"A Cosmic *Wirtschaft*": Mood, Materiality and "Metacommunication" in the Cinema of

Béla Tarr [Ágnes Hranitzky, Míhaly Víg, and Laszlo Krasznahorkai] (1987-2011).

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This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Nicky Hannan

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Abstract

This dissertation is a thematic response to the films of Bela Tarr's "second-period", from *Damnation* to *The Turin Horse*; and to claims made in the director's discourse concerning the departure of his cinema from "story" and toward "metacommunication." By this, Tarr refers to a motion away from the exigency of conventional narrative economy and toward an expressive realisation of the materiality of time, atmosphere and milieu. With reference to the philosophical discourse on *Stimmung*, or "mood," I will argue that the disposition toward these paranarrative elements constitutes a medium of experience that conditions an attunement to the affective presence of the world. The appeal of *Stimmung* - which displaces the difference between "subject" and "object" - will orient our engagement with the "cosmic perspective" of these films and the "poetic experience" it implies. This displacement takes place with regard to a "free-indirect subjectivity," an autonomous camera-consciousness that draws together subjects and environment into an experiential "state of being", or "being-with". Paradoxically, this inclination away from "story" becomes more profound with the entry of the writer Krasznahorkai into the circle of Tarr's collaborators. The writer's work represents a pretext and philosophical background to these films, which will be explicated with particular reference to Benjamin and Heidegger. Meanwhile, Tarr's medium essentialist view rejects interpretation, situating his antipathy to "story" with reference to "metaphysical things" – theory and ideology, symbol and allegory – and suggesting that our "dignity" has been progressively diminished by the being-in-language of historical man. Accordingly, corruption by language is a thematic element of these films, in which the breakdown of meaning and its communicability takes on the apocalyptic dimensions of a cosmic disharmony. This will be read through Agamben's discourse on gesture, ethics, and "messianic" time.

List of Illustrations

Introduction to Béla Tarr

This thesis critically examines the mode of experience that is invoked by the cinema of

the Hungarian auteur Béla Tarr, and the way that this cinematic experience is

represented by the director in commentary and interviews. More specifically, it centres

on a thematic reading of the affective atmosphere and temporality of the five films made

from *Damnation* (1987) to *The Turin Horse* (2011). This is a period that has been referred

to as the director's "mature films,"[1] or simply "the Tarr style."[2] The attainment of this

style follows Tarr's development from documentary realism, via a peculiar chamber

drama, to a signature aesthetic that has attained a special reverence among cinephiles, if

not a place in the pantheon of great art cinema directors, as Jonathon Rosenbaum

claimed as early as 1996.[3] The film widely considered to be the magnum opus of this

oeuvre, *Satantango* (1994), infamously runs for over 7 hours, and is emblematic of the

central significance of Tarr's representation of lived-time, which is evinced through a

proliferation of cinematic "dead time." It is for this reason that the corpus of films under

consideration is commonly characterised as part of the movement of "Slow" or

"Contemplative" Cinema.

However, this is a context in which Tarr's singular style is idiosyncratic, even

where the director is among the more influential names associated with this "cinema of

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[1] Jacques Rancière, *Béla Tarr, The Time After*, trans. Erik Beranek (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2013), p.24.
[2] András Bálint Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr: The Circle Closes* (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2013), p.1.
[3] Jonathan Rosenbaum, "A Place in the Pantheon: Films by Béla Tarr" from the Chicago Reader (May 9, 1996), www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/1995/05/a-place-in-the-pantheon/ (Accessed January 30, 2018).

slowness."[4] The formal strategies that characterise Slow Cinema are legibly descended

from the realist tradition in post-war modernism, sharing in an emphasis on the capacity

of the cinema to preserve phenomenal continuity and observe social reality. But Tarr's

films present a milieu that is made systematically uncanny and estranged in a way that

departs from the ostensive "transparency" of realism (for which he expresses disdain).[5]

András Bálint Kovács identifies this milieu as "a universal image about the world,"[6] while

Jacques Rancière regards it as a mediation of the historical and the mythological.[7] I will

retain Tarr's terminology in order to identify what he calls the "cosmic" condition of this

environment, but position it in relation to the influence of the writer László

Krasznahorkai. Tarr downplays this influence with reference to a medium essentialist

view of film;[8] a view that, contradictorily, appears to gesture toward the basic tenets of

realism.

The singularity and formal consistency of Tarr's aesthetic, as well as its internal

incongruities, thus open a fertile ground from which to contemplate cinematic form and

expression more generally. Tarr seeks to present a mode of perception and attunement

to certain qualities of existence, experience and material presence. "States of being" are

realized by a mobile gaze that seeks to position the spectator "inside and outside at the

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[4] Michael Ciment, "The State of Cinema," address speech at the 46th San Francisco International Film Festival (2003), available at:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040307143900/http://www.sffs.org:80/fest03/special/state.html (Accessed January 30, 2018).
[5] Béla Tarr, interview by Geoff Andrew in *Sight and Sound* 17, no.7 (July, 2007), p.19.
[6] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.174.
[7] Jacques Rancière, "Béla Tarr: The Poetics and Politics of Fiction" in *Slow Cinema*, eds. Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p.246.
[8] Béla Tarr, interview by Jonathon Romney, *BFI Southbank Events*, March 15, 2001, recording held at BFI National Archive, London.

same time."[9] This peculiar disposition resonates strongly within a philosophical discourse that sees mood as a structure of experience which is neither "internal" nor "external," neither "subjective" nor "objective," but a medium which unseats such distinctions. This erasure of binary oppositions will orient my discussion of the anti-metaphysical worldview behind Tarr's cinema, the encounter with a state of being that it presents, and the central concept of "dignity" toward which its ethos is directed.

A Slow Cinema

In Slow Cinema, narrative action is withdrawn into rhythms of everydayness, repetition and endurance. It is an art cinema that demands the concentration of the viewer, in addition to the expenditure of their time. The minimal and mundane are offered for contemplation, within durations that distend the relationship between the form and function of images. These strategies are most explicitly formed in opposition to the formal economy of Classical and Post-Classical Hollywood convention. But the Slow movement is often considered, by extension, in contradistinction to the models of temporal efficiency that characterise the technological worldview of modernity. This is particularly the case with regard to a contemporary globalised neoliberal capitalism, as well as the pervasive homogeneity, or hegemony, of the time under which it operates.[10]

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[9] Béla Tarr, "Temptation Harbour: On the Contrasts at Work in "The Man from London"" in *Sight and Sound* 19, no.1 (January 2009), p.55.
[10] Lutz Koepnick, *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p.2.

This distinction also reflects the dispersed (or globalised) centres of Slow Cinema's production. These range from across Asia, Latin America, and Southern and Eastern Europe, forming a common response to the affect (and after-effects) of globalisation and modernisation, with respect to peripheral locations and marginalised peoples.[11] The aesthetic strategies of Slow Cinema thus speak to a politics of representation which expand beyond national cinematic models, even where focus does not extend beyond the local. Against a global time that circulates and accelerates beneath the sign of capital, it poses the experience and significance of "other" modes of temporality and experience. These strategies can more readily be identified with critical discourses on post-war art cinema, such as in the Deleuzian "time-image,"[12] but even more particularly with the tradition of realism as it emerges through Andre Bazin's reading of Italian neorealism.[13] Indeed, slow cinema can be viewed as an intensified engagement with the techniques that Bazin associates with a "realist" aesthetic: depth of focus, long-takes and sequence shots; non-professional actors and location shooting. These techniques are almost entirely characteristic of the "Tarr style." The ambient density of scenarios in this oeuvre are realised through often "extreme" long-takes, regularly running up to 11 minutes in length. Choreographed mobile sequence shots work to open situations as sites of survey, rendering them as absorptive milieus, whose bond with narrative causality is stretched

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[11] Matthew Flanagan, "'Slow Cinema': Temporality and Style in Contemporary Art and Experimental Film," (PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2012), p.118. https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10036/4432 (Accessed January 30, 2018).

[12] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Robert Galeta (London & New York: Continuum, 2011).

