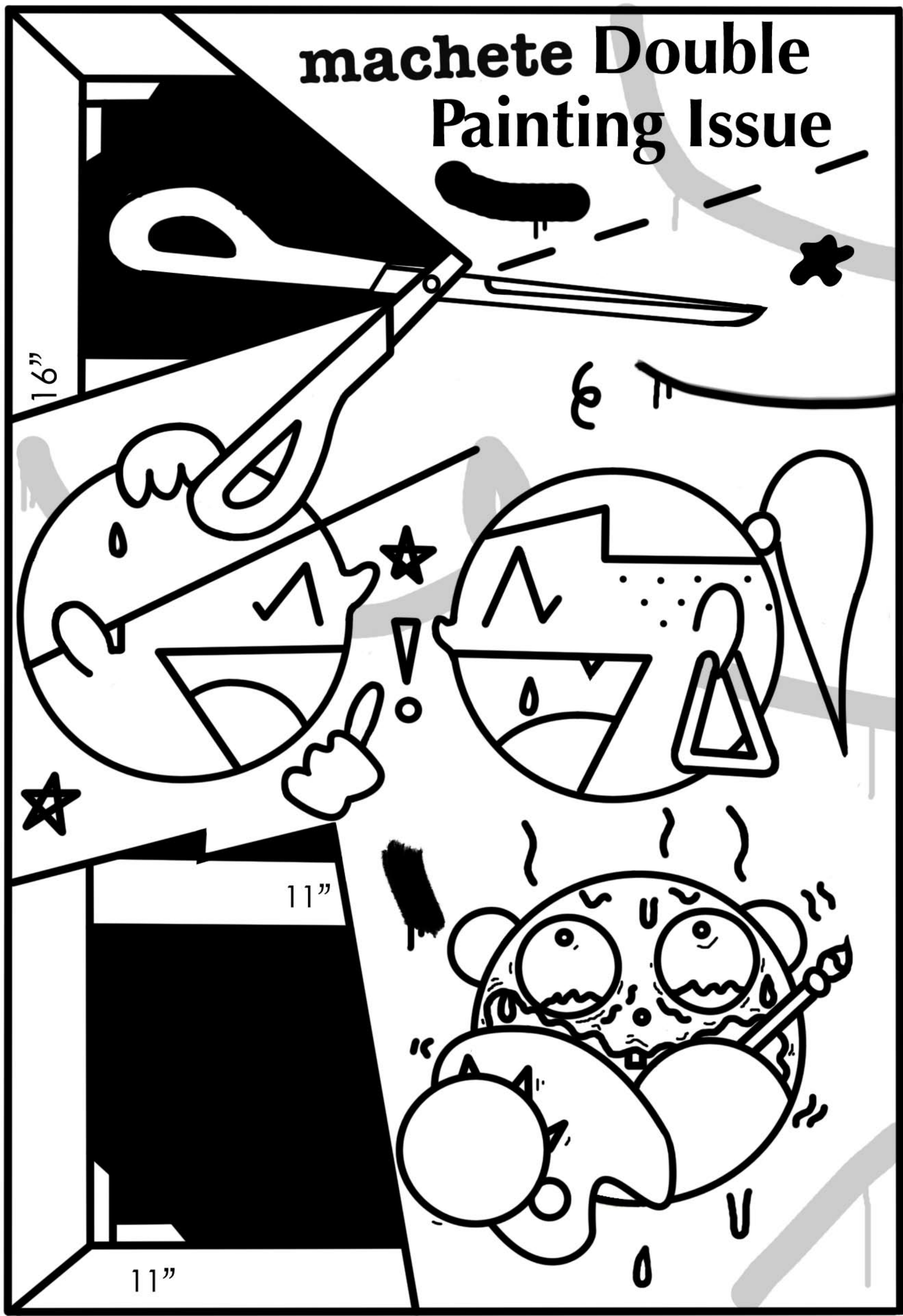


machete Double Painting Issue



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A Dead Artist in Motion: Review of Roberto Bolaño's *The Third Reich*

"Today's events are still confused, but I'll try to set them down in orderly fashion so that I can perhaps discover in them something that has thus far eluded me, a difficult and possibly useless task, since there's no remedy for what's happened and little point in nurturing false hopes. But I have to do something to pass the time." This final sentiment appears to be the singular impulse driving Roberto Bolaño's posthumous novel, *The Third Reich*, published this year by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. In its unfortunately underdeveloped and abandoned state, *The Third Reich* often reads like an unwilling exercise—a chronicle of self-imposed isolation. Given the remarkably prolific sequence of publications since Bolaño's untimely death in 2003 (posthumous publications in



English include *Amulet*, *Monsieur Pain*, *By Night in Chile*, *Antwerp*, and the forthcoming *Woes of the True Policeman*), it is not entirely surprising that this abandoned novel often refuses to develop its primary elements. Yet if you read retroactively with *The Savage Detectives* and Bolaño's masterful *2666* in mind, you can see the emergence of many of the motifs that structure his finest work: e.g., geographic displacement, noir-inspired mystery, offstage violence, and journalistic documentation.

Udo Berger, the protagonist of *The Third Reich*, is a German war games champion vacationing on the beaches of Costa Brava with his considerably more outgoing girlfriend Ingeborg. Together they befriend Charly and Hanna, whose late-night excursions accelerate from light inebriation to irrevocable chaos. By day, Udo Berger consumes his time as a WWII strategist, repeatedly fighting the major battles with dice and an oversized board. His obsessive gaming is predominantly cryptic—Bolaño constructs his gaming passages as a stenographer might, which is to say without psychological embellishment or color. By night, Udo parties with Ingeborg, Charly, and Hanna as a loutish vacationer. His late outings seem only to aggravate his existentialized sense of isolation.

