

# Eberhard Bosslet

EN - Wulffen, Thomas: Material & Effect - A view from the nineties, Material & Wirkung, Catalog Kunsthaus Dresden, June 1998

Material & Wirkung, Catalog Kunsthaus Dresden, June 1998, by THOMAS WULFFEN

## Material & Effect

A view from the nineties

The material is there and after fourteen years it is necessary - but precarious - to reevaluate the material and its effect. The context for art from Berlin has changed. At the beginning of the eighties Berlin was an artistic island. That situation was altered suddenly and for a short time by the success of the painters who worked with the gallery at Moritzplatz. Then peace returned, and this peace would have remained a long time, if an epoch had not come to an end, the epoch of the Cold War. The central place for this change was Berlin.

This place created, both politically and culturally, the necessary conditions and opportunities for the formation of certain artists in Material and Effect and their manifest establishment in the association's legal form. On the one hand the situation opened up the spaces for self-help projects - both metaphorically and literally. At that time there was a gallery centre around Fasanenplatz in Berlin-Charlottenburg, in the western part of the city. Anything that took place elsewhere was an alternative, like the gallery at Moritzplatz or Material & Effect and Büro Berlin with its various projects. But the proverbial hunger for images brought the western metropolis into the focus of international attention and the gallery at Moritzplatz was no longer an alternative. The discovery of the work of Büro Berlin and Material & Effect only took place years after its most important activities. In this case the zeitgeist and the exhibition "Zeitgeist" were against this type of art.

For the nineties it is possible to say that the development of art or rather the speed at which one artistic direction is replaced by another has accelerated. That also means that working with memory is undervalued by the artistic operating system.

Because everything has to be topical and new, historical momentum is seen as a quantity negligible. That creates the impression that everything really is new and innovative. But in fact only the contexts change, and these in turn alter the ways in which art is perceived in reception. "Primary objects" in George Kubler's sense cannot be found. Such objects first create the context in which they can be perceived and then lead to replicas. In a certain situation primary objects can also manifest themselves as primary situations.

This was the case for the work of Büro Berlin. And it was the case for Material & Effect. Material & Effect also completed various types of project in various locations outside of Berlin. The open-ended form of their actual management, in terms of time and organisations, characterised both the projects' strategies and Material & Effects initiators. A further circle of artists developed and publicised its investigations in consensus with Material & Effect. Each intervention into the given structure was always unique. Experiences, memories, photos and explanatory texts remained as the sole record of the interventions.

Such processes have now become accepted. At regular junctures self-help projects of a similar kind are carried out. In retrospect it is still remarkable that on the spot art or situation art possessed a status especially at the beginning of the eighties which it could never again attain. On the one hand this may be because satisfying the hunger for images pushed all other art forms into the background. On the other hand these art forms conquered public space more brazenly than previously. This was possible in the context of art and architecture or art in public spaces. Moreover, the institutions took a greater interest in such art forms, until they later institutionalised these non-spaces for art. In a concrete case this meant putting a museum or an artistic organisation into an already existing structure, such as a station, a factory or something like that.

Art has become part of the public consciousness. It no longer needs rearguard actions, because there are no spaces left for this. Whether art as service can still develop the potential to resist, is a question that has to be asked. Rather the danger is that, after the critical illumination of its own processes in the operating system of art as art, art now is determined by the system, which makes for art that hardly considers contents, but is interested in meeting the requirements of institutions, curators and sponsors: not art against institutionalisation, but

institutionalised art. In this respect Material & Effect also tells of a time when there really were free spaces for art which have since been lost. “The function of museums and galleries as fixed places with fixed positions and borders is now called into question by this art.” This still has to be proved.