

Ludwig Fischer Review

In legalese the distinction between the pornographic and the erotic is somewhat straightforward: the former depicts the genitals; the latter does not. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes suggested that the difference was central to the meaning of the photograph itself: the latter has a *punctum*; the former does not. For Barthes the erotic photograph gestures beyond itself, puts the viewer in a chain of signification, reflection, momentary comprehension. The pornographic photograph can do no more than amuse. It is stuck within itself, unable to generate meaning, or even the less personal reflective capacity Barthes called the *studium*. Pornography, in other words that which *shows everything*, ultimately shows nothing, since it can only show itself.

Although there is nothing that would classify as “pornographic” in Ludwig Fischer’s intervention in the show *Yes, yes I am happy aber glücklich ich bin nicht*, this may still be the most fitting appellation for his work. Consider: (1) The reproduction of an Yves Saint-Laurent ad from *Art Forum* of a woman with split open blazer and no shirt or bra underneath (the image is itself of course erotic but it is suggestive of art as pornography for the market); (2) The Lorenzo-Lamas style photograph of Fischer with head cocked in such a position that he could be saying either “Fuck you” or “I’m going to...”; (3) The photograph of a whiskey ad; (4) A piece entitled *Pink Kant*; (5) the positioning of the show’s mirrors.

But these are rather inessential elements. If the show is pornographic, it is less for these references than for the meaning of pornography as such: that which shows everything. We could start to list the themes: self, production, self-production, markets, art markets, resistance, critical resistance, resistance and survival, environmental catastrophe, catastrophic markets, auto-immunity of resistance and markets, etc. We could name names: Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Marx, Adorno. We could dig in to the archive: Dada, Fluxus, appropriation art. With images ranging from an inverted Hegel to a glacier to mirrors, coins (emblazoned with Fichte’s visage), and oxen (the only to survive the last ice age), it seems, indeed, as if Fischer wants to show everything, and, if this is the case, we are left with an essential question: does he wind up showing nothing?

Another way to pose the question of the relation between the erotic and the pornographic is as the relation between art and criticism. If the old adages prove true (creation is the “spontaneous overflow of emotion”; the function of criticism is to “see the object as in itself it really is”), then art is figured as erotic and criticism as pornographic. Art generates its allure in refusing to tell everything, while criticism seeks again and again to inscribe and control the erotic mystery.

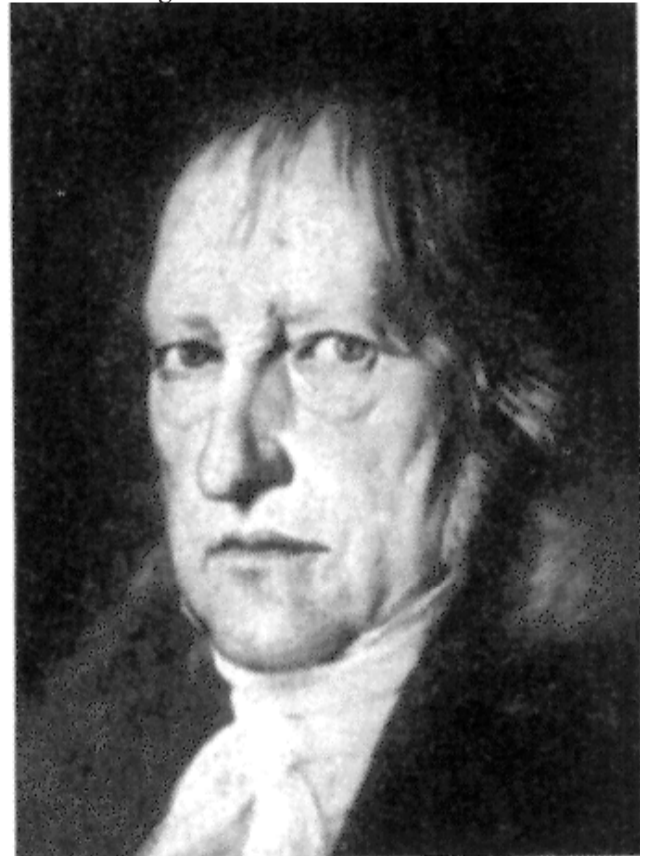
With such a definition in mind, we could easily call Fischer’s work, which seems to impose so much of its own conditions of reception, pornographic in the worst sense. But if this were indeed the case, if criticism and art really had this relationship, I would not bother writing criticism, and I doubt that Ludwig Fischer would continue making art. Indeed, the question of this relationship is precisely what is posed by Fischer’s practice. The artist is no longer the creative genius unable to control his or her own meaning, nor is the critic left in a position of gaining that mastery and control. In refusing to believe that showing everything is showing nothing, pornography is trying to force its way back into the erotic domain.

This, I would say, is the essential gamble of Fischer’s practice: to suggest that critically

informed art can put its claims on the table without fleeing into the opacity of the symbol or the obviousness of the reference. If the practice remains a gamble it is because Fischer still seeks the appropriate medium of this concern, the condensed vision which would allow the critical practice to come through while at the same time eliciting the wonder of the viewer. It is an imprecise formulation on my part, for it is an imprecise practice to attempt, but allow me one example.

In his short story “Funes,” Borges gives a vision of a man dreamt of by the philosophers: a man with exact perception and memory. There is nothing that he sees that he cannot recall instantaneously and from all angles. In almost Aesopian fashion, Borges gives us the moral near the end: “I suspect, nevertheless, that he was not very capable of thought. To think is to forget a difference, to generalize, to abstract. In the overly replete world of Funes there were nothing but details, almost contiguous details.” Then Borges concludes with his own detail, “Ireneo Funes died in 1889, of a pulmonary congestion.”

Such is the artistry of Borges: the moral does not close the story; it anticipates it. The end of the story returns to the body, to the necessity of life and death, and of the singularity of a named person who passes through the years. Add to this the pulmonary congestion: a blockage of the blood flow between the heart and the lungs, between that which takes in the outside world in the breath, and that which moves that world around the body to make life possible. The breath is timeless life; the blood puts it into circulation. When the world is only taken in, is only contained, there is congestion – cessation of life.



Ludwig Fischer’s intervention at Vox Populi is framed with a double signature: his face on one wall and his name in neon glass on the other. The moral of the show – the figure of the resistant artist – is also what contains the show. There is, in other words, congestion, but it is not yet life-threatening. I don’t return to Borges because of a moral I could have otherwise surmised. I return because of that last sentence, that banal report of a fact which exudes meaning. I anticipate the day when Fischer will finish his last lap, arriving at a fact which shatters all artistry.

-Avi Alpert