

AUF WUNSCH VON RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER
WIDMET SICH DIESE AUSGABE DEM THEMA
Kunst und Vernunft. DER KÜNSTLER
SELBST GESTALTETE DIE UMSCHLAGRÜCK-
SEITE, WÄHREND DER UMSCHLAG SO-
WIE DIESE DOPPELSEITE UND DIE LAND-
SCHAFTSDARSTELLUNGEN IM INNERN DES
HEFTES AUF SEINE ANREGUNGEN ZURÜCK-
GEHEN. UMSCHLAGRÜCKSEITE: Gehirn /
Blp; UMSCHLAG: RODINS Denker IN
EINEM BILDAUSSCHNITT DER Gemälde-
studie mit Mann und Hund VON
ROBERT ZÜND (1827-1909); DIESE DOPPEL-
SEITE: L'homme à la houe VON JEAN-
FRANÇOIS MILLET (1863).

AT RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER'S REQUEST, THIS
ISSUE IS DEVOTED TO THE THEME OF *Art
and Reason*. THE BACK COVER IS HIS OWN
DESIGN; THE FRONT COVER, THIS DOUBLE-
PAGE AND THE LANDSCAPE REPRODUCTIONS
THROUGHOUT ARE BASED ON HIS SUGGES-
TIONS. BACK COVER: *Brain / Blp*; FRONT
COVER: RODIN'S *Thinker* IN A DETAIL OF
Study for a Painting with Man and Dog
BY ROBERT ZÜND (1827-1909); THIS DOUBLE-
PAGE: *L'homme à la houe* BY JEAN-FRAN-
ÇOIS MILLET (1863).





**RICHARD
ARTSCHWAGER**

Einleitung

Richard Artschwager als Collaboration-Künstler dieser Ausgabe überraschte uns, indem er eine neue Form der Zusammenarbeit vorschlug. Er wünschte sich Beiträge zum Thema *Kunst und Vernunft* anstelle von Texten, die sich mit ihm und seiner Kunst beschäftigen. Gerne haben wir diese Herausforderung angenommen und freuen uns darüber, was ein Künstler einmal mehr in Bewegung zu setzen vermag: Parkett als Plattform, wo vom Verhaltensforscher zur Schriftstellerin, vom Wissenschaftshistoriker und Philosophen bis zur Biographin das klassische Thema *Vernunft und Kunst* oder die zwei Pole Ratio und Sinnlichkeit neu zur Reflexion und Diskussion angeboten werden.

Richard Artschwager gelingt es mit seinem Themenvorschlag, das Potential unseres Mediums, dessen Anliegen es ist, auf internationaler Ebene zwischen Sichtbarem und Erkennbarem zu vermitteln, sinnvoll einzusetzen.

Das Thema Kunst und Vernunft greifen traditionsgemäss Theoretiker auf; diesmal macht es ein Künstler zu seinem Anliegen, was eine Verschiebung des Blickwinkels mit sich bringt – Vernunft unter der Optik der Kunst und nicht Kunst aus der Sicht der Vernunft. Also eine Themenstellung, die Kunst nicht nur nach ihrem Erkenntnisgehalt und ihrer gesellschaftlichen Bedeutung befragt – und damit den sinnlichen Eigenwert von Kunst beschneidet –, sondern eine Befragung des Themas, die die beiden scheinbar unvereinbaren Erkenntnisweisen (das

Intuitive und das Rationale) miteinander konfrontiert, ja vielleicht füreinander zu gewinnen sucht. Darüber hinaus gewährt Richard Artschwager uns Lesern durch seine Wahl Einblick in die Problemstellungen, die ihn als Künstler im Zusammenhang mit Kunst und Kunstproduktion beschäftigen und somit für das eigene Selbstverständnis wesentlich sind. B.C.