The Third Reich proceeds within three discursive spaces—in part it is a report of Udo's increasingly anxious nightlife, it is a direct record of his incessant war gaming, and it is also part diary and confession. It is within the impressionistic entries of Udo's diary that Bolaño achieves his most interesting literary device. This mode of transmission supplies a decisive layer of perspectival concealment—Udo's reflections often fail to identify his own

drives in a way that infuses his presence with an ineffable sense of coldness. Through his daily entries you witness the development of a friendship with a local man known as El Quemado. He is a burn victim and gradually acquires a role as Udo's opponent in gaming. El Quemado's background is shrouded in mystery—are his burns the result of war?

Bolaño refuses to provide an answer. Over time Charly's drunken antics escalate until he disappears one night windsurfing.

Just as it is the case in his later work, Bolaño's mystery in *The Third Reich* is only a mystery in appearance. Indeed, Bolaño is reported to have said that he would have "preferred to be a detective rather than a writer." While it is transparently clear that his work plays with the traditional elements of mystery (journalistic detachment, violence, infidelity, missing persons), Bolaño only employs such tropes in order to complicate them. *The Third Reich* is interesting insofar as Udo Berger backs away from the crisis that his life has become. He retreats into the world of strategic gaming, where historical violence is mediated through cheap, desensitized stimulation. As the characters of his life drift back into their proper place Udo insists upon his literal and emotional displacement. Unfortunately, *The Third Reich* was probably abandoned in 1989 because its formal success was predicated on the total withdrawal of its protagonist. Consequently, the narrative fails to elevate and synthesize its fragments into the densely textured mosaics that constitute Bolaño's more elaborate novels.

That is why Giles Harvey is probably correct when he writes in "The New Yorker" that *The Third Reich* should join the shelf marked "For Completists Only." I am less convinced however, in his assessment that you "have to go back to Balzac and Dostoevsky to find masters of the novel form who showed so little interest in the sentence." Bolaño's prose attained rare heights—both in the complexity of its formal structure as well as through the haunting defamiliarization of his lyricism.

There are extraordinarily accomplished moments in *2666* with respect to their formal properties. Take the following description of a conversation from the first book of *2666* as an example of the inventive way in which Bolaño fuses the strategies of compression and lyricism:

"The first conversation began awkwardly, although Espinoza had been expecting Pelletier's call, as if both men found it difficult to say what sooner or later they would have to say. The first twenty minutes were tragic in tone, with the word *fate* used ten times and the word *friendship* twenty-four times. Liz Norton's name was spoken fifty times, nine of them in vain. The word *Paris* was said seven times. *Madrid*, eight. The word *love* was spoken twice, once by each man. The word *horror* was spoken six times and the word *happiness* once (by Espinoza). The word *solution* was said twelve times. The word *category*, in the singular and the plural, nine times. The word *structuralism* once (Pelletier). The term *American literature* three times. The words *dinner* or *eating* or *breakfast* or *sandwich* nineteen times. The words *eyes* or *hands* or *hair* fourteen times. Then the conversation proceeded more smoothly. Pelletier told Espinoza a joke in German and Espinoza laughed. In fact, they both laughed, wrapped up in the waves or whatever it was that linked their voices and ears across the dark fields and the wind and the snow of the Pyrenees and the rivers and the lonely roads and the separate and interminable suburbs surrounding Paris and Madrid."

Such passages manage to short-circuit the clichéd and nevertheless expand and develop the minute particular in the same gesture. The seemingly limitless flexibility of Bolaño's narrative voice as well as the heterogeneity of its parts makes *2666* the immediately compelling and necessary book that it is. At his finest, his writing is fully in command of the disparate literary traditions he draws on, and his powers as an artist seem to transform his precursors—namely, they are transformed into the figurative architecture which animates and supports the landscape of his characters. It is unclear how the hurried frenzy of posthumous publications will ultimately affect Bolaño's legacy, though they are nevertheless contributing to a more complete representation of his (apparently) immense and ongoing corpus.

-Charles Prusik

Lou Reed & Metallica

Lulu

The beauty of our times: this record is the most hated record ever and it has only just been released. Lou Reed and Metallica took a risk and Lulu is generating some of the most passionate and intelligent writing on the internet. For sure the cruelty of the reviews matches the cruelty of the record. Both seem to be an ethnographic study of our times. One of the reviewers said that Lou Reed and Metallica are amongst the most perverse musicians around. Why do people get surprised when they get the ultimate perverse record? So perverse that you cannot take it? There is a famous saying in downtown New York which goes: if you are a Lou Reed fan you must be ready to go all the way. Yes, he is going to take you to places that you have never dreamed of, even in your worst nightmares. If you are a Lou Reed fan you go through shit, shit records, shit playing, shit covers, shit lyrics... He takes you psychologically to the wild side even if you might be comfortably playing the record in your cosy home with a cup of tea. He is going to make you reconsider your values of judgement to the core and beyond. Once you go through this then you might agree with Lou when he says about Lulu: "This thing is the best thing ever done by anybody". And he insists in an interview that he is not being egotistical. I am a Lou Reed fan and I believe him. When Lou does something he puts himself into it 100% and as we know this is too much for the majority of human beings, from his solo on "I Heard Her Call My Name" that made him the best guitarist ever by bridging feedback noise rock with a Coleman free jazz sensitivity to Metal