[13] See Andre Bazin, "An Aesthetic of Reality: Cinematic Realism and the Italian School of Liberation" in *What is Cinema? Vol. 2*, ed. & trans. Hugh Gray (Berkley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1972), pp.16-40.

and loosened. Conventional structural emphasis on clarity of character motivation, action and causal dialogue is distended, and emphasis placed instead on the materiality of those locations, atmospheres and durations from which they are shown to emerge, or in which they transpire. The camera seeks out and brings forth the elemental textures that make up these environments, whether material, climactic, or sonic, as a means to encounter their affective presence.

At the same time, these presences are encountered within a foreboding monochrome chiaroscuro and a pervasive atmosphere of entropy and ennui that is equally characteristic of Tarr's cinema. They are set in small towns or rural collectives that appear to have been cast adrift from the surrounding world, and which are presented in the throes of irremediable social dissolution and a corresponding natural decay. These microcosms are at once emblematic of the broader geopolitical context of Slow Cinema and yet far too stylised to refer to it directly. Tarr's are estranged and uncanny worlds, situated at the edge of a crisis of meaning and its communication, which are held under the sway of a corruption that is progressively revealed to be cosmic in its dimensions, and not simply social, as in the neorealist tradition. Those that inhabit this universe are shown to be mired in a pervasive spiritual poverty which is reflected throughout their environment, the material presence of which is meticulously observed in the probing and coursing of an embodied camera. The director regularly admits that he considers the landscapes, climate and temporality of which his films' worlds consist to be protagonists with an equal force to the human subjects that inhabit them. As a measure of this free-indirect equivalence between subjects and their situation in a world, Tarr's

long-takes work to animate an inanimate object-world through movement and studied observation. The camera regularly traverses blockages, entering and emerging from columns of shadow, scanning the surfaces of buildings as well as people, and placing peculiar regard upon the natural-historical decay of the physical environment. Through this substantive cinematic gaze, the act of perception becomes self-reflexive. In the process, this observation becomes an event in itself, enabling Tarr to frame phenomenal experience as a thematic concern of these films. Narrative, he says, is of lesser concern than this particular mode of representation, and the experience of time and situation toward which it inclines. The director speaks of his cinema as a "circular dance" and in relation to a certain rhythm that is achieved by a distancing from "story."[14] This is a disposition that is underscored by the cinematic "dead-time" which accumulates through recurrent images of walking, watching, and waiting; and not least in the drunken, circling and stumbling dances that take place repeatedly in the diegesis. These films are often described for their apocalyptic quality, representing an end-time that is drawn into endurance through an oftentimes glacial temporality. The looming threat of cataclysm is consummated in Tarr's final film, a matchlessly bleak representation of 6 days of de-creation, which concludes with a final exit of light from an already dark and desolate stage. More than exercises in absurd nihilism, however, Tarr's films are widely considered to be profoundly contemplative experiences of time and world, emphatically aesthetic

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[14] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).

feats, however dark and estranging these may be. The director, for one, believes that they are (presumably pitch dark) comedies, barring the final instalment.

Praxis and Production

In looking at the Slow Cinema of Béla Tarr, however, it is important first of all to establish that we are talking not only of Tarr, but of a creative ensemble of which he is the figurehead. It is to the director's credit that a broad recognition of this circle follows from his own insistence on acknowledging the collaborative nature of his work, which he tends to speak about in the collective "we." This "we" refers, in the first place, to Ágnes Hranitzky, his wife, who is named as both editor and co-author or -director of all but the first of "his" films; even at that early stage, Hranitzky was listed among the crew for *Family Nest* (1977). In the course of the following 34 years of feature film-making, which reached a declared conclusion with *The Turin Horse* (2011), several other significant collaborators were to join (as well as depart). Mihály Víg composed music for every film from *Almanac of Fall* (1985) onwards, and Gyula Pauer entered as the set designer at the same time, remaining involved in various capacities until *The Man from London* (2007)*.* Each also joined the ensemble of actors - both professional and, more often, not - whose "presence" and "life experience" the director calls upon to give figure to certain states of being. Víg memorably played the role of Irimias in *Satantango*, while Pauer alternates in occupation between set designer and Tarr's barman of choice (playing this role in *Damnation*, *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000), and *The Man from London*). But, in a way

that partially undermines the elevated status afforded by Tarr to his associates, the

director strongly asserts that this body of work is not to be dissected into periods. In a

slippage from the collective ideal, the director (jokingly) implores "please, don't split my

life!," and asserts that "the form is always changing, but I'm always thinking about poor

people and human society and the human condition, as in my first movie."[15] This oeuvre

is, he says, a continuous development of style and concepts that had been present from

his earliest productions onwards – the same movie, but "deeper," "purer," "simpler."[16]

Rather than with regard to any determinate division between stylistic registers – such as

might occur with the addition of new contributors or ideas – Tarr suggests that this

development follows a maturation in his consideration of the "problems" addressed by

these films. The issues to which Tarr responds are the same, but viewed from different

perspectives. "Social" problems are considered, at first, in themselves, then as

"ontological" in nature, then as part of a "cosmic" condition.[17] The progression through

these frames of orientation is a recurrent description offered by the director, which will

form a central point of reference for this thesis. Specifically, it is with the last stage of

Tarr's development – into its cosmic register – that my argument is explicitly concerned. I

take this stage to overlap, substantially if not entirely, with the corpus of films that begins

with *Damnation* and reaches its conclusion with *The Turin Horse*. Equally central to the

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[15] Béla Tarr, interview by Fionn Meade, July 1, 2007, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/béla-tarr/ (Accessed January 30, 2018).

[16] Béla Tarr, "Pure and Simple," interview by Vladan Petkovic, March 4, 2011, http://cineuropa.org/it.aspx?t=interview&l=en&did=198131. (Accessed January 30, 2018).

[17] Béla Tarr, "The Turin Horse," interview by Virginie Selavy, Feb. 4, 2012, http://www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk/features/2012/06/04/the-turin-horse-interview-with-bela-tarr/ (Accessed January 30, 2018).

claims of this thesis, this second period of the director's oeuvre begins with the entrance

of Krasznahorkai into the Tarr circle. The writer completes a quartet of core collaborators

(with the co-directors, and Víg) that formalises the thematic and stylistic register – the

cosmic dimension - of the director's remaining five feature films. As is customary in such

cases, however, Tarr's name will stand in as a placeholder marking the centre of this

circle.

Reading Tarr

The difficulties in delineating the borders of Tarr's jurisdiction and categorising its

outcomes are evident in the most comprehensive analysis of this cinema to date, András

Bálint Kovács' *The Cinema of Béla Tarr: The Circle Closes*. Kovács is a close friend of the

director and Hranitzky, a relationship through which he has been privy to valuable insight

into the operations of the Tarr circle.[18] He unequivocally declares the central role of

Hranitzky as co-director (without, however, being able to define it exactly),[19] and

identifies the significant influence of Pauer, whose 1970's "Pseudo-Art" movement had

apparently inspired a postmodern self-reflexivity in Tarr's efforts to create "the feeling of

reality in an artificially created pseudo-world."[20] Kovács places this discovery at the

centre of the director's progression from documentary realism, through a period of

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[18] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.vii.
[19] Ibid. pp.19-20.
[20] András Bálint Kovács, "The World According to Béla Tarr," 2008,
www.kinokultura.com/specials/7/kovacs.shtml (Accessed January 30, 2018).

selective experimental stylisation, by the conclusion of which the "the Tarr style" is discovered and developed until its eventual completion;[21] that is, the social, the ontological, and then the cosmic. Along the same trajectory, Kovács regards this development of "the Tarr style" to represent an increasingly personal expression of the world on the part of the director. Kovács seeks to demonstrate what he calls "the permutation principle," which, in alignment with the director's self-conception, observes that the elements comprising the mature "Tarr style" had been in evidence since *Family Nest*.[22] This "permutation" is, according to Kovács, a matter of the disposition of formal strategies borrowed from the corpus of cinematic modernism: from Jancsó and Cassavetes to Antonioni, Fassbinder and Tarkovsky.[23] Kovács also situates Tarr's body of work within currents in Hungarian avant-garde art and cinema of the 1980s, specifically in terms of absurd or expressive stylisation.[24] At the same time, Kovács asserts that "there is nothing 'Hungarian' in Béla Tarr, and no Hungarian cultural or cinematic tradition would help in appreciating or understanding his particular cinematic universe."[25] Tarr is seen, in this way, as a universalised modernist-postmodernist, who systematically appropriates and re-configures those pre-existing artistic strategies that can best give form to a personal vision of the world – a world at once highly realistic and highly stylised, both localisable and decontextualised. Kovács channels these insights toward a discussion of the basic narrative-thematic system of Tarr's cinema. He characterises this system in