Introduction

*The collaborating artist for this issue, Richard Artschwager, surprised us by suggesting a new kind of collaboration. Instead of focusing on the artist and his artwork, he asked us to devote the issue to a discussion on *Art and Reason*. It was a pleasure to accept the challenge and to discover, once again, how much an artist can set in motion. This time our art magazine has become a podium for the behavioral scientist, writer, science historian, philosopher, and biographer to reevaluate and reflect on the classical theme of *Reason and Art*, on the two poles, ratio and sensuality.*

Richard Artschwager's suggestion successfully exploits the potential of an art magazine whose objective it is to promote the exchange between the visible and the knowable, between perception and cognition, on an international basis.

Traditionally the domain of the theoretician, the issue, when it becomes an artist's concern, is shifted to another angle of approach: not art in terms of reason, but reason in the light of art. A subject matter that not only inquires into the epistemological content and social relevance of art, thus curtailing art's intrinsic sensuality, but a subject matter that confronts or perhaps seeks to win over two seemingly irreconcilable modes of cognition (the intuitive and the rational). In addition, Richard Artschwager gives the reader insight into problems concerning art and the production of art that are essential to his understanding of himself as an artist. B.C.

ART AND REASON

It comes from the anthropologists and goes like this: the trouble with a human being arises from our being strongly individualist on one hand and social creatures on the other. There is an alternative to this schism that I like that goes like this: humankind can walk about and is capable of inhabiting a physical space and a social space as well. I bring this up because I think it can be of some use in dealing with our topic – Reason. We are looking at Art in connection with this theme not just because this is an art publication, but because reason and art stand correctly for the two fundamental modes of knowing. When we speak of both we are dealing with ancient as well as modern practices, and I think that the second characterization of their relationship – one of complex conduct, rather than schizophrenia – provides the better reach across time; there are substantial carry-overs of the ancient practices into those of the present day.

We are animals. In this branch of life we enjoy an advantage over plants: we can move about as we please. At the beginning, this mobility was a lot like that of plants – just faster. Oxygen to carbon dioxide is simply faster and there has always been an excess of power with our kind, much more than would be required to power a suite of tropisms. So, there is always a certain amount of movement to no particular purpose. We move through air and not dirt, generally speaking.

With the advent of memory, another increment is added to this excess in the form of virtual movement – a whole universe of the subjunctive; maybe starting with dreams that played back precisely the day's events. But somewhere some actual levering of mental processes, some actual arranging, took place. There arose a sense that there is such a thing as sets. This rough axiom would be enough to set art into play and reason to work. This hypothetical event – “the birth of the axiom” – marks the start of reason,

its branching off from the older, more holistic knowing. It also proclaims the social space.

The natural habitat for art is the physical space where movement is possible – that is to say, movement which is free and whimsical and essentially to no purpose, except possibly to celebrate what is generally meant by respect for life.

By social space I mean a space in which every move has a value: of yes or no, of good or bad. This (binary) space is also the space of Kant's practical reason. But reason as a whole belongs to the physical space as well; that is its birthplace. One could argue that reason and social space created one another, maybe when someone said, “Don't eat that leaf with the glabrous underside and serrated edge!” So the social space is a kind of subspace inside the physical space.

More surmise: Reason developed in physical space as a light skimming of the flux of experience, occasionally supplementing or grafting into the net of instincts. In art-making, any such skimmings are stirred back into the flux to increase its potency. You see this in art made 30 millenia ago and also 30 days ago. Nothing is thrown away. Editing, pruning, distillation, abridgement in general, are for the most part foreign to it, but integral to reason as embodied in language – that Procrustean practice.

The physical and social space are facts of modern as well as ancient life. Side by side they proclaim, also maintain, our notorious adaptability. Now our physical space is eroded to the point of being endangered, survives where (naively) there are few people and lots of space and where a person or persons can reside in pleasurable solipsism – watching, listening, not editing or throwing anything away – entering and departing this state each at their pleasure. Probably most people in today's world are so much a part of a corporate sensibility that they would be unable to conceive of a physical space.

