

Eberhard Bosslet

EN - Stepken, Angelika: Notes, Activation, Catalog of Material & Wirkung, Kunsthaus Dresden, Jul. 1998

Material & Wirkung, Catalog Kunsthaus Dresden June 1998, by ANGELIKA STEPKEN

Notes, Activation

Beginnings: To consider “Material & Wirkung” (“Material & Effect”) in 1998 on the occasion of a show in Dresden is a complex undertaking. “Material & Wirkung” was in the first half of the eighties a conception formulated and practiced by at that time seven artists working in West Berlin. “Material & Wirkung” was at the same time an association and an organiser of interventions in urban spaces as well as of installations and performances like in 1983/84 in the “Pankehallen HETAL” site of a former safe manufacturer in Berlin’s Wedding district. “Material & Wirkung” was an open working context which involved a great number of projectbased artists over the years. Although the word “art” did not even appear in a “Material & Wirkung” statement in 1981 they publicised and promoted both decisively and enquiringly an understanding of a time and/or site-specific art form in which the art work itself was to be seen as a “vehicle of perception”. “Material & Wirkung” had a beginning but no acknowledged ending. Obligations behind associativative thinking had to be continually reconstituted for the new. Now three of the original founding members are trading under their “old” label and making claim to its continuity and contemporary relevance. And at the same time “Material & Wirkung” becomes even itself the material of the effect of its own history. Rather than analysing these different historical and artistic levels this short text will focus on an assumption about an interface between their times and places - a focus on an understanding of ACTIVATION. Activation is an energetical process latent in all kinds of forms.

Berlin, 1981: Twenty years after the erection of the Berlin Wall (and only seven years before its then unforeseeable fall) West Berlin was not considered as a centre for art. In the seventies, one characterised the so-called “half-city” with the Berlin Realists. Only a few people attempted to keep up with the (western) international art discourse. In the Berlin artworld, Minimalism, Concept Art or an expanded art understanding had hardly found any kind of appropriate footing. The artworld survived on economy drive. In 1979, the “Jungen Wilden” from Moritzplatz gradually emerged as new, exportable hopefuls before a mystified Berlin artworld. Despite a provincial institutional infrastructure, the “Capital City of Absurdity” (Remy Zaugg) attracted artists from all directions for either shorter or longer working periods. And out of the difficulties of the self-interned situation were born the virtues of self-organisation: community action groups and squats mobilised the political situation in the early eighties and, following the example of the self-help galleries of the sixties, artists developed alternative models of artistic production, presentation and representation. While some of these initiatives were simply interested in attracting publicity to their studio-based output, groups like “Büro Berlin” or “Material & Wirkung” reflected on the conditions of reception and production of art by making and publicising just that. Ten years later this work had already become a “historical chapter”: what had once been possible to investigate “outside” the machinery of the artworld had since been devoured and digested by its rapidly expanding system. The general fundamentals adhered to by “Material & Wirkung” mentioned at the beginning of this text - that related to the time and site-specifics of the artistic intervention - are now an established part of an all-encompassing event-culture in the repertoire of successful art practice (... be there, never miss out, mix it ...). “In Situ” works have meanwhile catapulted all sorts of middle-of-the-road towns onto the world map of international art.

Energy of a work/vehicle of perception: “Material & Wirkung” was more than a historical phenomena. The conception was so formulated in 1981 that it could not be practiced independently of natural and social conditions, but would rather declare exactly those conditions as the material of its artistic research and selfreflection. The understanding of the term material was so expansive that everything from matter, objects and creatures to structures and systems in the natural, artificial, economical, scientific, social and cultural space was of relevance. “Effect” was understood as being “all qualities of comprehension, reception and experience resulting from and leading to the materials”. This meant that, for example in contrast to the still

virulent understanding of material in Minimalism and Arte Povera at the beginning of the seventies, "Material & Wirkung" did not assume material to be "objective", with its effect as a dialogue actually prescribing the spectator's experience of the subject. "Material & Wirkung" worked much more so with the construction and observation of visually or audibly experienced processes, in which the observer was confronted with his or her own experience in the material - and also with the blind spot in his or her perception, that blurred ratio in the relationship observer and observed.

"Material & Wirkung's" projects were about analogical artistic experiments with notions of order, which put perception itself as a progressive integral to the furthering of our senses in question. What kind of information does the visible carry what should one do with so-called information? Bernd Schulz once positioned this problematic in a succinct catalogue text as being in the Duchampian "tradition" of the "sterile desires of the bachelor apparatus". Programmatic for "Material & Wirkung's" project-based work was - or is - (if one can make such a generalisation about the numerous artists involved) the charging of each fracture in perception, of the rendering of artistic information through eye and ear, with pressure and energy. Essentially, a preoccupation with energy and power ratios, in life as well as in art. And the perception of ratios as the understanding of an "effect chain". The art, or the arrangement of work, takes on the status of a vehicle for the transmission of energy. Early Modernism operated fundamentally with the enquiries and results of natural scientific research. In the second half of this century, preoccupations seem no longer to originate from the premises of natural science but from its consequences and phenomena. Over the years, "Material & Wirkung" stuck close to "natural" matter, to the powers of its own system and the paradoxes of its technical simulation."

Art – Nature – Science: In the HETAL events of 1983/84 in the Pankehallen in Berlin-Wedding, "Material & Wirkung" operated specifically with the image of a "laboratory" as a space of natural scientific research. Natural energy was transferred into art, whether by the dynamics of water, wind or gas. The performative character of the events - the presentations lasted between one and three days - was to be understood in the context of a temporary work which freed itself from material circulation and which on its direct observation would leave a lasting impression. The atmosphere of the industrial factory hall provided a framework for three-dimensional installations and performances which were still relatively uninfluenced by the seduction of technological image and memory media. Indeed, the question of the perception of energy by the eye has become no less virulent since mass cultural change from the industrial to the electronic age. The so often cited disappearance of the real is not identical to the disappearance of real energy, but a question of how the latter is to be visualised or perceived.

Endings: Three artists, who, like almost all those previous participants in "Material & Wirkung", have established themselves in contemporary art practice since the eighties as individual figures with a consistent body of work, activate their lengthy friendship and collegial ties and regroup under the exhibition title "Material & Wirkung". Eberhard Bosslet works primarily with the physical pressure ratios of corporeal objects, using materials from industry and administration. The space is charged by its objective arrangement while the physical relationships of the materials to one another apply themselves to social principles of order. Otmar Sattel operates with biochemical processes, with the self-ordered dynamics of materially contained gases. His energy sculptures aim at a physiological reactionary mechanism in the observer, something which lies beyond individual reception. Humerously loaded tensions create the charging and discharging of psychological energies. Werner Klotz makes seeing devices and perceptual instruments with the seductive perfection of scientific apparatus. Their use implodes at the moment of collision between a rational analytical approach and the (shock and) desire felt on losing one's distance to the image. To trace the genesis of this latest work back to the origins of "Material & Wirkung" would be the task of future retrospectives. Integral was/ and still is, the critical point of the transformation and transmission of energy. In this respect, the end remains indeterminable.