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[21] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.40.
[22] Ibid. p.1.
[23] Ibid. pp.51-55.
[24] Ibid. pp.79-81.
[25] Ibid. p.97.

terms of the characters' "entrapment" in hopeless existential situations, the absurdity of

which are revealed through a circular narration (of return and/or non-progression) in

which the viewer becomes implicated.[26] It is with regards to the circular form of

narrative, and its intimation of an apparently "Nietzschean" cyclical time-concept, that

Kovács most clearly credits the contribution of the writer, Krasznahorkai.[27] Kovács offers

a rigorous formal analysis to demonstrate the gradual development of Tarr's personal

vision in quantitative terms. The incremental increase in the average length of shots in

Tarr's films, and a corresponding decrease in time devoted to dialogue,[28] are both

noteworthy, although the director himself strongly disputes their value. Tarr says he got

no further in the book (roughly halfway) than Kovács' cinemetric graphs, which he calls

"strange shit."[29]

This line exemplifies the brusque, oftentimes dismissive tenor of the director's

discourse. Tarr is keen to stress that "metaphysics," philosophy – or, indeed, analytical

measure – has no place in this cinema. Instead, he directs viewers to "trust your eyes:

everything is very clear and very simple. Watch. That's important. Don't think about it too

much."[30] Speaking of Kovács' study, the director states preference for Jacques Rancière's

slim essay-book, *The Time After*, directly after he calls Kovács' volume "very long."[31]

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[26] Ibid. p.100.
[27] Kovács, "The World According to Béla Tarr."
[28] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.142.
[29] Béla Tarr, ""Be More Radical Than Me!": A Conversation with Béla Tarr," interview by Martin Kudlac, July 18, 2016, https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/be-more-radical-than-me-a-conversation-with-bela-tarr (Accessed January 30, 2018).
[30] Béla Tarr, interview by Phil Ballard, "In Search of Truth: Béla Tarr interviewed" for *Kinoeye* 4, no.2 (March, 2004), www.kinoeye.org.04/02/ballard02.php (Accessed January 30, 2018).
[31] Tarr, interview by Kudlac (2016).

Where the current study more frequently refers to Kovács as a source of information, and is closer to it in scale, my argument will stake a space closer - in substance more than style - to Rancière's reading. Nadin Mai, who runs the excellent website "The Arts of Slow Cinema," characterises the difference between these two major studies of Tarr according to Kovács' quantitative dissection of the films, against Rancière's poetic engagement of their "quality" and "atmosphere."[32] This engagement is extended beyond the 81 (petite) pages of *The Time After* in a shorter essay that is included in a collection on the subject of "Slow Cinema," and which builds on the ideas of the earlier discussion.[33] Rather than as a categorical study of Tarr's oeuvre, Rancière pursues a critical explication of the way that these films' "radical materialism" represents a relationship between politics and aesthetics, in an extension of the philosophers broader discourse on this relationship.[34] He looks, in the first place, to the particular ("post-historical") context of Tarr's work. Rancière situates the director's films in a transition between historical narratives and their corresponding representations of time. He regards them as dealing in "the disenchantment regarding the capitalist promise following the collapse of the socialist one."[35] This disenchantment responds to the "post-historical" narrative of globalised capitalism, which corresponds to "the morose, uniform time of those who no longer believe in anything."[36] In the second place, and as an outcome of this context, Rancière

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[32] Nadin Mai, "Review: Béla Tarr, The Time After – Jacques Rancière," May 23, 2014, https://theartsofslowcinema.com/2014/05/23/review-bela-tarr-the-time-after-jacques-ranciere/ (Accessed January 30, 2018).

[33] Rancière, "Béla Tarr: The Poetics and Politics of Fiction,"pp.245-260.

[34] See Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London; New York: Continuum, 2004).

[35] Rancière, "Béla Tarr: The Poetics and Politics of Fiction," pp.246.

[36] Rancière, *The Time After*, p.9.

seeks to define "cinema's proper task" with relation to the form of realism that is exemplified by Tarr's rejection of narrative exigency in favour of a "materialist poetics," in which the experience of time is a central issue.[37] In the case of both politics and aesthetics, Rancière refers to a gap between the constructed time of narrative and the lived time of experience, which he aligns with a corresponding tension between "story" and "situation," and, by this turn, with the distinction between literature and cinema.[38] This echoes a central line in Tarr's discourse, which my discussion will also interrogate. Like Rancière, the director distinguishes between cinema and literature in the generalised terms of medium specificity, claiming that film "as a genre" is "primitive" and "concrete," (or, in the philosopher's terms, sensible and material).[39] The director most often describes this specificity in terms of a cinematic "language" distinct from literary or philosophical proposition. Moreover, Tarr gestures toward the correspondence between history, time and narrative that frames Rancière's study. A repeated phrase in interviews with Tarr concerns the repetition of the "same old story, since the Old Testament."[40] The director associates this form of "story" with linear narrative (and its resolution), and with a chronological conception of time. Tarr prefers "stories" in the plural, which he takes to emanate from the material presence of phenomenal reality, and which he likes to refer as "metacommunications."[41] It is toward the meaningful presence of landscape, environment, faces and bodies that Tarr's cinema of slowness is oriented, in a way that

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[37] Ibid. p.49.
[38] Ibid. pp.6-7.
[39] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).
[40] Tarr, interview by Selavy (2012).
[41] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).

will orient my examination of these films.

A Cinema of Poetic Presence

As with Rancière (and, to a lesser extent, Kovács), this dissertation finds Tarr's treatment

of story to be fundamental to the expression of time and materiality in his cinema.

Against the other studies, however, I take Tarr's distinction of his cinematic language

from that which is verbally constituted to be at once instructive and rhetorical in nature.

The "mature" style through which Tarr achieves this particular distance from "story"

becomes especially apparent from the point at which Krasznahorkai enters into this

collaboration, and after a period in which the director had first encountered the writer's

work.[42] Both *Satantango* and *Werckmeister Harmonies* are "adaptations" of

Krasznahorkai novels (or parts thereof), while *The Turin Horse* was inspired by one of the

writer's essays, and its "screenplay" written by him. Krasznahorkai also developed, with

Tarr, the script and screenplay for both *Damnation* and *The Man from London*; the latter

adapted from a novel by Georges Simenon, the only "story" in which Krasznahorkai had

no hand in creation. Another short film, *The Last Boat*, is based on two short stories from

the writer.[43] Furthermore, dialogue in Tarr's cinema – and particularly where it tends

toward digressive speech or pseudo-philosophical excursion, as it often does – has either

an inimitably Krasznahorkian quality, or is lifted directly from his prose. With verbalisation

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[42] Tarr, interview by Petkovic (2011).
[43] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.178.

so reduced in these films, a special gravity pertains to the appearance of these tracts of discourse. The central monologue in Tarr's near-speechless final film is a forceful example of this dynamic. It is intriguing, therefore, how little attention is afforded to the writer's influence by either of Kovács or Rancière. While Kovács does credit Krasznahorkai with the introduction of a circular narrative form and time-concept, as stated above, a greater significance is accorded, for instance, to the postmodern "pseudo-realistic" aesthetic of Pauer. Even where referring to "the shift to highly literary, artificial dialogue" and its "very serious consequences regarding the entire stylistic universe of Tarr's films," he does so with credit to the director rather than the writer, and pays little attention to the dialogue itself; only to the uncanny, "pseudo reality" it effects.[44] Where Kovács is specifically interested in the "vision" of the director in his formalist auteur study, he does little to admit the central role of Krasznahorkai in the forming of this perspective. Rancière does not undervalue Krasznahorkai's influence quite so much, but neither does he explicitly engage with the writer's work in his condensed discussions. He repeatedly casts Krasznahorkai as "Schopenhauerian,"[45] as shorthand for the disillusioned pessimism that his stories of false prophets and their false promises imply, and posits these narratives against the situations that Tarr extracts from them as the framework for a discussion of filmic realism.[46] It is perhaps reasonable to concentrate on the explicitly cinematic elements of Tarr's deliberated realisation of a phenomenal world, constituted through material and temporal elements. This is especially the case in that the director

