesting. It has a quality of light and sound that is very particular given the high ceilings, the stone structure and the skylights. It really allows things to happen.

Because you can do the same work in a place that has different conditions without these phasings in and out of scale becoming perceptible in the same way.

CdZ: There is an environmental element that we never think of: the bad weather, the rain and the sun alternately shining through the glass ceiling, that constantly change the light.

EM: The environment and its complex materialities always participate in the drawings we engender, and if we give these materialities the space to make themselves felt, others will feel them too. This then allows attention to be distributed a little differently, moving away from the sole focus on the human into a more distributed focus. In my experience, when attention dances in this way, the work is doing its work. At that moment, all of us are participants in a process that is, to a large extent, unfolding collectively, despite pre-existing choreographic orientations [...] I really struggle with the way the human tends to see him / herself as the centre of experience. This is of course not just in art. I often wonder what it is that makes us believe that something is ours; that a country is ours? Or that *a life* is ours? And, you know, about that concept, just before Deleuze jumped out of a window and killed himself, he wrote that tiny four-page piece called 'Immanence: A Life' that I cite in my book *The Minor Gesture*.⁵ He writes that there is a quality of life that exceeds us. He calls this *a life*. *A life* moves through us to connect to this life, but always also exceeds us, tuning experience to the *more-than*.

CdZ: When you speak about the *more-than* [...], it reminds me of the pond that I live next to. The water in the pond is never the same. It never has the same level. It goes up and down. Most people put a layer of plastic at the bottom of a pond so that the water cannot move any longer, to keep the water from passing through. But in natural ponds, the water is never the same. It flows: it flows under the earth; it comes up by chance in this pond. And then it flows further down to the sea. It flows everywhere under the earth, up, then it goes away again. The thing is that you cannot control it. I

have a choice: do I control it and put a plastic layer in the pond and it will then always remain the same, or do I let it move? And evidently, I wish to let it move because it's also much more pure, healthier. But, of course, we try to control it. And sometimes this is very problematic. This urge to dominate its flowing brings about all kinds of economic and ecological issues.

NG: I think that's where the minor gesture starts to work, when you allow this responding to happen, when you become aware of all these little things. That's also what we do within the *Choreo-graphic Figures* project: becoming aware of these little, minor gestures. We call it *figuring*—these micro-moments when your attention reaches a tiny peak. We started to give these tiny *figurings* names, that is, when they melt into a recognisable form. Indeed, there are so many figures happening—here and now! We decided to work with the term of the *figure* rather than with the term *gesture*. But what is the difference, and how could these terms come together? I realised that with *gesture* we still tend to think very much of the hand. And I prefer to think of the gesture as of the whole body.

CdZ: Do we then speak of the *corporeal*?

NG: Each of these words brings a different connotation.

EM: Concerning gestures, I don't see them necessarily as tied to a body-part. I see them as that which punctuates a movement proposition, activating a worlding. These can be movements that affect a body, but they can just as well be material movements, or environmental movements. The concept of 'the minor gesture' as I've defined it is very influenced by the idea of 'minor literatures', which is a concept Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari developed in relationship to Kafka's writing.⁶ For them, a minor literature is not a 'small' literature but a literature that cuts through what it means to be literary, orienting literature in ways that trouble the major ways in which it tends to define itself. Deleuze and Guattari also write about the capacity to be 'a minor speaker'. And

