

Eberhard Bosslet

EN - Gisbourne, Mark; Between perception and the sign, Booklet for CD-ROM Bosslet Archive, Kunstverein Trier 2012

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BETWEEN PERCEPTION AND THE SIGN

EBERHARD BOSSLET

It is evident in historical retrospect that much of the post-war and subsequent history of Western aesthetic culture has been driven by the discourses of existential-phenomenology or various readings derived from the philosophical-semiotic language of signs. Put simply the world perceived as an engaged body-to-space entity, or as chains of signifiers that form the continuous basis of the signs that constitute the nature of our identity and the formed world around us. Expressed by other means as understanding the contemporary world that is read either through the direct immediacy of sensory formations and their experience, or as material performative manifestations of consequential actions of speech; discursive arguments that numerous post-war interdisciplinary theorists have referred to as 'speech acts'. In the latter the perceived world is often understood to be the material extension of speaking as doing, constituting individual and collective identities through the reading of cultural signs. But just as the speaking act and the written thought are never quite the same thing, similarly it is true of speaking and making as a cognisant sculptor or painter of today knows. The works of Eberhard Bosslet therefore point directly to the creative interstices between what is perceived and expressed in his sculptures, installations, and developed paintings, and exposes a questioning and challenging contrast to the deterministic use of language that attempts to arbitrarily shape his art and its meaning.

From the earliest works of Bosslet in the 1980s we find an investigative turn of mind that focuses as he made clear upon emotional, discursive, functional, intuitive, coincidental and cultural standpoints, towards the material conditions of the world. These in fact were the actual terms he used to describe by manifesto the Material & Effect Group, he co-founded in 1981. What was implicit from the beginning was working with the ready made usually industrial materials and the found situation, which might in turn be that of dereliction or abandonment, or simply a direct intervention into a found and opportune spatial situation. In each situation Bosslet's interventions were a dialectic between what was either spatially and/or structurally framed and pre-determined, while the artist's response was to aesthetically re-functionalise a non-functional (at least recognisably so) or underutilised material situation. With regard to sculpture and installation this has always been evident from the outset. The works of this first decade therefore laid the epistemological groundwork for what has subsequently followed.

Throughout the 1980s, and beginning in 1981, he began his lifelong to date involvement in Tenerife and the Canary Islands. This took the form of re-orchestrating derelict or abandoned architectural situations by line-drawing the outlines of the ruins and creating a sense of visibility to something that existed but went unnoticed. Similarly, this was applied to found and rusting car wrecks, or painted debris fragments that were laid out and arranged on the ground and thereby asserted their formerly unrecognised presence. The works were called simply 'Interventions', their purpose being to turn the non-specific into the site-specific, to frame and foreground the innocuous and disregarded. These 'Interventions' at times were expressed (beyond those using white outlined structures) in intensely colouristic terms that were often being continuously transformed. In his 'Movables and Immovables' series in 1982 a scooter becomes a signifying trope through its various stages of coloured transformation and site-specific positioning. While the 'Interventions' suggest a legacy of sorts of land and environmental art of the 1970s, it has neither the frequent monumental tendency found in Smithson, nor the peripatetic poetic reveries one might associate with Richard Long. Bosslet's engagement with the open space environment is one of intense adaptation, and one that has an immediate and direct transformative effect. At the

same time the photographic record of several of these works such as Concomitant II (Begleiterscheinung II) reveal a kinship with Bosslet's 'Floor Plan and Supply Grid' paintings of the years 1985-88. The fact that the paintings are executed in industrial materials with strong architectural associations (plaster, aluminium, asphalt, steel, and copper) only furthers the integrated relationship within Bosslet's artistic practices. The Canary Islands environmental 'Interventions' and the related series called 'Reformations and Side Effects', have continued throughout Bosslet's work to this day. In each instance the engagement with the land environment has created an intentional sense of displacement, the signifier to sign stability of what formerly existed is transformed dramatically and creates new parameters of aesthetic meaning.

