all critical acumen in the name of a simple ideological alignment: you’re either for us or you’re against us! The relatively recent change in the content of the category “enemy” reveals to what extent it is the form of the opposition—and its flexibility—that is important: yesterday, the “communists” were against democracy (which would have been news to Lenin) today “terrorists” and “tyrants” are the opponents of democracy (see the National Security Strategy of the U.S.A.).

In resisting this ideological blackmail, it is important to return to the analytic, descriptive use of the term “democracy.” It is only in doing so that we can see that we are most definitively not living in a democracy. According to the categories that go back to Plato and Aristotle, we are, strictly speaking, living in an oligarchy, and more specifically in a plutocratic oligarchy that markets itself by constructing an administered, representative pseudo-democracy: an elite class of specialists manages the power of the people and largely constructs public opinion (see Sheldon Wolin’s excellent book Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism). Indeed, “democracy” is a class ideology that serves to legitimate the excessive control of the opposition—its flexibility—that is important: yesterday, the “communists” were against democracy (which would have been news to Lenin) today “terrorists” and “tyrants” are the opponents of democracy (see the National Security Strategy of the U.S.A.).

**“Democracy” and Capitalism**

Politics has been commercialized, and the ruling minority is largely bankrolled by corporate elites, if they’re not corporate elites themselves. The “revolving door” between government and big business has become a simple smoke screen, allowing for a massive limitation of the power of the people.

**Legendary History, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Ryan Trecartin**

As Philadelphia-based artist Ryan Trecartin continues his rise through the art world two positions have coalesced. The first position is that of the postmodern, which articulates a kind of postmodern discourse: Trecartin is showing the dissolution of all subjects, all genders, all relations. There is free-play, free-attack, free-love. The other position is that of the opinion, which contends for the pitiful context, which is that Trecartin is a Marxist/Situationist line, which sees in Trecartin’s work primarily an affirmative act of culture which, in its failed subversiveness, serves only as a mirror and reflection of the dominant mode.

Trecartin’s recent artist talk at the Institute of Contemporary Art in late April gives me cause to return to the questions raised by his work and its place in contemporary U.S. culture. In considering here a quick look of the pieces he showed at the lecture and his general reception, my aim is not so much to understand the work itself as its place in these contemporary debates. Moreover, the analysis is primarily formal, and therefore necessarily partial. His lecture showed precisely why reception of his practice has been so split. For example, when asked about the appearance “queer” to his work (Trecartin is part of the ICA’s new show, Queer Vision), he deflected the meaning of queer as a gender or sexuality-based phenomenon. Rather, and I paraphrase, he stated that queer for him was a general sense of opposition to the norm. Then, he telling added, “Maybe.”

What exactly Trecartin means by opposition or norm is not entirely clear. Again, if the norm is conceived at the policing of all knowledges. I am thinking here of subject-positions, then, sure. Trecartin’s work is oppositional. If norm is defined, alternatively, as the “new spirit of capitalism,” that is, as flexible, adaptive and creative, then, well, queer has just become the new norm. The partially dialectical status of these positions is affirmed in the dissolution of both queer and norm in their mutually interchangeable positions within the opposing discourse. It is only in doing so that we can see that we are most definitively not living in a democracy. According to the categories that go back to Plato and Aristotle, we are, strictly speaking, living in an oligarchy, and more specifically in a plutocratic oligarchy that markets itself by constructing an administered, representative pseudo-democracy: an elite class of specialists manages the power of the people and largely constructs public opinion (see Sheldon Wolin’s excellent book Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism). Indeed, “democracy” is a class ideology that serves to legitimate the excessive control of the opposition—its flexibility—that is important: yesterday, the “communists” were against democracy (which would have been news to Lenin) today “terrorists” and “tyrants” are the opponents of democracy (see the National Security Strategy of the U.S.A.).

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