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[44] Ibid. pp.48-49.
[45] Rancière, *The Time After*, p.31.
[46] Ibid., pp.6-7

regularly orients his interlocutors in this direction, and away from any conceptual or

symbolic understanding of these films; and more so where he commonly frames this

distinction with explicit reference to Krasznahorkai. A recently published study of Tarr's

cinema from Thorsten Botz-Bornstein does appear to admit the influence of

Krasznahorkai, and to the perspective of melancholy therein. Its focus, however, is on

Tarr as an exemplar of an "organic cinema" that Botz-Bornstein reads through the

concept of the organic in architecture and philosophy.[47]

Where the director is keen to stress the entirely practical nature of his work - and,

by extension, the "concrete," "primitive," practical nature of cinema itself - the writer

conceives of his role as lending not only narratives or situations, but "background

atmosphere" and "philosophical background" to Tarr's poetics.[48] But positioning

Krasznahorkai as a central figure in the development of these poetics does not diminish

the role of Tarr. Instead, I will argue that a more enriching sense of the director's

"cosmic" perspective can be explicated with reference to ideas in Krasznahorkai's prose

writing. In his *Satantango* and *The Melancholy of Resistance*, the writer animates

inanimate nature and draws an equivalence between environment and existence,

represented as a climactic correspondence between subjects and their experience of the

world. Throughout Krasznahorkai's writings and discourse, he gives shape to the notion

of a "cosmic" commerce within which these affects circulate, forms a melancholic

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[47] See Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, *Organic Cinema: Film, Architecture, and the Work of Béla Tarr* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017).

[48] László Krasznahorkai, "Against the Brutal, Against the Bad," interview by James Hopkins, http://www.lit-across-frontiers.org/transcript/interview-with-laszlo-kraznahorkai/ (Accessed January 30, 2018).

perspective of time, history, and "human nature," and also provides an edifying philosophy of aesthetic experience and truth. Krasznahorkai's speaking of a background that is both philosophical and atmospheric, as well as Tarr's denial of such a background, are mutually instructive in this sense. Concepts that can be traced from Krasznahorkai are realised and materialised by Tarr in a way that is self-consciously cinematic and, more than this, substantially poetic in nature.

Indeed, in the chapters that follow, Tarr's cinematic attunement to time, materiality, and milieu will be viewed as a mode of poetic experience, which reveals the significance of the material stuff of everydayness in an uncanny or extraordinary manner. It is an experience oriented toward the encounter with things *as such*, as material presences. It is here that Tarr's notion of cinematic primitivism and metacommunication will be situated, as well as his disenchantment with those forms of knowledge that are represented and transmitted through verbal expression. The director's disassociation of his cinema from "story," and from "philosophical or metaphysical things," is to be viewed as an outcome of the privilege afforded to the encounter with phenomenal *presence* in advance of the interpretation of re-presented *meaning*. This is an ethics formed against the inherent anthropocentrism of the modern, empirical worldview, and its foundation in the Cartesian dualism that separates subject from object, essence from substance, and the human intellect from sensory being or creaturely life. The separation of meaning from material can be placed among the binary oppositions that structure this worldview,

which Tarr implies to be a threat to human dignity,[49] and which the melancholic

perspective of his cinema seeks to destabilise. Indeed, the status of the camera in Tarr

speaks to this notion, in that it mediates between subjects and their environment in a

way that aligns to neither "subjective" nor "objective" points of view. Rather than

gesturing toward a premodern primitivism, however, Tarr's concern with presence is a

concern with the present. The apocalyptic quality of this cinema – which is, again, a

recognisable inheritance from Krasznahorkai[50] - can be regarded in this relation, and

given the proper name of a "time of the end," or messianic time. This is the time in which

we no longer defer toward a narrative teleology of historical progress or divine

providence, but instead "truly grasp the present,"[51] the now, as if the end had already

arrived.

Structure

The first chapter constructs a framework for encountering the material environment and

affective atmosphere of Tarr's second period films. It looks to the way that the spectator

is displaced into the uncanny world of *Damnation*, as a model for the enduring mode of

disposition that is realised by this cinema. I will draw on the German language concept of

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[49] Béla Tarr, "Listening to the World: A Conversation with Béla Tarr," interview by Matt Levine and Jeremy Meckler, March 20, 2012, https://walkerart.org/magazine/bela-tarr-turin-horse (Accessed January 30, 2018).

[50] As an example, Susan Sontag's label of "the contemporary Hungarian master of Apocalypse" is prominently displayed on the covers of both *Satantango* and *The Melancholy of Resistance*.

[51] Giorgio Agamben on Walter Benjamin's concept of messianic time, cited in Leland de la Durantaye, "Homo Profanus: Giorgio Agamben's Profane Philosophy" in *Boundary 2* 35, no.3 (Fall 2008), p.47.

mood, *Stimmung*, in order to read the paranarrative expression of Tarr's cinematic environments.

The prominent position of *Stimmung* within the writings of Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin will orient a discussion of this idea of mood, and initiate a running engagement with the two thinkers throughout this dissertation. Running in parallel, and joining them together, is the philosophy of Agamben, which is deeply influenced by both thinkers. Agamben offers a lens through which to consider Heidegger's poetic truth and Benjamin's messianic nihilism, in addition to his own significant work on political ontology and aesthetics.

The second and third chapter will work in tandem to explicate the issue of Tarr's cinematic language. Each responds to the terminology that the director employs to distinguish between his filmic expression and that of Krasznahorkai's prose. In each instance, the core concepts through which the director constructs this distinction will be developed in reference to, and revaluation of, two seminal voices from the history of film theory. Pier Paolo Pasolini's theory of poetry and "free indirect subjectivity" will orient the notion of cinema's "primitive language" in the second chapter, while Andre Bazin's discourse on realism will open an encounter with the concept of ("concrete") presence in chapter three.

The final chapter will draw together concepts from the previous three into an exposition of the ideas of rhythm and gesture. The formal, structural qualities of rhythm are regarded as the disposition of those elements that animate the being and

"mattering" of an artwork. The explication of this idea will centre on a reading of Tarr's final film, *The Turin Horse*, and especially with reference to the role of music in establishing a "common ground" between human and animal.

It is on the ground of this common place, or *ethos*, that Tarr stakes the central value of his work. The director refers to it as "dignity," in a recalibration of the central premise of Humanism. Tarr's peculiar approach to the idea, however, unseats the human from the centre of the universe in order to realise a cosmic perspective of time, materiality, and their affect on human being-in-the-world. The absurd narratives and estranging environments of these films appear to be of a morbidly nihilistic character, but, as the director himself has suggested, "the more desperate we are, the more hope there is."[52]

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[52] Béla Tarr, "The More Desperate We are, the More Hope There Is," interview by Robert Chilcott in *Vertigo* 3, no.7 (Autumn 2007), p.11.

