white Americans do not believe in death, and this is why the darkness of life so intimates them. And this is also why the presence of the Negro in this country can bring about its destruction. It is the responsibility of free men to trust and to celebrate what is constant, struggle, and death are constant, and so is love, though we may not always think so — and to apprehend the nature of change, to be able and willing to change. I speak of change not on the surface but in the depths — change in the sense of renewal. But renewal becomes impossible if one supposes things to be constant that are not — safety, for example, or money, or power. One cling then to chimeras, by which one can only be betrayed, and the entire hope — the entire possibility — of freedom disappears. — James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time

If school is a factory, art departments are industrial parks in which the creative spirit, like cosmetic shrubbery or Muzak, still “lives.” Photographic education is largely directed at people who will become detail workers in one sense or another. Only the most elite art schools and university art departments regularly produce graduates who will compete for recognition as fine artists. Nonetheless, the ideology of auteurism dominates the teaching of the medium’s history at all levels of higher education, even in the community colleges. This auteurism actually oscillates in and out of view, sharing prominence with its opposite, technological determinism. Students learn that photographic history is driven by technical progress, except in some cases. When history is the elevated product of especially gifted artists, who are to be admired and emulated. Very few teachers acknowledge the constraints placed on their would-be “auteurs” by a system of educational tracking based on class, race, and sex.

Thus, most of us who teach, or make art, or go to school with a desire to do these things, are forced to accept that a winner’s game requires losers. One can either embrace this proposition with enthusiasm, and steal, or one can respect the law, and achieve justice through a regression into an anarchic child-like state, which revolves around immediate gratification and relief. In this sense, McDonagh achieves a kind of grotesque grace in symbiosis with his environment. He masters his surrounding as an unpressed and irrepressible anarchic force running wild in a destroyed landscape thrust into chaos by the dual forces of ferociously indifferent Nature and hopelessly inadequate Civilization. Unleashed by the effects of copious drugs, Cage’s “bad” lieutenant discovers ecstatic truths in post-Katrina New Orleans in a comparable manner to Kinski’s ‘mad’ characters in the jungle in Herzog’s earlier masterpieces.

There is a sense of restored order at the end of the film in which McDonagh appears to have reformed his wild ways and become an upstanding citizen. After toasting his new promotion by sipping sparkling water with his newly sober family, he drops off his pregnant girlfriend (presumably no longer a prostitute) at their large house and shares a kiss in front of the nearly trimmed lawn. He drives off into the sunset but then plunges immediately back into his ‘bad’ behavior, harassing clubgoers and stealing their drugs. If this comes almost as a relief, it is because the film has so thoroughly established a cinematic universe in which the restoration of order is antithetical to the only kind of salvation possible—one in which ecstatic truths reveal themselves in the void that opens when belief in the law has been abandoned. As Herzog himself says, “There’s such a thing as the bliss of evil. Enjoy it. The viler and more debased it gets, the more you have to enjoy it.” —Mike Vass

The Astronomer: Part I Departure from Barbaric Times…

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This apparently fatal flaw is neither treated grandiloquently nor sentimentally. It does not prove tragic. The courage is mustered for the departure and, even if it may be too late, the characters set out on the voyage without any kind of melancholic lament. We are left with a sentiment of hope in severely muted tones. Stripped of its rhetorical flourishes and its pseudo urgency, the figure of hope with which Bass leaves us seems to be a potent antidote to the recent high engineering of this utopian motif by the Obama campaign. Who on the eve of the anniversary of Obama’s inauguration does not now see the campaign’s rhetorical abuses, to borrow a phrase from Frederic Jameson, “as the mere lure and bait for ideology (hope being after all also the principle of the cruellest confidence games and of hucksterism as a fine art).” —Alexi Kukuljevic

If you believe you have
or if you think you have only

A BRILLIANT INTELLIGENCE WITHE THE MACHETE

GENIUS

If you believe you have

If you think you have only

A BRILLIANT INTELLIGENCE WITHE THE MACHETE

If you believe you have
nor does he fall from grace through deviance from the law brought on by external or internal pressures (desperate social circumstances or desperate personal desire - often conflated in noirs). Instead something more peculiar occurs: McDonough transcends the law through a kind of gleeful abandonment to his desperate situation, to the void of desire; he transcends the law and achieves justice through a regression into an anarchic child-like state, which revolves around immediate gratification and relief. In this sense, McDonough achieves a kind of grotesque grace in symbiosis with his environment. He masters his surrounding as an unpresssed and irrepressible anarchic force running wild in a destroyed landscape thrust into chaos by the dual forces of ferociously indifferent Nature and hopelessly inadequate Civilization. Unleashed by the effects of copious drugs, Cage's 'bad' lieutenant discovers ecstatic truths in post-Katrina New Orleans in a comparable manner to Kinski's 'mad' characters in the jangle in Herzog's earlier masterpieces.

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A Little Reassurance in Barbaric Times...

For readers of Walter Benjamin or Craig Owens, one might expect allegorical treatments, especially of notions as historically charged as Utopia, to be melancholic. The chief virtue of Ronnie Bass' video installation, The Astronomer: Part I Departure from Shed currently at Marginal Utility, consists in its steady refusal of this "postmodern" temptation. This apparently fatal flaw is neither treated as the result of a lack of knowledge, nor does it thwart the departure. It is precisely the courage to imagine that the astronaut must muster, which is to say, summon from his fearful comrade. The blanketed character, fluctuating between references to Cousin Itt from the Addam's Family and Linus van Pelt, Charlie Brown's blanket-dependent best friend, is less a figure of the uncanny than a symbol of the childish need for security—a refusal to see, whose basis is emotional deficit, which nearly thwarts the departure. The courage is mustered for the departure and, even if it may be too late, the characters set out on the voyage without any kind of melancholic lament. We are left with a sentiment of hope in severely muted tones. Stripped of its rhetorical flourishes and its pseudo urgency, the figure of hope with which Bass leaves us seems to be a potent antidote to the recent high engineering of this utopian motif by the Obama campaign. Who on the eve of the anniversary of Obama's inauguration can refrain from a tearful lament? We do not know what has taken place or why, but we know that it is time go and that the necessity of departure is imminent. Indifferent to the spectacle of calamity, the story focuses rather on the human, all too human, emotion of fear. Although we know that the astronomer must be in possession of some knowledge that necessitates escape, Bass does not focus on his role as amateur scientist, as the tinkerer in his shed. Rather, he attends to the Astronomer's capacities for fraternal consolation, whose tone is infinitely removed from the patronizing tone of the man of knowledge. The astronomer remains the committed figure of the one who soberly gazes out towards other worlds. Yet, it is not the power of scientific judgment, but courage and fortitude that prove decisive. He thus seems to add a crucial nuance to the importance of Engel's recognition that Socialism 'stands on the shoulders of Saint-Simon, Fourier and Owen, three men who despite their fantasies and utopianism are to be reckoned among the most significant minds of all times, for they anticipated with genius countless matters whose accuracy we now demonstrate scientifically.'

- Alexi Kukuljevic