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DEADAS DAY

Margin of Utility

Securitarianism and the “Immigration Problem”

It is indeed an odd moment in history when a state in a union composed almost entirely of immigrants passes legislation allowing law enforcement officers to arrest anyone they suspect of being an “illegal” immigrant. Arizona’s Senate Bill 1070 not only encapsulates the contradiction of an anti-immigrant land of immigrants; it is also an open invitation to racial profiling and arbitrary detention. In this regard, it is one more step in an ongoing chain of anti-immigrant measures in Europe and North America, which are destined to make the film *Children of Men* look more like a work of social realism than science fiction.



As if to add insult to injury, the Governor of Arizona, Jan Brewer, has recently signed a new law banning ethnic studies in public schools. President Obama’s reaction to Arizona’s reactionary attacks on immigrants has been rhetorically firm and practically status quo as he has decided to further militarize the border with Mexico. Along these lines, Janet Napolitano, the current Secretary of Homeland Security chief and former Governor of Arizona, has recently decided to send unmanned Predator drones to the Mexican border and launched a program to photograph every license plate of vehicles that cross the border.

In Europe, Belgium recently forbade the wearing of the veil in public places. Switzerland has banned the minaret and is debating the possibility of forbidding the burqa in public places. France signed a resolution reaffirming the values of the Republic (*dignité, égalité*), which included two critical references to the burqa, and it is currently debating the possibility of banning the burqa in public spaces.

In short, immigration is, as the French say, *à l’ordre du jour*. The Euro-American world is preoccupied—if not obsessed—with the foreigners at its borders and within. In the current political imaginary, the former cold war polarization between “democracy” and “communism” has been replaced by the flexible, global opposition between “democracy” and “terrorism” in which any individual or group can

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.

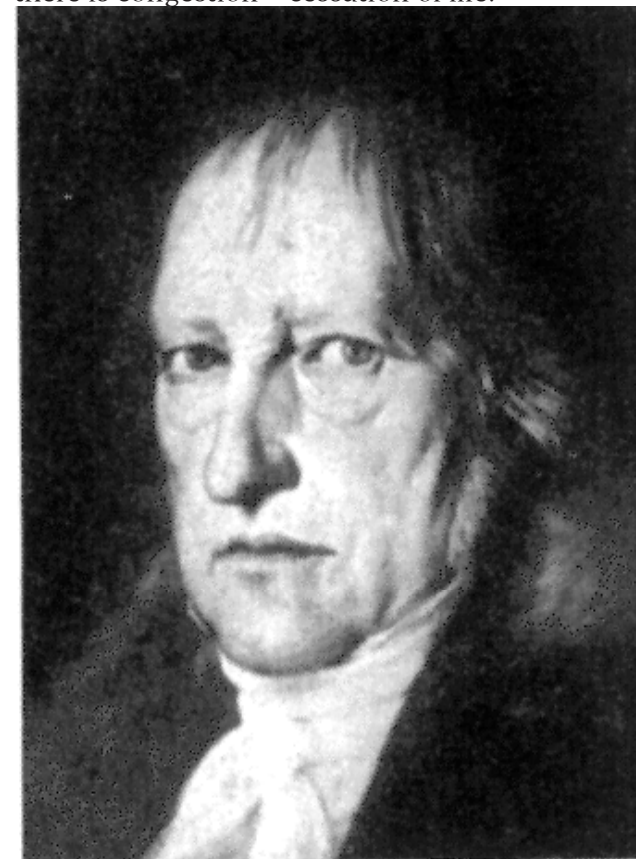
With such a definition in mind, we could easily call Fischer’s work, which seems to impose so much of its own conditions of reception, pornographic in the worst sense. But if this were indeed the case, if criticism and art really had this relationship, I would not bother writing criticism, and I doubt 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

be identified as a “security threat.” Immigrants are precisely such a group: a threat to homeland security, a threat to job security, a threat to the security of values, a threat to “who we are as a people,” etc.