1. **"A Peculiar Remaining, Enduring":** *Stimmung* **and the message of milieu.**

The style of Béla Tarr is immediately recognisable, and particularly after the turn to its "second-period." With *Damnation* – and with the core creative ensemble that remains in collaboration from this film until the director's last – a signature aesthetic is formalised. Specifically, Tarr's cinema becomes characterised by a stark minimalism rendered in foreboding monochrome and a doom-laden atmosphere, which is encountered within a complex choreography of lengthy sequence-shots. It is an unblinking formal engagement with situations and durations of existential deprivation, isolation and disquietude, one in which the exigencies of conventional narration are dispersed within a renewed focus on temporality, materiality and environmental presence. With respect to their treatment of time in particular, all of those films succeeding *Damnation* are commonly classified as belonging to the contemporary movement of Slow or Contemplative cinema. This is a context in which they are at once seminal and idiosyncratic in style. Where Tarr's cinema shares in a Slow deferral of narrative causality within an emphasis on the integrity of lived-time and perception, the evocation of mood and the poetic quality of images, the world it presents is at once immersive and estranging. Tarr's long-takes deliberate within degraded physical environments that are pervaded by a constancy of inclement weather and an atmosphere of entropy and ennui. The camera seeks to disclose an affectively-charged milieu in which viewers become displaced, attuned to the expressive qualities of

temporality and material presence. Where a mode of perceptual "attunement" and the poetic evocation of phenomenal experience are recognisable features of Slow Cinema, Tarr's intensive approach to these qualities is suggestive of a particular philosophical discourse on the German concept of *Stimmung*, or "mood." Indeed, considering cinematic experience in terms of *Stimmung* orients a phenomenological perspective on the way that viewers are positioned in relation to the affective disposition of a filmic world. For *Stimmung* denotes a dynamic resonance between the human and its surrounding world that is associated with physical environment and climate as well as musical tone. In this way, it connotes an enveloping, atmospheric quality of experience. Often translated as "attunement," mood-as-*Stimmung* refers to the tonality of our correspondence with a situation, which is at once psychic and physical. Rather than acting as a metaphorical designation for a film's emotional appeal, then, this discourse approaches mood as the medium through which the world is encountered. *Stimmung* is considered co-constitutive of perception and understanding in that it shows things – the world of things, things in general – to matter (or not), in a significant way. In this sense, we might distinguish mood as a structure of experience, a form of perception that does not relate directly to any particular object or stimulus, but which determines the tone of our encounter with such objects *in toto*.

This lack of intentional consciousness constitutes a significant part of the conceptual appeal of *Stimmung* to Walter Benjamin, in that it unseats the conventional division of subject from object, consciousness from materiality. This is an approach taken by Martin Heidegger also, for whom the integral concept of "being-in-the-world" is

necessarily structured by mood or *Stimmung*, an "attunement" to the "there" which is

the subject's access to the world. To Heidegger our attunement is an atmosphere or

milieu, a "medium for acting and thinking"[53] – a designation which, when emphasis is

placed upon the latter category as a means toward the former, might usefully describe

one potential of cinematic mood; that is, a medium through which the imminent *pathos*

of an emotional tonality can become totalised into an immersive engagement with *ethos*,

in the sense of a "dwelling" within the material texture and temporality of a mode of

being. My contention is that such a cinematic experience can condition a mode of

thinking, if not an attunement to the world, through the way of seeing it presents. A

film's way of disposing us toward a world is in this sense discursive, enabling reflection

upon the condition of being-in-the-world and, more than this, of being-with (others). This

is of particular importance in looking at Tarr, in that the poetics of this cinema aim to

position viewers "inside and outside at the same time," exploring the vital

correspondence between an environment and its inhabitants. The camera circulates

within this milieu, mediating between a human "story" and those "metacommunications"

that are evinced in an encounter with the intensive qualities of time, atmosphere and

material presence. It is a milieu that, I will argue, is conditioned in the first place by a

Stimmung of boredom, a mood that is significant to each of Heidegger and Benjamin in

their respective critiques of experience in modernity. Boredom in German is *Langeweile*,

which translates directly as "long-while," and which usefully describes the treatment of

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[53] Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 68. [*FCM*].

temporality in Tarr's cinema. But more than "long," boredom is a relation to time and possibility that colours a certain experience of the world, at a socio-historical as much as a personal level. Encountering this mood, "awakening" it, can open new regions of time to experience; an experience, moreover, which gestures toward the contemporary historical condition that devalues communal and habitual experience (*Erfahrung*) in the proliferation of subjective sensation (*Erlebnis*). Elsaesser situates post-classical cinema as a response to the "failure of experience" in modernity, a normalised medium of shock-*Erlebnis* that represents trauma as the pathos of techno-mediated modernity. Against this, Tarr's attunement of melancholic boredom offers an encounter with the time and atmosphere of an uncanny world, a significant *ethos* that seeks to explore and restore a more holistic texture of experience.

Stimmung, or Attunement

Analysing what he refers to as "Slow Cinema," Jonathan Romney identifies "an increasing demand among cinephiles for films that are slow, poetic, contemplative – cinema that downplays event in favour of mood, evocativeness and an intensified sense of temporality."[54] In such films, emphasis is placed on phenomenal perception rather than narrative information, and weighted upon experiential rather than expositive meaning structures. Accordingly, such phenomena displace conventional techniques of narrative

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[54] Jonathon Romney, "Cinema of the 21st Century: In search of lost time" in *Sight and Sound* 20, no.10 (2010), p.43.

economy in classical storytelling, while more reactively resisting the intensified

fragmentation of much contemporary continuity editing. Narrative action is reduced and

withdrawn into rhythms of everydayness, repetition and endurance. Plotlines are de-

centred and diffused instead within a renewed emphasis on holistic phenomenological

capture, in which atmosphere, mood, and the poetic quality of images become primary

expressive modes. The sonic component to these images, afforded a corresponding time

and space, is often likewise emphasised or accentuated for phenomenal affect. In

speaking of slow cinema's minimal encounters, Rick Warner identifies their specific force

as one of "perceptual attunement," a highly sensitised engagement which can, in his

suggested cases, "rivet and retrain our perception by drawing us into a particular

intensity of looking and listening."[55] Such attunement expressively foregrounds an

awareness of perception, presenting a medium for encountering sensate presence, which

implies a "certain manner of seeing the world."[56] Suggestively, "attunement" also refers

to one regular rendition of the German word for mood, *Stimmung*, a term with a

semantic richness and corresponding theoretical discourse which is lacking of its English

equivalent. *Stimmung* refers to mood not only in the conventional sense of an emotional

underscore or aesthetic atmosphere – it involves these still – but also as a more distinctly

vibrational quality, the sense of which inheres in the name itself: its root, *Stimm-*, also

forms "voice" (*Stimme*) and "to tune" ([*zu*] *Stimmen*); hence, attunement as a

transcription of the underlying idea. In highlighting the lack of direct equivalents among

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[55] Rick Warner, "Filming a Miracle: *Ordet*, *Silent Light*, and the Spirit of Contemplative Cinema" in *Critical Quarterly* 57, no.2 (2015), p.67.
[56] Ibid. p.50.

the major European languages that can "express the unity of feelings experienced by man face to face with his environment (a landscape, Nature, one's fellow man)," the philologist Leo Spitzer explains *Stimmung* as a condition that can,

> ...comprehend and weld together the objective (factual) and the subjective (psychological) into one harmonious unity... *Stimmung* is fused with the landscape, which in turn is animated by the feeling of man – it is an indissoluble unit into which man and nature are integrated.[57]

Significantly, this "indissoluble unit" is conceived as a pervasive, immersive atmosphere, an almost climactic materialisation of affects which is frequently associated with weather in addition to musical tone.[58] In this way, *Stimmung* upholds a special relationship with environment. Indeed, Spitzer further reflects upon the specifically enveloping character of this experiential sensibility by identifying it as a parallel to *Milieu*; he finds the etymological equivalent of "milieu" to be "environment" in English as well as in the German "*Umwelt*" (which translates directly as "around-" or "surrounding-world").[59] Regarded in this way, *Stimmung* is an affective tonality that structures our engagement with the world, conditioning the sense of its presence by enveloping *situation* within a certain *form of perception*. That Spitzer takes this term to be "untranslatable"[60] does not, however, preclude our mobilising the significant ways of thinking about affectivity that resonate within the idea of *Stimmung*, or by its rendition as "attunement." Critically,

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[57] Leo Spitzer, "Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony: Prolegomena to an Interpretation of the Word "Stimmung": Part I" in *Traditio* 2 (1944), p.411.

[58] Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge & London; Harvard University Press, 2008), p.22.

[59] Leo Spitzer, "Milieu and Ambiance: An Essay in Historical Semantics" in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 3, no.1 (September, 1942), p.2.