they don't mean *less*, they mean that your language cuts through language, unseating language as it tends to be used or heard. This unseating activates a certain line of flight within the practice of literature that has the capacity to make visible the minoritarian tendencies in thought or in writing. When I was writing *The Minor Gesture*, I was thinking what's the difference between a minor literature and a minor gesture? I brought in the concept of gesture because I wanted to foreground the punctuality of a certain kind of minoritarian tendency. In the context of the minor gesture, what I am looking at are the ways a process is populated by tendencies toward variation. I don't believe that you can craft a minor gesture, but I do believe you can create conditions for it to emerge or become perceptible. The minor gesture, in the way I understand it, has a capacity to make felt a shift, a variation in experience that deeply alters the ecology of that experience. The question is then: can it be followed? This is where art can and does make a difference. Art practice is one of the ways through which the opening that a minor gesture activates can be followed. Art for me is not about replaying the stakes of macro-politics but about orienting tendencies that create follow-on effects in experience that affect what moves the political at its core. In this sense, art is proto-political, affecting what can come. When Deleuze and Guattari talk about the macro and the micro, they say, 'don't think of the micro as small'. The micro is a qualitative variation that cuts through the macro-political. Like the micro, the minor moves across scales—it's transversal. It moves through. Sure, it's often imperceptible or on the edge of feeling, but that doesn't make it any less powerful. And so I think, that there is definitely a similarity between what you're thinking of as the *figure* and how I am conceiving of the *minor gesture*. If I were talking specifically about the choreographic, I don't think I would use 'gesture', because there would be too much of a tendency to think about the body, just this body.

CdZ: Like the memorable gesture of the Chinese student in Tiananmen Square in front of the military tank. That, for me, is really a minor gesture. It

came out of nowhere, from a student who suddenly was not afraid of anything. Nobody even knows what happened to him afterwards. But the repercussions of this minor gesture were enormous.

EM: Exactly! And people will think of that gesture as grand, but it wasn't grand. That's a good point.

CdZ: What fascinates me most in all the years that I've been working with artists on exhibitions is how things come to me, come together and how things somehow fall into place and present connections and coherence. It is as if I don't have to do anything, I just have to let it happen [...] In the process, I am intrigued by objects that make it towards me. It's the relation of people. It's the relation of objects. It's a beautiful confluence of circumstance, of moments, of conversation, of dialogue and suddenly it all falls into place and seems perfect [...] I love working in relation. But no one can get blocked, because then the whole undertaking falls apart. We only come into being-in-relation, no? [...] I have a sense that I really need other people to come-into-being. I mean, to evolve, to exist, to see the world more clearly, to give more purpose to existence, all of that. It can only happen through and with others.

EM: Absolutely. But working as I do in a collaborative environment at *SenseLab* that explores the interstice of activism, art and philosophy, I also want to register the importance of dissonance.⁷ Working in this kind of context, I've learned that there is a way in which the capture of a process by discord or disorientation also contributes to the relation as long as the collaborative potential is not personalised—as long as its the work that remains the focus. I am very interested in the collaborative force of difference. What we have here is a bit different since you, Catherine, have created the ground for a collaboration that begins in the midst of a shared orientation. This is one of the strengths of your approach, I find: your attention to the conditions of different processes coming together. This leads us back to the gesture of the curator, which in this case involves creating the context to catch us in the middle, in the middling of a process still underway.

You've made a career of catching artists in that middling, I would say. This is very important because it allows for a different kind of interaction amongst artists. When I speak of the work we do at *SenseLab* and of our sense that difference or dissonance is also an active component of working relationally, I should emphasise that the conditions are quite different. First, we don't come together on the merits of our individual work, but instead collaborate to generate new ways of working together around issues and practices that exceed any one participant's capacity. This kind of work requires a long-term commitment to collective exploration and the creation of an ethos of trust in the work itself. An exhibition context is different because it begins, in a sense, with the force of our own contribution (our own work, our own career as artists), which makes it much more difficult to activate an emergent solidarity. This is what I think your experiments toward new ways of bringing artists together is capable of achieving, and it's definitely what we see here.

CdZ: The translecture also allows an idea to be developed and taken up again and again. It's like in drawing and writing. It's developed and it's taken up, it's repeated, it's reframed. So you don't need to follow every word. It took me some time to accept that we cannot understand all texts at once. At first I wanted to understand everything at once, and then of course, you read something and you don't understand everything. You want to give up. Instead you have to accept, it's again this flow, you just have to let it happen. But, as I said at the beginning of our trialogue, the thing that has fascinated me most in the last days is this really common sensibility or sensitivity towards how 'se projeter' ... And I have a sense that this is still not the right word: 'Comment se projeter dans l'autre'. But in French, there aren't a lot of possibilities. Because it's not about appropriating the other, it's not about being the other, but it's something else, which I think the translecture in a way formulates more adequately. Actually, maybe we still don't have words in our language to speak about what we're speaking about.