KUNST UND VERNUNFT

Es ist eine Erkenntnis der Anthropologen, die besagt: Das Dilemma der menschlichen Existenz besteht im Gegenüber seines ausgeprägten Individualismus und seiner sozialen Anlage.

Dazu gibt es eine Alternative, die mir lieber ist, und die lautet: Der Mensch kann sich frei bewegen und ist fähig, gleichermassen einen physischen Raum wie einen sozialen Raum zu bewohnen. – Ich erwähne das, weil ich glaube, dass das bei der Behandlung unseres Themas – der Vernunft – hilfreich sein kann. Gleichzeitig betrachten wir Kunst unter diesem Aspekt, nicht weil dies eine Kunst-Zeitschrift ist, sondern weil Kunst und Vernunft stellvertretend für zwei grundlegende Erkenntnisarten stehen. Wenn wir jedoch von diesen beiden Arten der Erkenntnis sprechen, gebrauchen wir sie im alten wie im neuen Sinn; und ich denke, dass die Alternative – die eher komplex als schizophren ist – den besseren Bezug zwischen den Zeiträumen gewährleistet. So gibt es einen Sprachgebrauch, der aus der Vergangenheit stammt, jedoch zugleich die Gegenwart mitbestimmt bzw. mitkonstituiert.

Wir sind Tiere. Diesbezüglich geniessen wir den Pflanzen gegenüber einen Vorteil: Wir können uns bewegen, wie es uns gefällt. Am Anfang war diese Bewegungsfähigkeit der der Pflanzen ähnlich, bloss schneller. Sauerstoff wirkt einfach schneller als Kohlendioxyd, und ein Überschuss an Kraft war unserer Art schon seit jeher eigen; mehr als es erfordert, eine Folge von Tropismen in Gang zu setzen. So entsteht immer ein gewisses Quantum an Bewegung ohne bestimmten Grund. Wir bewegen uns an der Luft und nicht im Dreck, allgemein ausgedrückt.

Mit dem Aufkommen des Erinnerungsvermögens kam ein neuer Aspekt zu diesem Überschuss hinzu in Form von imaginierter Bewegung – ein ganzes Universum von Möglichkeit tat sich auf. Vielleicht hat es mit Träumen angefangen, die die Ereignisse eines Tages noch einmal genau wiederholten. Aber irgendwo muss ein geistiger Prozess stattgefunden haben, wurde

eine ordnende Kraft in Gang gesetzt. Es erwachte ein Bewusstsein für so etwas wie Gesetzmässigkeiten. Dieses grob formulierte Axiom würde genügen, um Kunst ins Spiel und Vernunft in die Arbeit zu bringen. Dieses hypothetische Ereignis – «die Geburt des Axioms» – kennzeichnet den Ursprung von Vernunft, ihr Abzweigen von dem älteren, eher holistischen Bewusstsein. Es bestimmt ausserdem den sozialen Raum.

Das natürliche Habitat für die Kunst ist der physische Raum. Er ist so definiert, dass Bewegung darin möglich ist – gemeint ist Bewegung, die frei und unberechenbar ist, ohne Zweck, ausser vielleicht dem zu zelebrieren, was man allgemein unter «Respekt für Leben(digkeit)» versteht.

Unter sozialem Raum verstehe ich einen Raum, wo jeder Schritt seine Bedeutung hat: ja oder nein, gut oder böse usw. Dieser (binäre) Raum ist auch der Raum von Kants Praktischer Vernunft. Aber Vernunft als ein Ganzes gehört ebenfalls zum physischen Raum, er ist deren Geburtsort. Man könnte behaupten, Vernunft und sozialer Raum hätten sich gegenseitig erschaffen, vielleicht als jemand gesagt hat: «Iss dieses Blatt mit der unbehaarten Unterseite und dem gezackten Rand bitte nicht!» So also ist der soziale Raum eine Art «Subraum» (Unterraum) innerhalb des physischen Raums.