[60] Spitzer, "Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony," p.411.

Stimmung connotes a unity of "factuality" and "psychology" that unseats the divide

between "subject" and "object," mediating between them, if not bringing their apparent

disunion into question. Its "tuning" connotes heterogeneous elements brought into

correspondence, and so - in terms of mood - the *tempering* of an interior experience and

its external conditioning, of subjective and objective "realities," of physical space and

psyche. In this regard, temper/ament is the concept in our own language that most

closely parallels this broader equivalence between a state of being and musical harmony

(but without the same experiential connotations, or contemporary currency).

The connection between the German language's conception of mood-as-

attunement – as a concert of human and environment, "subjective" and "objective"

spheres – and a cinema involved in the evocation of mood and atmosphere becomes, in

these terms, a substantial matter. It is also in regards to this conception that we can

engage the prominent position of *Stimmung* within the thinking of both Martin Heidegger

and Walter Benjamin. As Illit Ferber demonstrates, and despite a mutual antipathy

towards the work of one other, these thinkers occupy common ground in attempts to

account for a structure of experience, contra Kant, which might overcome the subject-

object divide of empirical epistemology.[61] In this, each sought to de-privilege those forms

of knowledge prescribed by the traditional authority of subjectivity over a world of

objects, as exemplified by intentional consciousness and empirical-scientific method. To

Heidegger, a formulation of the inter-determinacy of "subject" and "object," human and

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[61] Illit Ferber, "*Stimmung*: Heidegger and Benjamin" in *Sparks Will Fly: Benjamin and Heidegger*, eds.
Andrew Benjamin & Dimitri Vardoulakis (Albany: SUNY, 2015), pp.68-70.

world, is famously figured in his concept of their enmeshment in "being-in-the-world."[62]

Neither polarity is given primacy, so much as they are rendered as a holistic relational

totality. In this, the subject is not independent from a world of objects, but is instead

always-already outside itself, involved in the world and an interpretation of it. *Da-sein*

(being-there) is the name Heidegger gives to individual existence, in order to denote the

subject's essential situatedness in a human context.[63] In this, *Dasein* can be said to exist

only insofar as it stands out (*ek-sists*) into the world, the "there" that is *Dasein*'s

involvement in the structure of meaning and possibilities that articulate human

existence. In this view, the world does not stand over and against the subject as a source

of objects for knowledge, but is instead the presuppositional context of understanding

that enables knowledge in the first place. "World" is the matrix of meaningful

understanding into which we are disposed as historical subjects, and by which things take

on their purposeful significance to *Dasein*.[64] Significantly, Heidegger takes *Stimmung*,

mood-as-attunement, to condition the nature of *Dasein*'s experience of being-in-the-

world, determining the manner in which things are encountered and so the way they

become intelligible. Prior to experience and the condition of its possibility, *Stimmungen*

reveal one's *Befindlichkeit*, which translates directly as "how-one-finds-oneself-ness," but

more usefully as "situatedness" or "disposition."[65] It is in this way that moods are

disclosive. Attunement is the tenor of our exposure to being-in-the-world, the way that

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[62] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp.78-79. [*BT*]

[63] Ibid. pp.26-28.

[64] Ibid. p.33.

[65] For a discussion of this translation, see Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's* Being and Time*, Division 1* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: The MIT Press, 1995), p.168.

we correspond with this situation – the way that it "speaks" to us, and so the way that we comport ourselves to it in return. To Heidegger, *Stimmungen* are neither internal nor external, residing neither within a psyche nor in the world itself, but instead as the threshold between being and world.[66] Heidegger says, "A mood assails us. It comes neither from 'outside' nor 'inside', but arises out of Being-in-the-world, as a way of such Being."[67] In regards to this statement, Stephen Mulhall posits that Heidegger is not only suggesting the not wholly subjective nature of *Stimmung*, but that, "it also, and more fundamentally, implies that moods put the very distinction between inside and outside, subjectivity and objectivity, in question."[68] Attunement allows things to show themselves as meaningful, or not, in a specific way – in this, we might view it as a medium of experience, as the milieu in which the world is present, and through which we comport ourselves to the possibilities that structure our interpretation of it.

Both Benjamin and Heidegger seek to challenge the authority of the dominant model of subjectivity, which is placed over and against a world of objects rather than with regard to the experience of meaningful commerce we have with them.[69] But Benjamin's interest in *Stimmung* is both more diffuse within the context of his work and turns in a direction separate to that of Heidegger. Less systematic in approach than Heidegger's ontological critique, Benjamin's engagement is with mood as an optic through which to

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[66] Ferber goes so far as to suggest that we conceive of *Stimmung* as the hyphens structuring the formation "being-in-the-world." See Ferber, "*Stimmung*: Heidegger and Benjamin," p.76.

[67] Heidegger, *BT*, p.176.

[68] Stephen Mulhall, "Can There be an Epistemology of Moods?" in *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 41 (September, 1996), p.199.

[69] The oppositional structuring of this model is given clearer expression in German, where the English term "object" is denoted by *Gegenstand* - that which "stands against."

think about historical structures of knowledge and experience (in their relation to

"Truth"). In "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," Benjamin challenges the formal

structures of Kant's epistemological account of experience, seeking to collapse the

empirical viewpoint of a subjective consciousness.[70] Benjamin seeks to think affect and

experience from a position exterior to Kant's a priori structure of the spatio-temporal

intuition of objects of knowledge, and, so, without limiting experience to a framework of

means-ends intentionality.[71] Indeed, Benjamin's early "Program" thus pre-empts his

longstanding engagement with the relations between means and ends, and their

disentanglement into a "pure means" which is emancipated from teleological ends (and,

so, their pre-determination).[72] Against the empirical structure of subjective

consciousness, Benjamin posits an alternative that would begin from the separation of

knowledge and experience, so that the latter may not be constrained by the judgements

of the former. This is an idea explicated by Giorgio Agamben, who shows that, in the

model of empirical consciousness, knowledge and experience become conflated, where

in earlier conceptions they had been separate inspirations; experience a matter of (a)

common sense, knowledge of the active intellect.[73] Agamben calls this "the expropriation

of experience," the displacement of its embodied authority on to technical means of

[70] Walter Benjamin, "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," trans. Mark Ritter in *Selected Writings Vol.1: 1913-1926*, eds. Marcus Bullock & Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1996), pp.100-110.

[71] Implicit in this, Ferber points out, is a rebuff to the split between subject and object preserved in the intentional structure of Husserl's phenomenological method – another foot on common ground with Heidegger. See Ferber, "*Stimmung*: Heidegger and Benjamin," p.71.

[72] Given expression in Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), pp.277-300.

[73] Giorgio Agamben, "Infancy and History: An Essay on the Destruction of Experience" in *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 2007), p.20.

verification, transforming the burden of experience from a matter of existence to one of scientific method.[74] Shifting toward his later writings on melancholy in the Baroque *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin posits that, "the object of knowledge,"

> …determined as it is by the intention inherent in the concept, is not the truth. Truth is an intentionless state of being, made up of ideas. The proper approach to it is therefore not one of intention and knowledge, but rather a total immersion and absorption in it. Truth is the death of intention.[75]

It is this imminent absorption in a "state of being," which is without an object and cannot be possessed by knowledge, that marks out a vital connection in Benjamin between *Stimmung* and Truth. He saw the Kantian model of the subjective conditions of knowledge as furnishing a notion of experience that, in its restriction to the empirical consciousness of a realm of present objects, is emptied of meaning and significance.[76] It is in this direction that Benjamin looks to tie in this notion of *Stimmung* to a historical materialism, in order to critique a perceived poverty of experience in the modern age – it's "atrophy"[77] – and the ways in which empirical consciousness limits the range of legitimate experience within it. He thus comes to think of *Stimmungen* in their relation to a situation and its historical consciousness, most significantly in his analysis of the structure of Baroque melancholy in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*; but also in thinking of experience and boredom in the context of modernity. Benjamin enlists

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[74] Ibid. p.22.
[75] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 2009), p.36.
[76] Benjamin, "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," pp.100-101.
[77] Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Collins/Fontana, 1973), p.161.

notions of *Stimmung*, and particularly the attunements of boredom and melancholy, to conceptualise the way that moods are historically embedded models that structure experience (as much as they are an affective response to it). In so doing, Benjamin presents capitalist modernity as the site of an increasingly profound rift, to be addressed below, between the distinct modes of "experience" found in German, *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*. *Erfahrung* refers to experience as a continuous and totalising process of understanding integrated over time and history, as in life experience or that of a community, while *Erlebnis* implies a succession of transitory lived events, such as in experiences of novelty or sensation. To Benjamin, the collective, connective texture of experience has become devalued, "atrophied," in an age of subjectivised shock, sensation, and the disconnection it effects.[78] In terms specific to the subject of mood that I will return to at the end of this chapter, *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* can be read in alignment with the distinction between *pathos* and *ethos* in their original denotation.[79] By this I refer to the distinction between a singularly affective passion, in contrast to the forms of understanding that mark the borders of a common-place, or world.

