Margin of Utility

The purpose of this column is to explore the aesthetic frame of politics in the broad Greek sense of the term, meaning the structures of perception and discourse that construct subconscious worldviews organizing and orchestrating the realm of political possibility. In this inaugural issue, I propose to examine the discursive nexus acting as the lingua franca of the contemporary political imaginary in order to dismantle five key terms acting as so many lynchpins in the emblematic image of our times as a globalized world in which democracy is battling the evil forces of terrorism in order to spread freedom and prosperity throughout the world.

Globalization

The historical emergence of this monolithic concept can be traced back to the era around the fall of the Berlin wall. With the symbolic “end of the socialist alternative,” it galvanized a new world image of post-Cold War harmony succinctly summed up by Margret Thatcher’s claim regarding the “popular crusade of capitalism”: TINA (There Is No Alternative). Such a prognosis regarding what Francis Fukuyama has called the end of history should be readily recognisable to all of those familiar with the Marxist tradition. Indeed, Marxism, at least it its vulgar forms, was “refuted by history” precisely because of its crude economic determinism and its teleological conception of history in which there “was no alternative” to the revolution. It is in this light that we can begin to see the extent to which the master-concept globalization plays the role of a positive conceptual logo that has actually rebranded vulgar Marxist economism and teleology in order to sell a new world image under the broad heading of a marketable euphemism. The term itself

FISCHER’S DEATH 2+3+

On August 2 there closed a curated exhibition by Ryan Trecartin at Vox Populi gallery upon which Ludwig Fischer imposed “Death 2+3+.” So far as I know, it received no critical reviews and was hardly noticed by the public or much of the professional art world. This was regrettable because it was an event of considerable importance. It seemed at first surprising that it was so little noticed, for Fischer has been well known some years now for his “nefarious conceptual dealings” and “corrosive rants,” both as an exceptionally original artist and for his unseemly pedigree. Perhaps it was the bad weather that dogged the showing, perhaps it was the holiday season, but one has strong suspicions that it may also have been part of the apparatus of the “deep freeze” that so frequently attends the early years of a radical and sometimes difficult art.

This most recent of Mr. Fischer’s impositions generated one of the most densely sustained aesthetic ideas that has been come upon in some time. An opiate tranquility threatened the whole affair, engulfsed by silence, marred by touches of unexpected excitement, causing stupification, even indifference.

Modern Labyrinth

This was not, however, fortuitous. It was, I should judge, induced by the plan and materials of the idea. “Death 2+3+” was a modern labyrinth of narrow cerebral passageways constructed of punctuations, insertions, and repeated burglaries. A commodity, cut wood, vinyl, white paper, an art forum, a printer, ink, an email account and a blog, not to mention a name established an immaterial circuit leading into and out of the exhibition like a crypt (catacomb). Intestinally wound, crass and refined, almost Manichean in its lack of subtlety, which accompanies the imposition of a NAME, which tenously charts a course between the fragmentary parts. Then the object, less an object than a nodal point for a system of exchange relations, a shrine haunted by a dead god. It is indeed easier to erect a shrine than bring a god down to haunt it.

The dissolution of the object into its context here was unforgettable. Its temporal place within the exhibition unclear, before and after, inside and out a blur… beautiful in that discarded sense of the word, bestowing upon the visitor a pleasant, unsought blur… beautiful in that discarded sense of the word, bestowing upon the visitor a pleasant, unsought tranquility threatened the whole affair, engulfsed by silence, marred by touches of unexpected excitement, causing stupification, even indifference.

Instantaneous and Dramatic

Yet I believe Ludwig Fischer’s art is not of itself hard to grasp, right now. On the contrary, its impact is instantaneous and dramatic. It is an art both of high seriousness and of emotional breadth. What does present a problem is its apparent relation to an established cultural tradition deemed morose. One no longer doubts whether this is art, but a distrust and fear of such expressions remains, as though they were subtly calling upon death itself. One cannot comprehend an attitude which bluntly embraces something with all the exclusions that such a position necessitates. Perishable materials, perishable forms, perishable genius; chance, change— all conspire to damn this work and dissolve our values. Far beyond “Death 2+3+’s actual content and innumediability stands Fischer’s inadvertent quarrel with all the vapid glories, qualities and eternities which we think are History.

—Paul Kersey, Los Angeles, California