Weitere Mutmassungen: Vernunft hat sich im physischen Raum wie Schaum auf der Flut der Erfahrungen entwickelt, der gelegentlich auf das Netz der Instinkte übergreift oder darin hängen bleibt. Beim Kunst-Machen wird solcher Über-Schaum wieder in die Flut zurückgeleitet, um deren Kraft zu steigern. Das sieht man an der Kunst, sei sie nun 30 000 Jahre alt oder erst vor 30 Tagen gemacht worden. Nichts wird verschwendet. Korrigieren, beschneiden, ausscheiden, derartige Eingriffe sind ihr [der Kunst] eher fremd, hingegen sind sie integraler Bestandteil von Vernunft, so wie sie die Sprache verkörpert – welch eine rigide Disziplin!

Der physische Raum und der soziale Raum sind Gegebenheiten des heutigen wie des vergangenen Lebens.

ON ARTSCHWAGER ON ART

It is difficult to accept Richard Artschwager's claim that art and reason are "the two fundamental modes of knowing" when in truth reason plays so central a role in art, which cannot be understood except as an exercise of reason. We may appreciate this by considering the relationship between art and art criticism, as Artschwager invites us to do under "Questions of possible interest."

At the very least it is the task of the critic to present a description of a work explaining why the work's components are as they are. This is a demand for the reasons – the artist's reasons – for the components being as they are. One ex-

planation of why there is a peacock in Botticelli's *ADORATION* is that the flesh of the peacock was believed not to decay, this making it an exact symbol for the immortal body of Christ in the iconographic idiom with which Botticelli worked. But as an item in the language of symbols, the peacock, and hence the painting in which it figures, belongs to what Artschwager calls social, in contrast with physical, space. So if it is conceded to be art, it is difficult to see how Botticelli's *ADORATION*, dense with shared meanings, belongs to physical as against social space, or that it embodies a form of knowledge which contrasts with rea-

son: there is reason in operation at every point of composition and color and significance.

This will be as true for a work of Artschwager's as of one from the Renaissance. It is always a fair question to ask why one of his characteristic furniture-like fabrications makes use of formica. This is a form of the question "Why?", the answer to which takes the form of "Because..." And "Because" is that word in English through which we state the reason. The reason belongs to the interpretation of the work, where we explain why it was that the artist used this material, as rich in associations as the peacock was in medieval

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symbology, rather than some other. It, too, locates the work in social rather than physical space inasmuch as formica would repel one class of aesthetes and mark as belonging to a certain world of taste those who were indifferent to it or chose it for its practicality, like plastic slip-covers. Only because it can be explained the way the critic endeavors to explain it does it belong to the sphere of art rather than the mere world of things. Art is a rational activity through and through. The use of formica was a rational artistic choice.

Artschwager is romantically wrong when he says that "The natural habitat for art is the physical space where movement is possible – that is to say, movement which is free and whimsical and essentially to no purpose." The philosopher Hegel writes: "The man in the street thinks he is free if it is open to him to act as he pleases but his very arbitrariness implies that he is not free."¹ Indeed, in Hegel's view there is an incoherence in the idea of free purposeless behavior. One is free, Hegel goes on to say, only when one acts rationally, and then, as a rational agent: "I am not acting as a particular individual but in accordance with the concepts of ethics [read 'the concepts

of art'] in general." In Hegel's beautiful vision, "The rational is the high road which everyone travels, where no one is conspicuous." By this he means that reasons are universal and define a community of beings defined as rational through accepting those reasons as explanatory – and justificatory – of actions.

I mention Hegel in this context because he is one of the few philosophers, other than Kant, to connect reason and art and freedom and universality up in a single systematic and coherent manner:

When great artists complete a masterpiece, we may speak of its inevitability, which means that the artist's idiosyncrasy has completely disappeared... But the worse the artist is, the more we see in his work the artist, his singularity, his arbitrariness.