The most significant aspect of *Stimmung* to each of Heidegger and Benjamin is its mediating presence, issuing neither from a subjective centre of intention nor from a discrete world of external objects, but instead comprising and conditioning the context of their more fluid phenomenal encounter. To each of these theorists, thinking through

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[78] Idem.

[79] Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010). The definition of *pathos* (p.1142) is related to "incident, experience…;emotion, passion…," while *ethos* (p.511) relates to "custom, usage…accustomed place." It is in this sense that I will follow a common interpretation of *ethos* as "dwelling," and *pathos* as "passion."

Stimmung promises to account for the ways in which perception and judgement could be said to be affected by the ways in which we relate to our situation, our being-situated in a historical "there." To Heidegger our attunement is a "medium for acting and thinking"[80] – a designation which, when emphasis is placed upon the category of thinking as a foundation for action, might usefully describe the ethical potential of a cinema that takes mood to be a primary condition of experience of the world; it is for this reason, perhaps, that *Contemplative* Cinema has been offered as an alternative to the potentially pejorative *Slow* Cinema. Furthermore, this is a cinema in which the *pathos* of an emotional tonality is transfigured into an encounter with *ethos*, a (mode of) "dwelling."[81] It is an immersion within a totalised *milieu* – an engagement with the temporality of a situation and an environment, which attunes us to a certain mode (if not quality) of being. This is not to say that we might stake our consideration of melancholic boredom in Tarr wholly upon Heidegger's schema of attunement, so much as to suggest that those notions underpinning a philosophical discourse on *Stimmung* are conceptually rich in their application to a certain kind of cinematic experience. Thinking in terms of one's becoming immersed in an atmosphere and a situation, to which one becomes attuned, and through which a certain way of thinking about (or relating to) the world becomes disclosed – these notions might usefully describe, or at least be generatively deployed in relation to, mood in the cinema of Tarr. It is in this sense that we might encounter Tarr's cinema through Heidegger's key descriptions of *Stimmung*, and particularly where he

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[80] Heidegger, *FCM*, p.68.
[81] The origin of *ethos* with "dwelling" (as in, a home or "accustomed place") is recognised not only by Heidegger, but is "dwelled" upon by him more than others.

associates mood with a kind of atmospheric force that conditions our encounter with the world. For instance, in a rich formulation of the idea that also manages to evoke the social and ethical dimensionality of attunement, Heidegger states,

> Attunements are not *side-effects*, but are something which in advance determine our being with one another. It seems as though an attunement is in each case already there, so to speak, like an atmosphere in which we first immerse ourselves in each case and which then attunes us through and through.[82]

Not only does this accord with the significant role given to climactic atmosphere within Tarr but it also reflects the way in which a sense of mood might be said to appear therein. It is worthwhile to note, in this context, that "attunement" as it is ordinarily conceived in English is near-synonymous with "acclimatisation" – both of them speaking to a sensitivity toward environment. In Tarr's cinema, sound and images of climate are constant and palpably affective means of representing and conditioning the atmospheric tonality to which we are exposed. The sound design is deliberately disquieting, often evidently artificial and repetitive, with some form of aural underscore only rarely abating entirely – whether as the ambient humming of a synthesised drone, in Mihály Víg's often dirgelike musical scores, or in the expressive foregrounding of otherwise ostensibly naturalistic, diegetic sound. In each case, sound imbues the image with a texture of rhythmic constancy or a cyclical patterning of aural pressure. This is most often produced by the prominent resonances of natural processes: the unending rain and wind that form the climactic atmosphere of these films' worlds are combined into an audio-visual

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[82] Heidegger, *FCM*, p.67.

consistency, which conditions our experience of this environment. These invoke a

potentially penetrating synaesthetic envelopment, shared with the characters, which

aligns with an essential feature and appeal of the category of *Stimmung*: that it belongs

neither solely to objective facticity or internal psychology, but refers instead to the

affective tonality with or within which the world is encountered. In this, *Stimmung* is a

totalising structure of experience which one inhabits and mediates. It discloses the world

as a whole in a particular way, to which one responds or corresponds; to respond in a

musical analogy, this might be soft or loud, consonant or dissonant, in a major or minor

key.

Mood in Tarr is not simply a matter of an interior psychology, of causal

motivations or their objective attachments. We find here instead something of an

existential situation or state of being, one that is shared among those collected in its

milieu (even where delimited by proximity to a central protagonist-figure). Moods, as

"already there," act as a frame of access to the world, one that is not preconditioned in

terms of a subjective consciousness, but which is instead that medial atmosphere

through which a particular perspective of the world is given. As addition to this allusion,

we might note the extensive linkage made by Benjamin of certain atmospherics (rain, fog,

dust) to that *Stimmung* of boredom which will become our primary focus in the

subsequent discussion.[83] Not only do these forces present an atmosphere as the medium

or milieu by which each of us, character and spectator, are situated, immersed and

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[83] See Walter Benjamin "Convolute D [Boredom, Eternal Return]" in *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p.101.

attuned; they are conceived by Tarr himself to be co-constitutive of his films' dramaturgy.

The director states in a number of interviews that not only people serve as characters

within his films, but that the weather, landscape and time also play major or even equal

roles.[84] Before moving on to identifying this notion particularly within Tarr's image, we

might last of all pay heed to the idea of immersion as it is first alluded to in the above

quote, "an atmosphere in which we first immerse ourselves in each case and which then

attunes us through and through." More than simply atmospheric, this notion of

immersion is also and perhaps more profoundly figured in Benjamin, as foreshadowed

above in connection to Truth. Benjamin posits Truth as having a particular ideational

character, which cannot be subsumed within the judgements of knowledge, but which

presents itself instead through an immersion within the arrangement (disposition) of

meanings and attachments by which things become articulated for experience. As

Benjamin states in the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" to *Trauerspiel*, "truth-content is only

to be grasped through immersion in the most minute details of subject-matter."[85] Where

he is speaking in this context of mosaic, whose fragmentation we could take to find

equivalence in a montage cinema, this does not preclude the resonance of this

immersion in the minutiae of subject-matter with a cinema whose central subject matter

is an environed experience of attunement. Tarr's cinema is consciously immersive, "close

to you," emphasising atmosphere, texture, and materiality within what Kovács calls a

"radical continuity"[86] of time and space. It enacts a deliberated encounter with/in the

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[84] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).
[85] Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, p.29.
[86] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr,* p.114.

presence of an estranged world, an attunement to its existential texture. To literary

theorist Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, and resonating with Warner's formulation, reading

Stimmung is to, "encounter otherness in intense and intimate ways."[87] Gumbrecht points

out in this connection, that each of sound and climate are dimensions of our physical

reality: forms of pressure that both constantly "surround," but also "happen" upon, our

corporeal being, making their presence felt.[88] It is in this way that *Stimmung* at once

encompasses and penetrates lived bodies as an affective milieu, but it is also why an

aesthetics of *Stimmung* functions as a specific medium of embodied cinematic affect. In

this direction, Robert Sinnerbrink has posed *Stimmung* as an alternative to established

and largely cognitivist positions on cinematic mood. Broadly, these theories tend to see

moods as diffuse affective states which work to induce audience responses of emotion or

cognition, guiding viewers toward an understanding of narrative content or character

actions.[89] Sinnerbrink highlights the historical importance of *Stimmung* as an aesthetic

principle for early film theorists such as Béla Balazs and Lotte Eisner, and seeks to

reinscribe it as a contemporary figure of thought able to frame a phenomenological

perspective on cinematic mood.[90] Sinnerbrink's own formulation has an instructively

Heideggerian turn of phrase, in which moods in cinema, and particularly those that

"*ground*" our viewing position, can serve a "*disclosive*" function: revealing and expressing

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[87] Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature,* trans. H. Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), p.13.
[88] Ibid. p.4.
[89] Robert Sinnerbrink, "*Stimmung*: exploring the aesthetics of mood" in *Screen* 2, no.53 (Summer 2012), p.151.
[90] Ibid. pp.149-150.

the character of a cinematic world.[91] These, he says, have the ability to pervade a film as a whole, positioning the viewer within a relationship of shared affective attunement.[92] *Stimmung* seen in this way is not simply an underscore or backgrounded frame of representation, but a constitutive aesthetic environment into which one enters into affective dialogue.