Machine Music where the guitar did not even need a guitarist (artistic de-subjectification probably taken from Warhol's filmmaking: he didn't need to be behind the camera). But here we get a blunt and confident Lou Reed happy to have a partner to rock with. And this is what Lou Reed and Metallica are becoming: Rock'n'roll animals in the perverted zoo of the internet. Yes, Lulu is about sex. It is a 69

voice as a device for achieving unreified noise which still contains alienation. But this is not concrete poetry, somehow it sounds even more abstract, it is relentless, beautifully out of tune and it hurts. And then the lyrics: sniff your shit in the wind, coloured dick, pathetic little dog... these sentences are snubs to any form of taste. Reed lyrics achieve a level of vulgarity so brilliant that it will probably beat the number

of quotes that a single record can get on the internet. Yes, James, you are a table, where Lou can rest his fuckin' feet on. What Lulu produces is a radical equalisation: a teenage Metallica cover band are the backing group to a drunken 100 year old ranting about how viciously prostituted a prostitute was who he met when he was 14 while angels in furs play violins and the neighbourhood dudes in a basement are making noise while looking at amateur German porn which contains some scatological moments. In fact on this record you get the whole canon of interesting music: drone wrong, Henry Chopin-style language deconstructions, improv-thrash, heavy literary cock rock, contemporary classical Brainbombs, geriatric-metal... The headfuck continues with the gender politics: what could be more queer than a young feminist girl shouting for sexual liberation in the body of an old male



between Lou Reed and Metallica. Lou's tongue is a chainsaw with rusted links (for infection and maximum durability). Metallica gets cut in two and will never recover. They say in interviews that now that they have discovered improvisation with Lou they will implement it on their 10th record. Who knows, maybe next year Metallica will play at the Konfrontation festival? Lou has previously made amazing noise with the guitar but that has already made it into the proper canon of Noise (as an established genre of music). Now he uses his

Jew with cut legs and tits? (Whether this body has sperm or not is another question...) Lulu is more Lou Reed than Lou Reed and that surely means that this is the best thing ever done by anybody.

-Mattin

Interview Between Mattin and Ray Brassier

Mattin: Do you think it could be possible to inject noise into theory (by that I mean to use conceptually some of the strategies that noise makers utilize rather than to focus on producing sounds, to focus on producing theory)? Or let me put it in another way (and related to the series of conferences that you organized): what could noise theory be?

Ray Brassier: Yes, in a way, that was what initially drew me to Laruelle's non-philosophy, but also precipitated my subsequent disenchantment: what I thought would be

habitually engender obscurity, equivocation, ambivalence, polysemy, etc., (à la Derrida's Glas, to take just one notable example of philosophy supposedly tending towards or miming modernist experimentation with form) would be precisely how not to introduce noise into theory... What we find in such instances is a polysemic froth entirely beholden to norms of semantic functioning and yielding a decipherable philosophical 'sense' which turns out to be a philosophical bromide.... All this to say that, in the conceptual element proper to theory, experiment at the level of form can

practice" into the idea of non-philosophy as a "practice-of-(philosophical) theory". While I favour a non-teleological alignment of theory with practice, my problem is with Laruelle's contention that it is the individual human being that is the real of the "last instance". If "I" am the real of the last instance, then I am the ultimately determining cause: history, society, culture, ideology, politics, economics, biology, neurology, can be summarily dismissed (along with philosophy) as redundant abstractions with no salient determining force. This easily degenerates into a kind of transcendental



metal machine music, turned out to be Coney Island baby...

So I am all for introducing noise into theory, rather than generating more theory about noise, in a way that ultimately reaffirms the redundancy of both.... But the element of theory is the conceptual and conceptualization cannot and should not be conflated with aestheticization: that way, only kitsch lies... Precision, saturation, density, frequential extremity: plausible conceptual analogues for these may be found but I suspect they would lie in the domain of mathematics rather than the kinds of discursive conceptualization usually deployed by philosophers.... Also, I now believe that noise is not to be pitted against "meaning" (whatever that might be), as I naively thought when I believed having any philosophical truck with "meaning" was a symptom of reactionary senescence. My current conviction is that a properly exiguous conception of meaning can eradicate conceptual conservatism and engender all the desirable subversive attributes of noise... So to cut a long story short, the sorts of lexical and syntactical trickery that

mask conservatism at the level of content (e.g. Glas), while conservatism at the level of form may harbour extraordinary radicality at the level of content (e.g. Wilfrid Sellars)...

M: My impression is that one of the most useful tools that you get from Laruelle is his use of determination-in-the-last instance. Could you please tell me why?

