

SATZBAUPLAN THOMAS LOCHER

LEARN FOR LIFE / STOPPING THE DECONSTRUCTION OF LANGUAGE.

The pejorative meaning of "didactic" has taken root so solidly that no one asks whether the avoidance of didactics might not be in the interest of all those concerned with preventing any extracurricular learning.

Calling an artistic project "too didactic" always knocks the wind out of its sails. This qualification conceals the fear that we might actually learn something from art, that is, call up usable information.

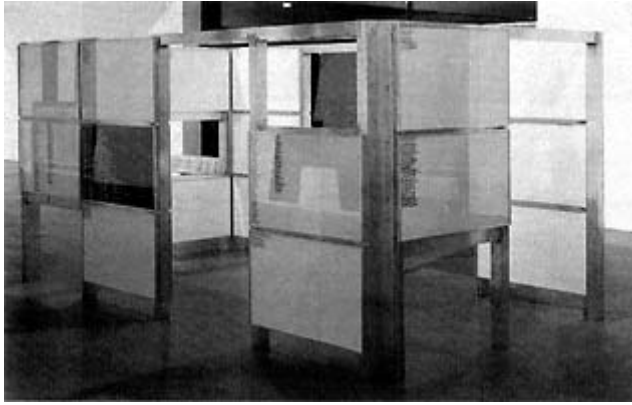
Yet that seems to be precisely what Thomas Locher is claiming when he resorts to tried-and-true learning methods (tables, charts, lists), even though his claim (artistic experience as a learning experience) might then collapse: for the orders that he sets up can be refuted instantly.

Thus, my point in the following is to advocate not an art that transmits knowledge, but an art with "cognitive usability",¹ which doubly exploits its lack of obligation towards science. For the artist who fiddles about with scientific books has a twofold advantage; he can convey results in an unorthodox way (owing no verifiability to the discipline), and he can lend art a breath of scientificity and verifiability. What this means is that the artificiality of the scientific fact is exposed and the facticity of aesthetic accuracy is demonstrated. Naturally, these equations, which should be labeled "art information" and "science construction", do not work out: and indeed, Thomas Locher goes beyond them, if only because in his works, aesthetic transcends utility — the presentation in the light box is more than what a word demands, or: art is more than information. It is left to the consumer to favor either the aesthetic or the cognitive usability of Thomas Locher's work.

What are the reasons for transporting words to light boxes or furniture? The first important reason can be an insight gained from conceptual art of the 1960s: the use of language and the concomitant reduction of the visible are a far cry from protecting against total encroachment. Indeed, the opposite has become the case. In the past, a reduced art product that based its outer appearance on its practical value signified a possibility of preventing such encroachment; today, it is precisely the reduced, straightforward appearance that guarantees instant encroachment with disregard of all contents. Which, in turn, proves that the original intention, or rather, the means applied towards it, will frequently, and even years later, cause them to be used to realize non-intention as well.

Ideas and words are just as marketable in their most reduced form as other commodities. As a result, Thomas Locher has decided to give his words and numbers more of a presentation.

The other reasons are inherent in form/content necessities, which, although not compelling, are nevertheless evident: the light box is a common form of presentation in advertising, lending authority and visibility to what is said, and the utilitarian objects (run-of-the-mill furnishings) have sentences carved into them that are associated with the situation of the room and work, and the weight down a head surrounded by furniture ("what is indicated"; "do I misunderstand this"). It is only the state of being surrounded by things that promotes a reified consciousness.



LANGUAGE WORK

Does anyone actually go to the trouble of picking out the basic vocabulary from a language? We are held back from doing so by our awareness of the inevitably resulting lacuna. At the outset of Locher's language works, there are reflections about conditioning by culture, about the determinedness of all artistic reception by language, and about the necessity of representing the linguistic system of rules, which is not represented quite correctly, yet is nevertheless honored, if not celebrated, by means of an elegant presentation.

LET US CELEBRATE RATIONALISM, positivism — our tradition of thinking — for the inadequacy of the system and the falseness of the overview already become blatant during the celebration! Let us commit ourselves to the rules that dictate our thinking, and let us work with the methods provided by a positivist science (tables, graphs, lists)! Let us yield to that impulse to put in order, to articulate and juxtapose, and let us concentrate on the specific, given material (the basic vocabulary), instead of letting our minds roam unfettered, giving free rein to our imagination!

The widespread deconstruction of language will then stop of its own accord, once the non-oppositionality of opposites or the insufficiency of basic vocabularies is brought into focus or into the light box.

Thomas Locher refers to the recipient, the gallery context, the surrounding field in so far as he changes the language according to the site; however, this is not a real reference so much as a metaphor for our awareness that a reference would now be suitable. Adjustment to the respective native tongue is an inadequate nod to the given specific local situation; yet it is also a sign that the letter cannot be skirted.

And if the basic Italian vocabulary contains numerous terms that involve eating, this takes into account the actual linguistic conditions, it also means that someone has finally succeeded in reversing practice into theory.

Isabelle Graw

(Translated from German by Joachim Neugroschel)

NOTE

1 According to Nelson Goodman, all aesthetic experience is cognitive: "Under cognitive, I include all aspects of knowing and understanding, from perceptual discrimination to recognition of patterns and emotional insight, as well as logical deduction."

Courtesy Tanja Grunert und Michael Janssen, Köln