**NO AMNESTY!
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Securitarian Logic

This obsession with security has produced a perverted logic of inevitable intensification that is readily visible in the case of immigration. The first sign of this perverted logic of securitarianism is that there is a double bind in which the possibility of reducing security measures is foreclosed. There are two possibilities: either the perceived problems increase such as in the case of greater illegal immigration, or they decrease. If they increase, than this is taken as a sign that more security measures are needed such as more unmanned Predator drones on the

border. If they decrease, then this is taken as proof that the security measures are working and, therefore, they need to be maintained or increased (to augment their proven efficacy). Regardless of the situation, then, the same or more security measures are always necessary. The reduction of security measures is a structural impossibility.



It is worth noting that, as Barry Glassner has demonstrated in *The Culture of Fear*, media hype and “public” dismay are rarely correlated with factual threats. In fact, it is often the opposite, with fear of rape, murder, etc. increasing precisely at times when the real rape and murder rate are decreasing. It is important to emphasize, therefore, that the perceived threat—constructed through media hype, political jockeying and a manipulative punditocracy—is more important than the “real threat.” Secondly, the double bind logic of securitarianism that excludes the possibility of reducing security

measures will inevitably, over time, lead to increased security measures. Given that the perceived threat will increase at some point in time based on sheer probability (not to mention the manipulation of public sentiment by the powers that be, such as was illustrated by Dick Cheney’s fiendish exploitation of the color-coded terror threats), security measures are destined to increase with time.

This reveals the deep complicity between securitarianism and the commercialization of the security industry. For there are at least two parties that benefit from this perverted logic of security: the private companies that are increasingly in charge of policing the world (Blackwater, now Xe, is of course the most infamous) and the governmental forces whose strategic interests benefit from diversionary tactics. Securitarianism therefore goes hand in hand with the privatization of the military and secret service, as well as with the neo-liberal agenda of the Washington consensus for it serves to distract from the lack of fundamental social services in this country by locating the threat elsewhere.

Solving the “Immigration Problem”

The attempt to “solve” the “immigration problem” through increased securitarianism is not only inefficient,

**RACHEL MASON
JUNE - JULY**

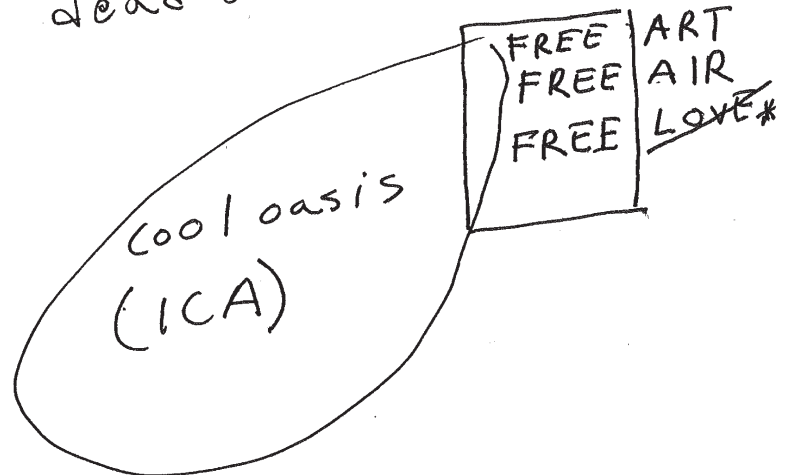
**ABIGAIL DEVILLE
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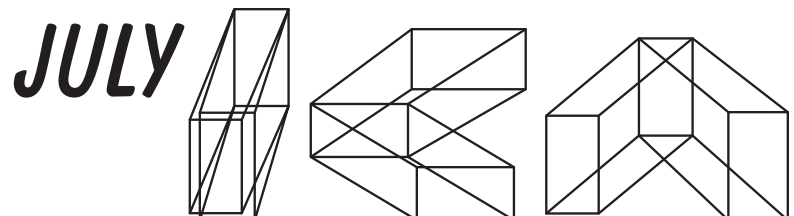
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but it actually serves to further compound the issue rather than going back to its source. If so many people want to come to Europe and America it is not because they all desperately want to abandon their families, way of life and culture in order to be treated as “illegal aliens” in a foreign country. It is first and foremost due to the unequal global distribution of wealth and the massive disparities in the standard of living between the “core” and the “periphery.” If there was a true interest in solving the “immigration problem,” the first place to start would be with the colonial imperialism of neo-liberalism that has seriously increased the divide between the West and the rest. In the United States, we could start by cancelling NAFTA.