RB: I think the concept can do some useful work but not in the form in which Laruelle himself presents it. I'm basically sceptical of the alleged non-philosophical novelty of Laruelle's concept of determination-in-the-last instance: I fear it boils down to a kind of Fichtean materialism of practice (or what Iain Grant has called "practicism") insofar as the last instance is identified with the individual human being and determination is identified with his/her practice—even though Laruelle has in mind a very specific concept of practice ---that of theory. Laruelle converts Althusser's conception of philosophy as "theoretical

individualism, where the individual human subject is absolutized (notwithstanding Laruelle's own protests against philosophical absolutism). It also implies a kind of punitive nominalism, were everything but the human individual is relegated to the status of causally inert metaphysical abstraction. Ultimately, I'm afraid this non-philosophical protest against the supposed absolutism and totalitarianism of philosophical universalism ends up being both theoretically and practically---i.e. politically---debilitating. I think venerable questions such as "What is real?", "What is causality?", "What is determination?", are still unresolved and urgent topics of philosophical concern, which it would be short-sighted to dismiss as antiquated metaphysical hangups: they point to the need to understand the complex stratification of reality and the different sorts of causally determining mechanism operative at distinct levels. All this to say that I don't think there is an ultimately determining instance in Laruelle's sense; which still seems to me to be that of an updated version of free human agency or activity—this is of course the core of

Fichteanism. If there an ultimately determining instance, it cannot be identified with the free activity of the human subject. This is not to say that activity, whether practical, theoretical or some fusion of both, cannot serve as a medium for some other determining, material agency, but the latter invariably operates behind the back of the human subject---which is precisely what Laruelle denounces and wishes to rectify with his concept of man as last instance. I favour a conception of the subject as organon or automaton, but one whose heteronomy--i.e. allocentric determination--- actually constitutes a kind of autonomy: the sorts of rule governed behaviour exemplified by subjects engaged in deductive activity exemplify a kind of "heterautonomy" where the only freedom available is measured by the potential failure to do what one is rationally obligated to. This is very Kantian of course, but it's a Kantian rationalism freed from the encroachments of morality.

M: You have written about noise in opposition to capitalism: "What I consider to be interesting about noise is its dis-organizing potency: the

register of abstraction, whether aesthetic or conceptual. The currency of "noise" as a commercial marketing category is ample testimony to this fact. But this need not provide a license for complacent or reactionary cynicism. Any allegedly "critical" or "subversive" politics must involve disciplined conceptual construction and noise's metamorphicity invites conceptual investment and elaboration to a degree perhaps unequalled by any other extant "musical" genre---precisely insofar as it threatens the logic of generic classification as such. This is where I believe noise's subversive potential lies---at the level of abstract form; and not in any alleged radicality attributed to its sonic content (volume, frequency, pitch, etc.). Construed in terms of the predilections of its practitioners, the politics of noise runs the gamut of political opinion, from absurdly reactionary obscurantism to mystical anarchism. At the same time, we shouldn't be surprised if the politics of noise's consumers turn out to be the default politics of all contemporary consumption: that of a terminally complacent neo-liberalism. If noise harbours any radical political potential,

Following what you said at the interview Against an Aesthetics of Noise: "Noise exacerbates the rift between knowing and feeling by splitting experience, forcing conception against sensation. Some recent philosophers have evinced an interest in subjectless experiences; I am rather more interested in experience-less subjects. Another name for this would be "nemocentrism" (a term coined by neurophilosopher Thomas Metzinger): the objectification of experience would generate self-less subjects that understand themselves to be no-one and no-where. This casts an interesting new light on the possibility of a "communist" subjectivity." How might we initiate the process of desubjectification that is required in order to organize ourselves for a collective transformation beyond individual needs and desires?

RB: Acknowledging that individual subjectivity is shaped and conditioned down to its innermost recesses by impersonal social structures would be a good start. Unfortunately, it seems particularly difficult for



incompressibility of a signal interfering with the redundancy in the structure of the receiver. Not transduction but schizduction: noise scrambles the capacity for self-organization." Do you see any possible political use of the nihilist character of noise for the destruction of capital?

RB: I don't think it's credible to attribute to noise a directly anti-capitalist political valence. The political significance of a phenomenon is often ambiguous (I say "often" rather than "always", because there is nothing ambiguous about the political significance of an English Defense League rally, for instance). Only rarely can it be unequivocally deciphered or straightforwardly translated into an identifiable political stance. And of course, it's not only content that is political, it's also the form of political deciphering: it's not just what something is but how it is interpreted that is political. Ultimately, this means that nothing in the realm of cultural production is inherently pro- or anti-capitalist: popular entertainment is sometimes slyly subversive; critiques of capitalism have long been grist for the academic culture industry. This ambiguity is quite evident in the case of noise. The noise subculture has been around for a long time now---at least since the early 1980s---and I find it telling that during its existence, it's been possible to ascribe to it just about every conceivable position across the political spectrum. Thus the politics of noise have variously been described as neo-nazi, crypto-fascist, neo-conservative, liberal-democratic, anarcho-libertarian... To the best of my knowledge, noise has rarely if ever been aligned with communist or Marxist politics. There is every interest in doing so. But such an alignment should not take the form of the somewhat inane equation between dissonance and political subversion. Capitalism is no more threatened by noise than by any other

then it needs to be elaborated via a process of interrogation, which would involve working through questions such as: What is experience, given that capitalism commodifies sensations, affects, and concepts? What is abstraction, given that capitalism renders the intangible determining while dissolving everything we held to be concrete? What freedom are we invoking when we proclaim noise's "freedom" from the alleged constrictions of musical genre?

This is just to say that the "destruction of capitalism" evoked in your question certainly won't be achieved via any form of spontaneous or participatory experience. It would require the development of a political agency informed and instructed by cognitive achievements obtained over the course of a critical collective investigation. A "politics of noise" commensurate with such an ambitious task presupposes cognitive discipline, communal investigation, and collective organization.