The dialectical use of architecture and industrially related materials is central to all of Eberhard Bosslet's artistic undertakings. It forms the intellectual infrastructure of his artistic consciousness, whereby issues of space, structure and matter (as in 'Material & Effect') are but a natural extension of his ideas. In 1985, Bosslet began his architectural-spatial interventions which he called simply 'Supporting Measures', and which have continued in ever more sophisticated variation in his practices through today. By utilising adjustable pole props conventionally used to shore up architectural components such as walls and ceilings, the structures deal with a sense of connectedness and support. Aspects of multiple material unit interconnectedness are an important sub-text that runs throughout all of Bosslet's works. However, unlike the open air 'Interventions' which could be said to aesthetically re-functionalise a pre-existing sense of place, the interior 'Supporting Measures' might be said (in one respect) to de-functionalise it, or at least make the viewer newly aware of its existence as a negotiable and operative space. At times the columnar structures might be considered coercive and containing as in his Stammheim (1986), whereas in other instances such as in his works Presumptuous I & II (Anmassend I & II) created for Documenta 8 (1987), the work poses a question of neutralised necessity. Incorporating elements like a found filing cabinets, a desk or planks and boards, the vertical structures pose utility but then deny it, since we know installed as they are in the Kassel Fridericianum that they serve no actual architectural stress related function being installed to suggest only the 'presumptuous' manner of their presentation – a literal intervention. Similarly, the double columnar, dado and palette stacked work Atlas HB (1987), installed at the Kunsthalle Bremen served no actual structural purpose save that of interposing its status and as an immediately located presence. Nevertheless the materials used and presented do serve the function of inferred connotation, which is to say pointing (indexically speaking) to the hidden visible processes of construction implicit to architecture. Furthermore in works like UN-ANT Expander (1985), or the Paris installation of Expander I (1990), through to Expander I Berlin (2008), the thrust is horizontally expressed between walls rather than floor to ceiling. In each case, however, the idea of architectural stress and tension is both evoked and inferred. In some small measure these support-based structural undertakings reflect something of the Düsseldorf constructivist traditions of the 1960s and 70s, since their work also involved repetition, stacking, strapping, industrial materials, and propping procedures, that are all familiar to the works of artists like Joseph Beuys, Blinky Palermo, Imi Knoebel, Rainer Ruthenbeck, and Reinhard Mucha. And these influences are often redolent also of the trajectory of painting taken by Eberhard Bosslet that will be discussed hereafter. In distinction, however, the 'Supporting Measures' of Bosslet are far more architectural in terms of reference and materially interactive with their specific environmental settings rather than the compositional arrangements often seen in the Düsseldorf constructivist tradition.

While the large body of works of Bosslet create a welter of different applications the material serialisation of his ideas present a coherent consistency. For example the 'Modular Structures' (begun 1988 ongoing) are frequently based on series of sketches that work through each project installation in great detail. These modular units tend to be autonomous but paradoxical inasmuch as they function simultaneously as sculpture, object, and constructed Donald Judd-like minimalist systems. Here again we find the slippage between the signifier and the sign, as the installed modules create a sculptural and objective presence, but at the same time confuse the viewer response by appearing as if it were nothing more than part of an anonymous industrial power unit, or simply a left over component from an abandoned central heating system. Though it must be said that through their serialised development over twenty years the 'Modular Structures' have become ever more sculptural and less industrially focussed in pictorial terms. The repeated unit elements as modules have as a result become colourful, presenting a painted appearance as the pictorial skin masks something of their former industrial and mass produced utilitarian nakedness. The same might be said of the pneumatic pieces (1989-98) that use compressed air to inflate cushion components that are expanded between chain-constrained mass produced industrial units such as grill structures, radiators, tyres and wheel units, and stool elements. Indeed small industrial units of pseudo-furniture are incorporated into Bosslet's sculptures and form something of a

sub-current of changed signification throughout his work. Many of these pneumatic installations incorporate the sculpture and accumulated object-based elements within an architecture attaching them to columns and wall elements by means of strapping, cladding or pneumatic systems of suspension. So too with his industrial unit light works that he first began in 1979, while he was still at art school in Berlin, and which have continued to be consistently and expressively developed at different times throughout Bosslet's subsequent art production.