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If we are truly interested in a secure world for all rather than the manipulation of security interests for the perpetuation of privatized industries and the neo-liberal consolidation of wealth, then we should abandon the system that is at the heart of the “immigration problem”: the neo-liberal system that has concentrated the majority of the wealth of the world in the hands of a very few and made a few select “lands of prosperity” in the sea of decrepit poverty where the global work force is restrained. Rather than blaming the victims for attempting to individually overcome the global disparities they have inherited, we should attack the structures that are at the source of these disparities. While working for the material reversal of the systematic perpetuation of global inequality, we should declare our solidarity with the disenfranchised and abused. Echoing one of the resonate slogans of May 1968, “we are all German Jews!,” we must affirm in the era of rampant securitarianism and xenophobic anti-immigration policies: “we are all veiled Muslims!” “we are all ‘illegal aliens!’” “we are all a threat to security!”

- Etienne Dolet

In Praise of Vain Gestures – Roberto Bolaño’s *Antwerp*

A peculiar fact about termite-tapeworm-fungus-moss art is that it goes always forward eating its own boundaries, and, likely as not, leaves nothing in its path other than the signs of eager, industrious, unkempt activity. The most inclusive description of the art is that, termite-like, it feels its way through walls of particularization, with no sign that the artist has any object in mind other than eating away the immediate boundaries of his art, and turning these boundaries into conditions of the next achievement.

The best examples of termite art appear in places (...) where the spotlight of culture is nowhere in evidence, so that the craftsmen can be ornery, wasteful, stubbornly self-involved, doing go-for-broke art and not caring what comes of it.

- from Manny Farber’s manifesto “White Elephant Art vs. Termite Art”

“The scorn I felt for so-called official literature was great, though only a little greater than the scorn I felt for marginal literature. But I believed in literature: or rather, I didn’t believe in arrivisme or opportunism or the whispering of sycophants. I did believe in vain gestures, I did believe in fate.”

-from “Total Anarchy: Twenty-Two Years Later”, Bolaño’s introduction to *Antwerp*

“The only novel that doesn’t embarrass me is *Antwerp*.” So says Roberto Bolaño in the quote on the back cover of his novel *Antwerp*. As anyone interested in literature knows, Bolaño has by now been as widely acclaimed as any writer in recent times, and he is the rarest kind of cultural/literary phenomenon – one whose work actually merits the wild enthusiasm heaped upon it. So the quote could at first glance seem disingenuous, especially after reading *Antwerp*, which no one in their right mind could prefer over *2666* and *The Savage Detectives*, the two Bolaño novels that have deservedly been the focus of the most the praise. However, it is worth remembering Bolaño’s ambivalent relationship to the notion of the writer as cultural hero, as well as his highly critical view of culture in general and literary culture in particular. It is perhaps not hard to imagine why *Antwerp* is the only one of Bolaño’s novels that doesn’t embarrass him – because it is hardly a novel at all, and certainly not one at risk of becoming a cultural phenomenon. This reversal of the usual shame over the relationship of a flawed early attempt to later more acclaimed achievements is indicative of an important aspect of Bolaño’s writing. The recent publication of the first English translation of *Antwerp*, which was written in 1980 but not published in Spanish until 2002, shortly before Bolaño’s death, provides occasion to pause and consider this element of Bolaño’s work.