"If you tolerate each other, you will tolerate anything"

M: Simon Yuill's contribution, a quote from Raoul Vaneigem seems to perfectly summarize the Evacuation of the Great Learning workshop at the Instal festival in Glasgow. During the workshop, it proved impossible for the group to arrive at any consensus about what to do or not to do, so the last day it was decided that every proposal would be accepted. But as someone subsequently pointed out, instead of collectively achieving something radical, we merely reproduced the paltry freedom of expression which capitalist neoliberalism accords to the individual subject, no matter how false this 'freedom' turns out to be. It seems that capitalism has conditioned our subjectivity to the point where we are no longer willing to give up anything individually, even if this entails a bleak future for everybody.

artists, who have been encouraged to invest in their own individuality, to recognize this. Nothing is more emblematic of the chokehold of neoliberal ideology than the unquestioned conviction that individual self-expression remains a natural reservoir of creative innovation. The cultivation of individuality as a profitable personal resource is an efficient means of enforcing a reactionary conformism. Narcissistic or aesthetic self-cultivation can be usefully contrasted with the sorts of aberrant individuation generated through psychosocial pathologies. (One way of expressing this would be in terms of the theoretical contrast between socially prescribed subjectivation, which is personalizing, de-singularizing, and sociopathic; and socially proscribed subjectivation, which is depersonalizing, singularising, and communist.) Alienation is a profoundly unfashionable theoretical trope, but it might be time to rehabilitate it. It was summarily dismissed in the wake of postmodernist critiques of authenticity. But alienation arguably has nothing to do with lost authenticity, whether at the individual or species level. It is better conceived as expressing the contradiction between actually existing social pathologies and the absent social ideals that they indicate even as they deny them. The alienated individual can be seen to embody the objective contradiction between social ideal and social pathology. But what is required in order to prevent this from lapsing into a sentimental "outsider" romanticism is the imperative to individuate through conscious depersonalization. What is necessary is to achieve an objective or cognitively enlightened, which is to say, impersonal self-consciousness about one's own pathology; i.e. detached insight into how the pathological nature of one's own personality indexes the objective discrepancy between what exists and what ought to be realized at the collective level. By achieving an objective perspective upon her own pathology, the antisocial

individual becomes more social than her well-adjusted, properly integrated peers. This is how individual de-subjectivation becomes the condition for collective subjectivization: one relinquishes the pathological markers of one's psychosocial individuation the better to achieve that depersonalized state in which subjective agency coincides with collective capacity. Subjectivizing depersonalization is the precondition for collectivity. A collective is constituted by a group of individuals committing together to a principle, or set of principles. Only by consciously relinquishing what is pathological (i.e. conventionally social, and therefore anti-social) in one's personality does one become capable of such collective commitment. From this principle or principles, specific objectives can be derived, together with appropriate criteria for discriminating between those proposals that optimize the realization of the central objective and those that inhibit it. The determination of the goal ensures the identification of a method for resolving disagreements. Consensus on matters of principle provides the condition for resolving dissensus over questions of method. Of course, this presupposes a commitment to a certain conception of dialectical rationality, as well as to rational canons of theoretical and practical investigation. This will be too much for some: too "dogmatic", too "authoritarian". An apt response to such protests would be to point out that the alternatives to rationality have hardly proven effective. The revolutionary potential of rationality remains sadly underestimated: reason is routinely castigated as conservative or defamed as "totalitarian". But the transparently reactionary and ideological character of this alignment should be perfectly evident by now, and it might be worth re-considering once more the critical efficacy of pure reason both in theory and in practice.

How do we break out from the correlationist circle? First of all, what is the correlationist circle?

Very simply, it seems to follow from the following reasoning: whatever you think about is thereby rendered relative to your thinking and so cannot be conceived as existing independently of your thinking about it. Thus, your claim to be thinking about something that existed before you began thinking about it is contradicted by your very act of thinking about it. If you say the earth existed for billions of years prior to your existence now, the correlationist will tell you that what you ought to say is that the earth has existed for billions of years for you now, not absolutely or "in itself". Everything is a "correlate" of your thinking and trying to think about things that are not correlates of your thinking is like trying to step over your shadow: you can't do it. The correlate is projected by your thinking just as your shadow is projected by your body. This is the circle: whenever you believe yourself to be thinking about something outside thought, your act of thinking re-envelops it within thought.

RB: Why is this a problem? Because it seems to imply that we can't think or know anything as it is in itself, independently of us. In its most basic form, correlationism is just another name for the kind of generalized skeptical relativism typical of "postmodern" ideology.

There are three possible responses to this dilemma. The first response is to reject the argument upon which this conclusion seems to rest. It can easily be shown to be invalid.

But there's a sense in which this is not enough because we still haven't accounted for the peculiar force correlationism seems to possess. It's the vulgarization of an important insight. The important insight is that we need concepts to know things, and we can't know things without using concepts. But one can acknowledge this without accepting the argument that seems to lead to the correlationist circle, according to which all we really know are concepts, not things. The way to do this is to understand that even if we can't know things without concepts, we are connected to the world otherwise than through concepts alone. This is because we are not just minds but also bodies with nervous systems connecting us to material reality. Of course, correlationists will object that what is being invoked here is just the concept of a body or the concept of material reality, and that the circle remains closed: thinking only ever accesses its own correlates. But I think this objection can be refuted by pointing out that it rests on a simple non-sequitur: while it is true that you can't think about something without thinking about it, it doesn't follow from this that what you're thinking about is nothing more than the correlate of your thought. I can't think about a dog without the concept "dog", but this doesn't entail that the dog I'm thinking about is the same thing as the concept "dog". This is the assumption through which the correlationist presumes to be able to close the circle. But once you realize it's not valid, then it becomes possible to insist that there's nothing inherently contradictory in admitting the difference between concepts and things that are not concepts. We're connected to those things through our body, which is another thing, and although we have to rely on concepts to know anything, including our own bodies, this doesn't mean we only know about concepts. In fact, we ought to acknowledge that knowledge has two components: on one hand, it requires concepts, which we generate through our minds, but on the other hand, we also receive sensory information from physical reality via our nervous systems, since our bodies are physical things connected to the rest of physical reality. It is the fact that our mind is not a self-sufficient system but is intimately connected to a body which connects it to the world that prevents the circle of correlation from closing in on itself.

