

Sophie Erlund : The mechanics of fluids

Sophie Erlund - « *The Rationally Unattainable Certainty* » - PSM (Berlin) / 10.06.2014 - 26.07.2014

« It speaks "fluid" [...], Yet one must know how to listen otherwise than in good form(s) to hear what it says¹ »

After a first solo show in 2009 at PSM gallery (Berlin) composed by a set of architecture-sculptures (« *Udvandring* »), followed by a second, exclusively sound-based show (« *The house is my body* »), this time, Sophie Erlund, proposes an environment organized by sculptural elements at once sonorous and olfactory.

Entering in « *The Rationally Unattainable Certainty* », a peculiar organic smell of mushrooms comes to our nostrils : an odor at once humid and dry in this warm Berlin summer. We quickly detect its origin : a part of the gallery space is covered by Icelandic moss - still alive.

Writing about the exhibition forces us to dissect this environment to understand its diverse elements, which, however simultaneously affect several of our senses. We have to appreciate the Danish artist's composition as a whole where smells, sounds, volumes and architectures are juxtaposed.

Six odd sculptures are erected on imposing white circular pedestals, which are set down on this spongy ground. Quickly, a beat attracts our attention, like the strikes of a regular knock on a metallic door down into a cellar. This sound is coming from *Bell Tower* (2014), a sculpture shaped by radical lines : dark and uncluttered. Giving form to a triangle where at its centre water drops flow on a regular rhythm. Each time one of these drops crashes onto the black slab, the sound produced is modified and amplified in the space. We are invited to walk around within this sonorous, oppressive and even troubling atmosphere. A dry and whitish tint covers the floor, and these enigmatic sculptures or futuristics architectures shape an almost extraterrestrial landscape. Slow electronic pads, alternated with what seem to be heartbeats, strident bells, escape from the other room. Added to the squeaking sound under our feet, this composition reinforces the cinematographic atmosphere of science-fiction. Thanks to sensors disseminated in the space, this sound-work reacts to and evolves directly from our movements. Living elements, such as the moss, become unpredictable, progressive, experimental and uncertain works that also alter with audience's presence. Movement figurations in the passing of time in the space, contrast the static nature of the imposing architecture-sculptures. The whole installation is shaped by a dialogue of both resonance and conflict between the solid and intangible forms.

Jens Soneryd's beautiful text - acting as an autonomous component of the installation - along with the exhibition's title, reveals Sophie Erlund's reflection on the evasive.

Her encounter with the thinker continues to influence her artistic development. The text emerged from numerous discussions, as writer and artist fed one another's practice. This text directly refers to the well-known essay by G.E Moore, « *Proof of an External World* » (1939), in particular to his

¹ Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, coll. « critique », 2012, p. 109.

statement that «Nothing is easier than to prove the existence of external objects ». Yet, immersed within the artist's environment, nothing seems to be so certain. In view of this text, the venture of « The rationally Unattainable Certainty » questions and challenges notions of rational and irrational, outside and inside, solid and fluid.

Unity House (2013), a black lacquered sculpture, immediately embodies these dichotomies. The strange rectangular table top, with its straight and shiny surface, contrasts with the abundant, organic and chaotic underside. Set into two cavities, a glass tube, itself very « clean », joins these opposing surfaces. There is a sense of fragility and bipolarity embodied in the relationship between the precise, certain surface and its unstable, cavernous underbelly.

Atop their pedestals, the sculptures assume their physical and material weight : raw woods with prominent splinters, rope and used leather (*The Cerebral Soldier*, 2013), finger traces and clumsy paintings (*Bullet*, 2014, *Illogical : Corporal*, 2014) - the artist's gestures are visible, revealing the importance of intuition and the instinctif in the making process, which becomes a direct and visceral formalization of inner even unconscious, emotion. These formal expressions find themselves precisely at the threshold between conscious and unconscious, control and abandon.

Coming back once again to the materials used, the opposition between solid and fluid operates within the same symbolic realm. The drops escaping from *Bell Tower's* crotch contrast with the rectangular forms of the sculpture. Also the fluid composition of the sound works : water noise, cavernous echoes, mind-blowing electronic pads, steamy of gaseous pressures (« pschitt »), unchanged by the unexpected visitors' movements or non-movements.

Facing the gold block of *Bullet*, brutal and almost clumsy : an imposing monument, with a carving on one of its faces that is a troubling allusion to female genitalia. Thus, we could suggest the same contrast mentioned before. Luce Irigaray suggests that the feminine sex is subjected to fluids - « Since historically the properties of fluids have been abandoned to the feminine ». In Sophie Erlund's work this unstable property is unconsciously submitted to geometrics, but the fluid qualities are heightened in the contrast. The artworks, then, demonstrate logic's powerlessness to incorporate all the characteristics of nature.

By elaborating a philosophy of certainty through the comprehension of what is « external » to us, Moore assured the absolute power of the form. Although visually « solid », Erlund's work challenges this solidity by showing, listening, smelling and imagining active continuities that are fluid, dilatable and in flux.

A suspended metal gate divides the two rooms of the gallery. Also « present », it is at once opaque and transparent. The gate is pierced by several holes : our gaze struggles as focus shifts between its surface and what is visible behind / through it. Here is a formal embodiment of a quote from the exhibition text : « He gazes upon the world with one eye through a gridded window ».

Erlund's own exhibition escapes its author, fleeing her control, or at least defying certainty, becoming a formal expression of the impossibility of rationally understanding our past and future experiences and intimacies.

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