EM: Someone said to me you really need to separate the text and the drawing, because then you really get the lecture and you really get the drawing. But it's exactly not about that. As I understand it, the translecture is about the quality and at the same time about the impossibility of mingling them. It is an experience of the middling that forces you to face the incapacity to stand outside the event. In this case, the echo created a kind of fourth character, a force that affected all of us. I felt uncertain because I could hear myself speak in a tonality that was just on the side of the ineffable, and I knew that you might be having difficulty hearing me [...] So all of us were attuning differently to the sound of our coming together across language and drawing [...] I think it's because we both collaborate a lot in general. And we met each other in that ethos of collaboration. There was immediately a sense of care for the work, and for our contribution to its coming to expression [...] I felt like it was important that attention be focused on the rhythms of your composition. If I moved, you tended to move as well, almost always. It was almost like the movement of

waves in the water. I loved the quality of responsiveness. Similarly, if the rhythm of your composition calmed, I felt an invitation that allowed me to enter. There was a lot more happening, I think, than what was necessarily perceived.

CdZ: In fact, what we often do in our society is to erode the content of the work and turn it into a commercial object. That's mostly what our society is doing. It's commercialising everything. And it's incredible if you think about it. Where is there still a space where this is not happening? In effect, I hope that I can create that space a bit.

NG: Could it be that a minor gesture cannot or resists to be commercialised?

EM: It resists capture. It creates its own value. I think that the minor gesture really resists and I think that's what makes it a gesture: this resistance. It resists because it's far too complex. It creates an orientation that needs to be followed. It activates a reevaluation.

1) The exhibition took place in the framework of the Creative Europe project *Manufactories of Caring Space-Time*, a cooperation between MSK, Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent, Belgium; FRAC Lorraine Metz, France and Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, Spain and presented large-scale installations by artists Selma and Sofiane Ouissi, Nikolaus Gansterer and Erin Manning. In addition, Gansterer and Manning were invited to develop a translecture performance together. Cf. Nikolaus Gansterer, www.gansterer.org/translectures for further contextualisation of the 'translecture' model. Cf. Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016. For further contextualisation of curating forms of expanded drawing: Cf. Catherine de Zegher, *On Line: Drawing through the Twentieth Century*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (21.11.2010-7.2.2011. Exhib. cat.); Catherine de Zegher, Griselda Pollock, and Evelyn Nicodemus, *Women's Work Is Never Done: An Anthology*, Ghent: Asamer, 2014.

2) This phrase is borrowed from a conversation with artists-choreographers Selma and Sofiane Ouissi, who consider the power of minor gestures to transcend boundaries, social differences, and linguistic barriers. Both poetic and political, their creations record nonverbal language and create new modes of cohabitation based on cooperation, attention, and exchange with the other. Their research on vital gestures is an opportunity to take the time to listen and visualise life stories marginalised by the dominant discourse. Making

use of video, choreography, illustration and installation, they invite the audience to reach out to an other through a gesture of shared emotion and experience. Personal gestures are transformed into a collective notation. Like memory, the body is a site and an archive of lived experience, which may shed light on the individual in their subtlety.

3) Cf. Nikolaus Gansterer and Dieter Mersch, *A Translecture on Nietzsche Diagrams*, performed on 26.11.2015 at Tanzquartier Wien, in the framework of the research project *Artist Philosophers. Philosophy as Arts-Based Research* led by Arno Böhrer and Susanne Valerie Granzer. <http://homepage.univie.ac.at/arno.boehler/php>

4) Cf. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, (Trans.) Nancy Margaret Paul and William Scott Palmer, New York: Dover Publications, [1896] 2004.

5) Gilles Deleuze, in *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, New York: Zone Books, [1995] 2005.

6) Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

7) Founded by Erin Manning in 2004, *SenseLab* is a laboratory for thought in motion. Based in Montreal, it is an international network of artists and academics, writers and makers, from a wide diversity of fields, working together at the crossroads of philosophy, art, and activism. www.senselab.ca