This is the second possible response to the correlationist argument mentioned above.

The third is simply to deny or ignore the necessity of concepts and pretend we can know reality through some other medium. But this is to exit from the circle at the cost of giving up on the possibility of rational knowledge altogether.

The better way I think is to acknowledge that concepts are necessary for knowledge, but not sufficient. What I'm propounding here is the classical Kantian view of course---the irony being that it is Kant who is usually charged with being the founder of correlationism. In fact, I don't think he is: that dubious accolade is better merited by philosophers like Berkeley or Fichte, who deny that we have any reason to assume the distinction between concepts

and objects. But Kant says we have very good reason to assume this difference, even if we need concepts to know objects. So he leaves open the gap through which we can access what is outside our minds ("the great outdoors"). The point is that we don't need to escape because we're not really locked in: the inside communicates with the outside. But because having a mind and being able to know things requires some distance from those things---a fundamental hiatus---we can't ever be totally immersed in the great outdoors, or lose ourselves in it, unless we want to cancel the very condition that makes us thinking beings in the first place.

So I would say in response to your question: First, that there's no reason to believe the correlationist circle is hermetically sealed in the first place. Second, that some minimal or epistemic correlation between concepts and objects is a necessary condition for knowledge, but that this doesn't mean that objects are indistinguishable from the concepts through which we know them. Another way of saying the same thing is to distinguish between a good or epistemic correlation, which maintains the gap between concepts and objects, and a bad or metaphysical correlation, which tries to close the gap and render them indiscernible. Once this distinction is taken into account, then the conditions of the problem change quite significantly: it's a question of using the correlation to understand its outside, and of understanding its inside as a function of its outside, since there would be no outside without an inside and vice versa.

-Mattin and Ray Brassier

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AND

Alighiero e Boetti at MOMA

In 1973 Alighiero Boetti changed his name to Alighiero e Boetti. The addition of an 'e' ('and' in Italian) has the simple effect of division. What was one becomes two. The integrity of the self (the purported referent of the name) is split into two halves. He could, however, have split the self otherwise with different effects and consequences. He could have adopted the moniker, Alighiero e Boetti. The conjunction "and" is worlds apart from "or". With "and" what is divided is included, whereas with "or" what is divided is excluded. The formula Alighiero e Boetti is an inclusive disjunction.

The retrospective of Boetti's work, *Game Plan*, currently on view at MOMA places this logic into the foreground. The entrance to the exhibition has a blown up version of the postcard *Twins* (1968) a work that clearly foreshadows the linguistic intervention into his artistic signature. The image on the postcard is a photomontage depicting two figures holding hands that look nearly identical (both are Boetti). In addition to this crass repurposing of the postcard as a billboard style advertisement is the early work *Ping Pong* (1966), consisting of two light boxes that flank each

side of the entryway, flashing intermittently ping, then pong. Even at this early stage, the logic is clear; for Boetti, art is a game of division played with oneself in which each work becomes a new opportunity to multiply the self.

The exhibition plays this logic out across Boetti's divergent output often obscured by his tendency toward overproduction (producing, for example, more or less 150 embroidered maps). The exhibition focuses the work around its essential lines of thought, excising the sense of repetition that threatens to overwhelm the subtle shifts that orient Boetti's exploration of singularity and multiplicity. There is perhaps only one conspicuously absent series of work, the airplane series. From this work of editorial condensation a dominant idea emerges, despite the stress, for example, that the exhibition places on his attempt to distance himself from his early Arte Povera concerns. For Boetti, the greatness of art does not lie in resolving contradictions, but in allowing them to subsist. His work is constantly playing with the tensions between opposites: space and time, singularity and multiplicity, identity and difference, order and chaos, presence and absence. By allowing contradictions to subsist,

the artwork occasions an act of division in the self that complicates what is dominant and what is subaltern, what is known and unknown, expected and unexpected, the familiar and the strange, the personal and the impersonal, as



when a right handed person draws with their left hand: a strategy that Boetti often used. The ambition of the work is admirable.

The work is marred, however, by a tendency toward self-indulgence and mystification as in the bronze plaques, *December 16, 2040* and *July 11, 2023*. The former date alludes to the hundred anniversary of the artist's birth and the latter date refers to the day that Boetti imagined that he would die. Boetti tends to imbue the artist with mystical importance and at times seems to truly believe that the artist is the revealer of mystical truths. One fears that the multiplication of his self results only in its projection; he finds himself everywhere; the world becomes a vast reflecting pool for his artistic gestures.

