

this is tomorrow – Artist Profile, 20 July 2011

Gina Buenfeld on Falke Pisano

Continental philosophy has no doubt been a major influence for many contemporary practitioners – Derridian and Deleuzean axioms are standard fare in exhibition literature. But in the case of Falke Pisano, theoretical discourse does not frame her practice - it is the work itself. Written text, spoken word, lectures, or videos overlaid with monologues she writes and reads herself, form an ongoing project she refers to as 'Figures of Speech.' In this she sets out to examine translations between formal, physical and linguistic registers; essentially, an examination of the nature of things. What is a thing in the first instance? The glossary of her Christoph Keller book sets this concept out as being 'interchangeable with entity or being,' including 'events, propositions, properties and relations, not just material in nature.' Pisano postulates the ontological instability of things within the encounter between subject and object and does so through language as the site where materiality, form, description and agency convene.

Often, she takes concrete objects as her point of departure, specifically, abstract Modernist sculptures. Supplanting the sense of autonomous objecthood proposed by Modernism with a discourse that delineates a densely woven web of subjective descriptions and reflections into which the objects are re-articulated, Pisano brings the 'frame' to the centre of our attention. *Chillida (Forms & Feelings)* (2006) is a two-channel projection showing images and pages from a photographic book by David Finn published in the late '90s. The images of Chillida's sculptures in Finn's treatise on vision are accompanied by texts describing the experience of encountering them. The aural backdrop is Pisano tracing her attempt to reflect on what she feels as she looks at the sculptures. Her phenomenological meanderings demonstrate the inherently unstable relationship between the sensuous and the discursive and the inseparability of these two orders of experience.

The physical body is our necessary mode of living – it reports to us events from the world of form of which it is a part and wholly contingent upon. But we also inhabit language, such that it would be difficult to imagine any experience that is truly pre-discursive, existing independently of reflection and thought. The subject positions we take up in order to conceive of a coherent identity are constituted in language. Pisano's meditations approach philosophy as a logic through which we can understand the nature of being in the world, and art as a point of entry into it. As Heidegger proposed, artworks 'unconceal' a world, the one they are held in reference to, revealing their own location – including the clemency or inclemency of the weather – in an event that unites subjective and objective realms. Although Pisano does not directly address her audience, in *Chillida (Forms & Feelings)* we are privy to her stream of consciousness and offered an intimacy with the fleeting and perpetually fluctuating collision of sense-perceptions, conditions and reflections that constitute her subjectivity.

The Wave (2010), a film made in collaboration with Benoit Maire, begins with an empty white screen accompanied by Pisano's voice constituting an object with recourse to our imagination, through descriptions of form and quality. In this it is apparent how indebted her practice is to the conceptualist paradigm: its dematerialising emphasis on relationality; the valorisation of cognition; the critique of pictorial regimes; and the propensity to represent things diagrammatically.

Whilst writing the text for *A Sculpture Turning into a Conversation* (2010) Pisano collected images from the Internet, which became part of the work - arranged within a structure of black lines, based on the script for László Moholy-Nagy's unrealised project *Dynamics of a Big City* (1927). The adjacent projection shows a sequence of images in which people engaged in conversation can be seen through fragments of an unidentified red sculpture.

The proposition set out in the title, that a thing in the physical world can transform via some alchemical magic into the intellectual realm, seems an impossible one, and it is this antinomy that interests Pisano: how is transformation possible between states that are ontologically different in kind, how can we transcend the constraints of our given experience? Language here must be thought of as a means of describing a proposition diagrammatically – as a site where ‘objects’ can be constituted (by description) and consequently transform (through discourse). Whilst the object on screen remains inanimate and without physical change, the discussion of it constitutes a space in which the potential for transformation is not restricted to physics or chemical change, as the conditions of its existence have been transferred into the realm of language. This highlights the subjective nature of sensory experience, and the constantly shifting processes of interpretation inherent in perception – whereby the qualities and nature of external forms can change as they manifest themselves to a beholding mind. This notion of the diagrammatic is a Deleuzian one, a ‘reterritorialisation’ in which the particularities of physicality or semiotics are levelled and can interact on a ‘plane of consistency.’

In her book, Pisano cites a passage from Yukio Mishima’s *Sun and Steel* in which he asserts his belief in the corrosive power of words as they pollute or corrupt the purity of a pre-linguistic world. There’s no doubt she shares his fetish for words, and the opaquely theoretical texts are not intended to be read, or heard, as interpretative or academic, but just the medium Pisano has selected to approach artistic production; to speculate, experiment, play, test her hypotheses and attempt to solve problems within the structure of language. Though seemingly hermetic and impenetrable, it is (to borrow JL Austin’s sentiment) what she does with words that is of primary importance to her work. Her subjective take on things is evident in the idiosyncratic command of English; the intensities of attention given to discursive issues; and the relations drawn out between works, the way that one work comments on another and the translations that are made over time. For Pisano, performativity relates not just to her presence as interlocutor in the work but to the notion of agency. All sentient beings are complicit in a perpetual circulation and transformation of forms and relations. Pisano’s artistic position could be described as the deliberate exertion of will in order to affect change within this system.

Falke Pisano was born in Holland in 1978, and is now based in Berlin. At the time of writing, she is on residency at Capacete, Rio de Janeiro. Her work was included in the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009) and Manifesta 7, Trentino, Italy (2008). In 2010 she had solo exhibitions at Transmission Gallery, Glasgow and Extra City, Antwerp and her artist book *Figures of Speech* was edited and designed by Will Holder and published by JRP Ringier, Christoph Keller Editions. She is represented by Hollybush Gardens in London as well as Ellen de Bruijne Projects in Amsterdam and Balice Hertling in Paris.

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