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.

In Praise of Vain Gestures – Roberto Bolano’s Antwerp

A peculiar fact about termite-tapeworm-jungmoss-artz is that it goes always forward eating its own boundaries, by culture is not, leaves nothing in its path other than the signs of eager, industrious, unkept activity. The most inclusive description of the art is that, termite-like, it leaves its way through walls of particularization, with no sign that the artist has any object in mind other than the sheeren, a juicer of boundaries or eating the boundaries of 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 to be seen, 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 the superego of securitarianism, and I believed in the essays of an actor in the realm of official culture appears simply as his highly critical view of culture in general and 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 Bolano’s novels that does not approach 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 Bolano’s writing. The reason is the first English translation of Antwerp, which was written in 1980 but not published in Spanish until 2002, shortly before Bolano’s death, provides occasion to pause and consider this element of Bolano’s work.

One of the most unique and admirable qualities of Bolano’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 Bolano understands all the ways literature can lead one astray and,buried within it, all the ways its supposedly noble intentions can unfold into self-justifications and corroboration with forces of oppression and mediocrity and collective, culturally-sanctified insanity. Bolano’s consistent twin subjects are the end of literature and its salvation for 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 distribute oneself 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 Bolano novels appear in sketch form here, and a fair amount of Bolano’s unique style is present throughout. Bolano 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 Bolano characters from his later works. It is written at a point when he had not yet found a 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, and in that instance, Bolano suggests, self-deluded ally to all that is worst in the notion of culture. One of Bolano’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 in search of culture (this reaches its pinnacle with 2666). Bolano was a poet as young man, one of the founders of the short-lived radical movement Infrarealism, described by Bolano 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). Bolano 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 did not want 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 Bolano 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 Bolano 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 Bolano 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 it not precisely the sublimity of Bolano’s sublimity, as we move into the realm of “so-called official literature” that culture.

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 few very few and made a few select “lands of prosperity” in the sea of decadent 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 disenchanted 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

Mike Vass

The Savage Detectives, which was written in 1980, and The Savage Detectives, which was written in 1980, and The Savage Detectives, which was written in 1980, and