Yet, this is not a problem that Boetti seeks to avoid. This is nowhere more apparent than in his desire for anonymity, which he sought through collaboration. This is perhaps most evident in the ballpoint pen drawings which strike a masterful balance between rigor and ease of execution, tedium and beauty, sense and non-sense. Whereas in the more well known embroidered maps, it is deceptively clear when the 'other' apparently asserts their autonomy (a choice, for example, of the color of

thread or which text to include); the brutality of the ballpoint pen drawings' execution crushes any romanticization of this kind of work or the autonomy involved. The rift between self and other here becomes excruciating, as does the division between intellectual and manual labor. The work becomes most interesting at those moments when it becomes unclear which tendency is dominant: a tendency towards self-inflation or deflation. In the bronze sculpture, *Self-Portrait* (1993), Boetti wears a suit and pours water from hose onto his head. The bronze head is heated internally which causes the water to evaporate as it makes contact, giving the effect that his brain is smoking. This playful gesture mocks his own belief in his fervid genius that nonetheless subtends much of the work.

Boetti is highly aware that the aesthetic situation sets up certain expectations, a belief that there will be an aesthetic event: the light could indeed turn on for 11 seconds, there could be an illumination, but most likely it will not. The absence of such an event is only registered if one believes that it could in fact occur. This is no doubt what motivates much of the tourist industry and animates aspiring global trotters: the belief that the experience of the foreign will produce a richness and a complexity of perspective that will shatter horizons and open the self up to sources of meaning that hidden or obscured by daily routine and the crushing and overwhelming sense of the normal. Did Boetti believe? Is this what motivated his desire to travel, to establish One Hotel in Kabul? Was he aware that this is nothing but a wanton romanticism

and that tourism depends on narcissism and the human's indefatigable ability to map its expectations onto the foreign? He certainly plays with this belief, with these expectations. And if one knows? Then what? Should one not travel? In the end, the works continued interest lies in its uncertainty and unease, Boetti's willingness to indulge, overindulge, and then nonetheless distantiate, mock; his awareness that art is not merely a game to be played, but a trap. I choose then to read the clasp in the postcard *Twins* not as an expression of solidarity with his self (with his double), but as sinister pact. One never knows whether one's double is a friend or an enemy. Consistent with the logic of inclusive disjunction, Boetti refuses the forced choice of the 'or'; his self is both friend *and* enemy.

-Alexi Kukuljevic

THE END GOES ON (AND ON): BELA TARR'S *THE TURIN HORSE*

In *The Turin Horse*, Bela Tarr's latest and reportedly last film, the Hungarian filmmaker follows Samuel Beckett's path of impoverishment and subtraction as far as one can imagine in the cinema. This is not a matter of simple minimalism. To construct a form through which to perceive a void, for Tarr as for Beckett, requires bold contortions of aesthetic invention. Having already established himself as the most stubbornly modernist of contemporary auteurs, Tarr has ended his career with possibly his most radical film to date.

A Philosophic Parable

The Turin Horse begins in darkness as a narrator provides a slightly bemused recounting of Nietzsche's storied final moments of sanity:

In Turin on January 3rd, 1889, Friedrich Nietzsche steps out of the doorway of number six Via Carlo Alberto, perhaps to take a stroll, perhaps to go by the post office to collect his mail. Not far from him, or indeed very far removed from him, the driver of a hansom cab is having trouble with a stubborn horse. Despite all his urging, the horse refuses to move, whereupon the driver – Giuseppe? Carlo? Ettore? – loses his patience and takes his whip to it. Nietzsche comes up to the throng and that puts an end to the brutal scene caused by the driver, by this time foaming at the mouth with rage. For the solidly built and full-moustached gentleman suddenly jumps up to the cab and throws his arms around the horse's neck, sobbing. His landlord takes him home, he lies motionless and silent for two days on a divan until he mutters the obligatory last words ("Mutter, ich bin dumm."), and lives for another ten years, silent and demented, under the care of his mother and sisters. We do not know what happened to the horse.

Following this prologue is the first image of the film, a virtuosic tracking shot lasting several minutes showing a horse pulling on old man on a cart. As Mihaly Vig's dirge-like score is introduced, we watch the horse labor on from a variety of shifting perspectives. Inevitably, we initially assume that this is *The Turin Horse* and that the film is going to speculate on the lingering question of what became of the animal after the fateful encounter with full-moustached philosopher. However, the Nietzsche incident is never referenced in the film, and besides the period in which the film is set, there is little to connect it directly to the events of prologue. While the horse in the film does refuse to move at one point, this occurs outside the stable where the animal sleeps rather than in a public square. The cold, brutal, wind-ravaged landscape of the film certainly isn't Turin. The characters speak Hungarian and drink palinka. While the narrator speculates on the Italian name of the Turin cabbie, he refers to horse's elderly owner in the film as Ohlsdorfer. There seems to be little doubt that we are in Hungary, far from number six Via Carlo Alberto.

The film's story, such as it is, focuses on the horse's owners more than the animal itself. Ohlsdorfer lives in an isolated hut with his middle-aged daughter. He has one lame arm, and she dresses him (the same clothes everyday) and cooks his meals (a shot of palinka for breakfast, a boiled potato for dinner). For entertainment, they take turns sitting in front of their small window gazing catatonically out at the baron landscape. The film takes place over six (presumably) consecutive days. On the first day, Ohlsdorfer and his daughter labor in the howling wind to saddle the horse and fasten their cart to it, only to have the animal stubbornly refuse to move. Ohlsdorfer beats the horse until his daughter convinces him that it's useless. They unsaddle the animal and go back inside. The next five days chart a quiet apocalypse

as the world around them mysteriously grinds to a halt. The horse refuses to eat. Their well dries up. The nearby village is reportedly wiped out. The wind ceases. The oil in their lamps won't catch fire. Nietzsche may have lived on silent and demented for ten years, but it seems unlikely that anyone in Tarr's film makes it past day seven.