To be sure, Hegel is speaking here of great art, of the masterpiece, which compels through its universality, and which, accordingly, has freedom and reason as both its condition and its subject. It is about the viewers of it as rational beings. It is art as a mode of philosophy, and it was indeed Hegel's powerful thought that art and philosophy together are moments of what

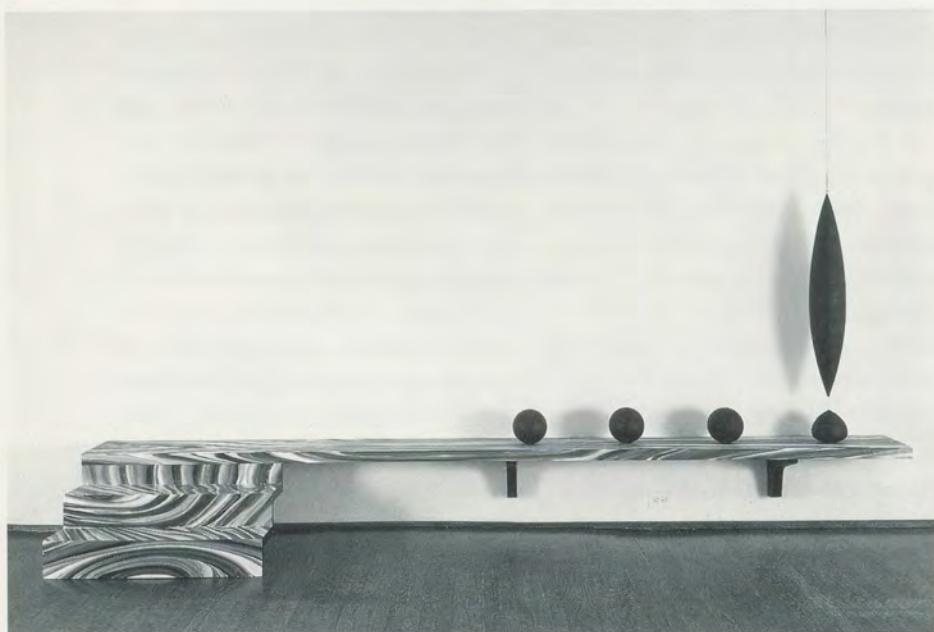
he termed "Absolute Spirit," different modes of the same thing. Of course, art embodies reason in sensuous media, and there is accordingly an ineradicable sensuous dimension in all art. But it is art and not just sensuousness only so far as it is reason that is embodied.

To be sure, not all art consists of masterpieces, but I incline to the view that the masterpiece – and here I am being as romantic as Artschwager – aspires to that ideal. Bad art is particular rather than universal, arbitrary rather than free, but upon reflection we can see that it can never be art and altogether arbitrary and particular, for were it to attain this total degree of badness, it would not be art any longer, and would have become mere animal movement. "Animal movement" can be art only when done for a reason, and hence it is no longer what Artschwager means as animal movement as such.

So it is art only as defined by a universality it may fall short of if the artist is not great. Since great art has as its condition and subject freedom and reason, hence what we must regard as criteria of moral value, art by its very nature belongs to what Artschwager calls "social space." For by the latter he

¹) Hegel, *THE PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT*, translation by T.M. Knox, 1942: Oxford University Press, p. 230.

RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER, UP AND ACROSS/AUF UND QUER, 1984–85,
POLYCHROME ON WOOD/POLYCHROM-GEFASSTES HOLZ,
61 x 144 x 35"/155 x 366 x 89 cm.



means "A space in which every move has a value: of yes or no, of good or bad." This he terms (correctly) "The space of Kant's practical reason." But nothing is art that does not belong to this space, for the work of art is the

product of countless practical syllogisms which it is the task of the critic to resurrect in accounting for the work.