The complex dialectic of interior/exterior floor, wall, and ceiling, needs to be constantly re-stated in the work of Bosslet, and is sometimes more readily understood in relation to his direct use of painting. From the outset the artist has always had an interest in spatial partitioning and separation, and as early as his painted 'Portal' works of 1979, this has frequently been expressed through works devoted to doors, gates and fences. The Blinky Palermo-like floor-based 'Variable – Painted Panels' of 1980-81, and the four-face painted cardboard dado-like boxes summon up obvious repetition of the forms found familiarly in the works of a Sol Le Witt type minimalism. Similarly the painted multicolour chains of this period, cast onto the ground sometimes as a simple floor sculpture, or, conversely, as engaged open air environmental interventions. Hence the paintings of Bosslet express the same coherent use of industrial materials turned to aesthetic painterly use as in his three-dimensional works. In a whole series of colour based glossy paper and colour-based photo-works in the first half of the 1980s, Bosslet experimented constantly with notions of the wall as both a site of illusion and reality. Sometimes real elements were included against the painted wall environments then photographed. Most notable perhaps are Bosslet's so-called 'Floor Plan & Supply Grid' paintings (1985-88), and his 'Enamel Plates' (1987-89), which use not only aspects of the floor plan but also alludes to the grid-like connectedness of the modern world. In this respect they stand in for not only the implied cybernetic nature of the world in the 1980s, but also envision the subsequent reality of mother-board technology within computing. These abstract grid-like configurations were a painting phenomenon of the 1980s, and commonly associated with the work of abstract Neo-Geometric artists like Peter Halley. But not only are Bosslet's applied materials industrially sourced, but the support materials were often found mass produced materials. Bosslet's painting on old car windscreens and glass fragments beginning in 1980 has been a periodic form of creative engagement through to today. His most important public walls commission for the Duisberg-Meiderich Subway Station 'Auf dem Damm' (1996-2000), and totally designed by Bosslet, is a major project executed through paint on glass. And while painting on glass has a long history the integrated relationship to the architecture of a modern transport system was not the least of Bosslet's achievements. The artist's recent use of glass as a surface (2003-ongoing) has been with sheet glass that has had variable sized holes cut though it, and has the effect that the painted and transparent areas of the glass surface create a subtle set of interactions with the wall onto to which they are hung and/or mounted at any given time.

Over the last decade Bosslet's use of repetition of forms has continued but in a somewhat different direction with a renewed emphasis on the public space. The use of what he calls his 'Biometric Sculptures' (polyurethane and fibreglass, 2001 ongoing) which look like large asymmetrical jelly moulds, or like miniature fishponds as seen in garden centres. Brightly coloured they create an engaged interactive environment within the public space, where persons often sit on them, and they have also in other circumstances been floated onto lake and/or river settings. More recently his series of 'Circles' (2007 ongoing) created with shopping trolleys installed in supermarket car parks, or his star form circles made by galvanised fencing units has extended the artist's investigations of mass produced multiple units than can be turned to other uses. At the same time Bosslet has renewed again his involvement with the Canary Islands. For thirty or more years the sculptural work of Eberhard Bosslet has reconfigured the parameters of perception and immediate comprehension. At the same time the signifier to sign basis of the materials he has used and adopted become displaced into a new open-ended set of meanings. What we continually confront in this artist's works is a sense of slippage, one that intentionally refocuses the viewer to the opaque space that exists between human perception and the sign.