Rather than searching for a direct connection between the prologue and Tarr's characters, it is more fruitful to see it as having an indirect and ambivalent relationship to the rest of the film. As a mysterious and apocalyptic tale of empathy and despair precipitating a cataclysmic collapse that snuffs out in an instant and yet lingers on agonizingly, the Nietzsche story functions as a parable mirroring the film's elusive themes.

The prologue also serves to implicitly suggest Tarr's view of the relationship of cinema to philosophy.



Characters often philosophize aloud in Tarr's films. This usually takes the form of semi-coherent rants, a superb example of which can be found in *The Turin Horse*. A neighbor bursts in on Ohlsdorfer and his daughter one day asking to buy a bottle of their palinka. He then sits down and launches unprovoked into a bitter, paranoid metaphysical rant, beautifully written by Tarr's collaborator, novelist László Krasznahorkai. Speculating on the impossibility of the good and the inseparable forces of acquisition and debasement that rule the world, the neighbor rambles for five full minutes, the only scene of sustained dialogue in the film. When he finally finishes his diatribe, Ohlsdorfer grunts "That's nonsense," and the neighbor shrugs and leaves.

Such scenes serve several functions for Tarr. Through them, he acknowledges the impulse to wrestle with philosophical questions; he confirms that his film is partaking in this impulse; he simultaneously demystifies and poeticizes the impulse by having it acted out by drunken, half-mad characters; and, he demonstrates the limits of language and rationality in engaging this impulse (at least in the cinema).

It is characteristic of Tarr's approach that he highlights the unknown, and unknowable, experience of the horse in the Turin parable. For Tarr, the cinema philosophizes by plunging in the opposite direction from philosophy, into that which philosophy cannot adequately engage. The end of philosophy for Nietzsche is the starting point for Tarr's cinema.

Stubbornly Uncertain

Ailing bodies, political instability, the volatility of human relationships, the unknowability of animals, the limits of communication, the deceptive nature of logic, the precariousness of sanity, the insatiability of needs and desires, the unreliability of pleasure, the confinements of family/community/location, the haphazard tyranny of the weather: these are the defining features of Tarr's cinematic universe. In this sense,

The Turin Horse functions well as a summation of his body of work. The metaphysical, existential, ontological precariousness that haunts Tarr's other films becomes the sole subject of *The Turin Horse*, which could be described as an aesthetically precise and exacting parable of vagueness and indeterminacy.

For Tarr, given this fundamental precariousness, nothing is more dangerous and contagious than despair. A spark of despair can turn the world to ash in Tarr's universe, and much of his late work charts the slow, creeping, apocalyptic arc from uncertainty to apathy to despair. Walking, of course, features prominently in Tarr's films. Walking and weather. Long chunks of screen time are given over to characters laboriously battling brutal wind, one step at a time. For Tarr, this functions both as a realistic depiction of life, and as a simple, visceral metaphor for it. Without faith or purpose,

one must trudge on. There is no redemption to be found in Tarr's vision, not even the kind Camus finds in the Sisyphus myth. Sisyphus could be happy because he knew his fate and so he could accept it. We, on the other hand, don't know what's in store for us from one step to the next, never mind beyond that, though all indications suggest things will get worse and worse. The tedium is always fraught with the likelihood of catastrophe. But we must go on regardless, for as long as we can, because, of course, it is not up to us in the end.

Tarr's vision aligns well with Beckett's famous last words in *The Unnamable* ("in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I will go on."). However, Tarr counters the misleadingly triumphant tenor the phrase can take on when presented, as it often is, as a kind of epigram for Beckett's worldview: to go on is no feat to be applauded, it is not even necessarily desirable, it is simply the burdensome fundamental condition of existence. Both Tarr and Beckett are artists of purgatory, and their differences have less to do with perspective than medium. Writing, for Beckett, mirrors interiority, speaks of wrestling with the seemingly useless, unrelenting, confounding experience of consciousness. The cinema, for Tarr, stages exteriority, observes the mysterious, interdependent relationships between unknowable beings (human or animal) and the seemingly indifferent world that they inhabit and that dictates the confines of their existence.

Tarr refuses to stage a satisfying apocalyptic finale. In Tarr's films, even the apocalypse is robbed of its grandiosity and finality, is rendered provisional and uncertain. Every moment is apocalyptic, headed inevitably toward the end, and yet no end arrives. The seventh day is never shown in the film. On the one hand, there is no need to show it. Rationally, we know what will happen. The village is gone. Everyone has vanished. They have no water. Fire won't burn. At the end of the sixth day, Ohlsdorfer and his daughter sit at their table in darkness, each trying to force down a raw potato. And yet, we see them. In the last shot of his career, Tarr gives us light where there is none. This can hardly be viewed as an uplifting gesture of hope, as it allow us only to witness inevitable suffering longer than we would otherwise be able to. Nonetheless, there is something modestly, even bleakly, affirmative in this simple final gesture, which attests to Tarr's refusal to deflect uncomfortable truths with a spectacle of finality he doesn't believe in.

-Mike Vass