Artschwager writes "Editing, pruning, distillation, abridgement in general, are for the most part foreign [to art],

but integral to language, to reason as embodied in language." Were I to offer a critical abstract of one of Artschwager's characteristic pieces, from his classic period, one of his sharply crafted furnituresque cubes of fitted and inlaid formica, a table or a desk or a chair, I could not do better than to describe it as "edited, pruned, distilled, abridged." An Artschwager chair is a chair distilled to its platonic essence, all trace of ornamentation edited and pruned away, abridged to the intellectual state of pure chairhood, part of a kit through which we teach the meanings of "chair" and "table" to

...!

In an Artschwager work of 1984–85, UP AND ACROSS, composed of a platform ascended to by a low flight of steps and supported by two brackets, the entire structure painted with garish whorls of gray and white, looking like something a tap-dancer might perform on in a black-and-white movie of the Forties, there are, at the extreme right of the platform, three spheres and an

explanation mark: "...!" Suspended dots and exclamation points belong to punctuated discourse, are modes of print through which we convey, not simply an omission (...) but excitement ("!"). In a thought-balloon in a comic strip, "...!" would convey that a stream of thought has been interrupted by an idea, a discovery. What are those punctuational signs doing in a piece of sculpture? Surely, they indicate "reason as embodied in language." They indicate reasoning or thought. UP AND ACROSS starts out as a work of sculpture ("reading," as we do, from left to right) and takes on a graphic identity, as if a written sentence, as it concludes with an exclamation. As if a discovery were made. As if it began as a thing and ended as a written utterance. It is plastic art aspiring to the condition of speech.

I have used the punctuational notation "...!" to mark the occurrence of a break in thought, a fresh idea, a possible truth.

What if this crafty and oblique master were using words in "Reason and

Art" in much the same spirit in which he used formica in the composition of his celebrated furnituristic works, and that his text stands to the ordinary genus of philosophical statements in something like the relationship in which TABLE WITH PINK TABLE CLOTH stands to the genus of tables? It is as little to be read and meditated as that cube of inlaid formica is to be sat at or dined upon. TABLE WITH PINK TABLE CLOTH (only for example) sets up conflicting impulses, appropriate respectively, but not simultaneously, to utility and to artistic contemplation. Under the guise of art it brings the incorrigibly utilitarian substance into the domain of aesthetics where its garishness proclaims it as an intruder. But in so proclaiming, it at the same time proclaims itself as the bearer of a meaning which transcends utility and invites interpretation. Words are natural bearers of meaning, and their very physical presence invites interpretation rather than aesthetic contemplation of them as marks. But if used to form an artwork, as perhaps

here, their meaning is deflected from the rules of speech and grammar onto some other plane, and we are not sure how to understand them. I took them au pied de la lettre and commenced a discourse of philosophical scolding. Suppose, though, that Artschwager has used philosophical language like verbal formica and created a work as text? Then criticism and interpretation has barely begun.

It is the practice of PARKETT to insert, for a price, a work by the artist celebrated in an issue into the issue which celebrates her or him. Leave it to Artschwager to subvert that concession to connoisseurs and collectors by blurring the boundary between text and artwork, philosophy and art, original and reproduction, by creating a work that comes with the celebrating issue of PARKETT as integral to its text. It is at once a work and the illustration of itself, and exists on more levels than I care to count.

Seite an Seite vergegenwärtigen sie uns – und erhalten damit – unsere notorische Anpassungsfähigkeit. Unser physischer Raum ist heute bis zu einem bedrohlichen Mass ausgenutzt, so dass Überleben nur noch da möglich ist, wo es (naiv ausgedrückt) wenige Menschen auf weitem Raum gibt, wo ein Mensch oder eine Gesellschaft in angenehmem Solipsismus existieren kann, mit offenen Augen und Ohren, ohne einander einzuschränken oder

verschwenderisch zu sein, sich frei entscheidend, ob sie Teil dieser Welt sein oder ihr lieber fernbleiben möchten. In der heutigen Welt [aber] sind die meisten Menschen vermutlich so sehr Bestandteil eines kollektiven Bewusstseins, dass es ihnen unmöglich ist, sich einen [derartigen] physischen Raum überhaupt vorzustellen.

(Übersetzung: Sensor)