One of the most unique and admirable qualities of Bolaño’s novels is his lack of reverence for literature. This is not to be mistaken for a lack of love for literature, nor a lack of belief in its possibilities, but Bolaño understands all the ways literature can lead one astray and be led astray itself, all they ways its supposedly noble intentions can unfold into self-justifications and corroborations with forces of oppression and mediocrity and collective, culturally-sanctified insanity. Bolaño’s consistent twin subjects are the end of literature and the salvation of literature. For him the only literature that’s still conceivable is either one that catalogues all the ways literature has gone and can go wrong (as in *Nazi Literature in the Americas* and *By Night in Chile*), or one that catalogues the ways one can dedicate oneself to literature outside of the realm of official literature, which locates the existence of true literature outside of literature (as is *The Savage Detectives*, a book about poets whose poems we never see, in search of a mythic poet who wrote one non-poem/poem composed of squiggled lines and shapes). We could see Bolaño’s approach as

proceeding along two seemingly distinct paths. One is an attempt to give voice to the forgotten and marginalized characters that, Bolaño suggests, account for the majority of the population on Earth, though they do not figure much in contemporary cultural consciousness. The other path is a quest to turn literature against itself, to uncover and catalogue the numerous ways in which literature is a dirty business, a blind, corrupt, fraudulent, self-deluded ally to all that is worst in the notion of culture. One of Bolaño’s unique achievements is in the way these two paths overlap and intertwine in his work, ultimately merging into a single road – one that carries us away from literature, in search of literature (this reaches its pinnacle with *2666*). Bolaño was a poet as young man, one of the founders of the short-lived radical movement *Infrarealism*, described by Bolaño later as a kind of Latin-American Dadaism (their legacy seems to consist mostly of crashing readings by people like their sworn enemy Octavio Paz). Bolaño didn’t start writing prose seriously until he was close to 40, when he was diagnosed with a rare liver condition and realized he only had a few years to live. He decided writing fiction was a better way to make money and thus ensure that his young family would be provided for after he was dead, and so he started writing short stories and novels. This is the way Bolaño explained it anyway, and the last ten years of his life was astonishingly productive (he wrote not only his two long experimental novels *The Savage Detectives* and *2666*, but also over a dozen shorter novels and many short stories). Only in middle age, in the shadow of imminent death and under the inescapable burden of the responsibility of fatherhood was Bolaño able to force himself to move into the realm of “so-called official literature” and culture.

Using Manny Farber’s distinction between “termite art” (as described above), and “white elephant art”, the term he used for the outdated concept of the masterpiece in European art, we could say that Bolaño is a born termite-artist who later seemed to move, however reluctantly, toward the white elephant realm with his two epoch-defining tomes, *The Savage Detectives* and *2666*. And yet even in these his termite inclinations remained present – is as if with his two long novels Bolaño carved giant elephants to furnish a suicidal feast for his termite instincts. However, in *Antwerp*, his first novel, these instincts are still fully intact and on display. Presented in 51 numbered and titled chapters, many less than a page long, *Antwerp* has no real plot or story. The chapters are a series of fragments, self-conscious observations, descriptions and meditations concerning a handful of recurrent characters, events and locations. Many elements from later Bolaño novels appear in sketch form here, and a fair amount of Bolaño’s unique style is present throughout. Bolaño would use himself as a character in much of his fiction, and reading *Antwerp* often feels as though we are reading a novel by one of the young Bolaño characters from his later works. It is written at a point when he had not yet found a way to fully incorporate into his writing either his wild enthusiasm for literature or his suspicion of literature. In *Antwerp*, his reluctance to enter the world of literature and thus, irrevocably, to become an actor in the realm of official culture appears in raw form, as pure obstinateness, frustration, stubbornness, rage. While the novel may ultimately fail on its own terms (though it’s not without its rewards), it is more than just a fumbling adolescent attempt that hints at future triumphs, it survives as a testament to the formation of the aesthetic and ethic that are the conditions of Bolaño’s later achievements, and it serves as reminder of some of what is most urgent, even moving, in his writing.

-Mike Vass