Framing Disposition

To speak, then, of this manner of deliberation within the world(s) of Béla Tarr is to speak of an immersion in a state of being that is represented as a situation and a situatedness, an atmosphere and a temporality. The particular tonality of this concord can be regarded as a grounding *topos*, a *milieu* which structures and mediates our encounter with the disclosure of "world." Viewed in terms that reflect the situatedness of mood, this paranarrative *topos* grounds a fundamental form of *disposition*, in which we are entered and to which we are attuned. It is in this direction that I turn to a focus on landscape as a fruitful example of a broader cinematic poetics that seeks to decentre the narrative emphasis on causal agency and subjectivised psychology in favour of a more immersive encounter within a milieu. Landscape is given specific form by the establishing shot of *Damnation*, which forms the entrance to the second period Tarr. This shot serves not only as a primary example of the figural use of landscape as a constitutive force within

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[91] Ibid. 156.
[92] Ibid. 158.

the evocation of a disposition – one that reverberates between the film's world and the viewer's experience of or attunement to it – but also of the figuration of the gaze of melancholic boredom that becomes a defining feature in Tarr's cinema. To begin, a long take in black-and-white shows an industrial cable-car system stretching off into the distance above a barren vista. The points of reference for this vast apparatus, its origins and ends, are withheld by the expanse of its dimension, but its continuous motions imply a mechanically assured cycle. Partially obscured by distance, a rain-laden atmosphere, and a grayscale tending toward indistinction at its limits, our eye is nevertheless drawn into the depths of this degraded landscape and toward the point where this coursing of steel and wires descends beneath the horizon, splitting the dimension between earth and sky as it does. To its right lies a flat, unbroken horizontal expanse; to the left, a rising prominence, perhaps formed of the accumulating materials carted in its direction, and behind which the human edifice disappears. As we watch, the camera draws back gradually - almost imperceptibly at first - and, over the course of three-and-a-half minutes, slowly opens the frame to reveal our looking onto this scene through a window. The camera continues to recede slowly, so that the window's frame is fully realised and then, behind it, an unlit room is shown to be our apparent setting. We rotate slightly in coming to rest behind the darkened head of a seated figure, staring out, it would seem, into this distance. The procession of cable-cars hum, groan and churn continuously, while the man takes a long draw on his cigarette. Silhouetted against this view, motionless, watching the cycle of departure and its inevitable return, we are first presented with our as-yet faceless protagonist, Karrer, by being interpolated into his own passive position,

his world and this watching of it. In this way his visage becomes something like the dark imprint of a reversed *Rückenfigur*,[93] affixed to a landscape whose inspiration is decidedly mundane, in the sense of being both monotonous and earthbound. Unlike that fundament of Romantic landscape painting, however, here we begin with the landscape and work back toward a given viewing position; but, as with the *Rückenfigur* - which serves to furnish a point of entry into a landscape through a human subject's position, but not an identification with them as an individual subject - our own entrance is Karrer's entrancement, this captivation by the horizon and a fusion with it of our own. For in viewing such a film as intends to make a claim on us as participants, we are ourselves disposed to the disclosure of a world, displaced within it, in order to mediate its relation to our own. As such, we become situated at the outset within the atmosphere and temporality which are the medium of experience within this environment.

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[93] The *Rückenfigur* is a device most commonly associated with Caspar David Friedrich and German Romantic landscape painting. Conventionally, the Rückenfigur is a person placed in the foreground of a landscape painting, seen from behind, in whose position the viewer is intended to interpolate.

Figure 1.1

Figure 1.2

Figure 1.3

Figure 1.4

Figure 1.5

Figure 1.6

Figure 1.7

Figure 1.8

Figure 1.9

To think here of our becoming "disposed" to this environment is to make implicit reference to "disposition," which is more explicitly related to notions of mood. In either form, there is a tangible connection to be drawn from their shared etymology in English – from Latin and through French, and denoting a putting or placing apart, a way of being positioned or oriented.[94] Where the noun "disposition" itself appears first of all in reference to an order or arrangement, commensurate with the Latin stem *disponere* (to put in order, to arrange), its extension into the sense of psychical-emotional inclination would appear to stem from an early deployment of the word in reference to the determining effect of the (ordering of the) planets in astrology.[95] Without staking its use on a faithfulness to astrology itself, it is significant that from this idea of planetary influence derives a resonant lineage in our language, of the saturnine, jovial, martial, venereal and mercurial as bearing this historical link between conceptions of the cosmos and the moods or temperaments of earthly beings. The implicit sense of this notion of cosmic influence, however, is not entirely to be dismissed, where it bears a metaphorical link to one's having an inclination toward, or being under the influence of, a sovereign body (whether literal or figurative). This notion is recognised by Agamben in his account of the Foucauldian *dispositif,* or "apparatus."[96] For Foucault, *dispositifs* are structures of

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[94] "disposition, n.," *OED Online*, January 2018 (Oxford University Press), http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/55123?redirectedFrom=disposition ; via link to "dispone, v." (Accessed January 27, 2008).

[95] Idem.

[96] Agamben presents the idea in two slightly different forms. It is the title essay in: Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?,* trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp.1-24. An earlier version of the same text was presented as a lecture at the European Graduate School: Giorgio Agamben "What is a Dispositive? 2005," www.youtube.com/watch?v=ua7ElsQFZPo&list=PLD799D53E8DE691A6. (Accessed January 29, 2018).

knowledge or strategic networks of mechanisms through which relations of "power" are

inscribed, exercised and maintained.[97] Agamben attempts an expansion of *dispositif* via a

retranslation according to the English "dispositor": "the law of the astrological sign

[which] embodies all of the forces and influences that the planets exerts on individuals,

inclining them, binding and restraining them in all possible ways."[98] Where Foucault

takes institutions such as schools, prisons and madhouses as examples of *dispositifs*,

Agamben expands this scope toward, "literally anything that has in some way the

capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures,

behaviours, opinions or discourses of living beings."[99] An apparatus viewed in these

terms is any non-living device (whether physically constituted or not) which mediates or

conditions the life of living beings[100] – up to and including the transmissions of language,

human being-in-language[101] (an idea that will be returned to in the final chapter). It is in

this sense that the idea of disposition can be mobilised as a productive terminology in

reference to the way in which a state of mind or mood might be said to "assail us" - to

always-already affect our constitution, to posit an orientation toward a situation through

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An accurate transcription of this video can be found at:
https://eclass.upatras.gr/modules/document/file.php/ARCH213/Agamben%20Dispositor.pdf. (Accessed January 29, 2018).

[97] Foucault gives his clearest expression of the idea in: Michel Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh" in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp.194-195.

[98] Agamben, "What is a Dispositive?" (2005).

[99] Idem.

[100] It is significant, in this sense, that Agamben compares "apparatus" etymologically and conceptually with Heidegger's *Gestell*, "enframing," the latter of which denotes the way in which the modern worldview relates to (or "reveals") the world of things in a technological or scientific mode of knowledge, consummate with empirical consciousness. For Heidegger's discussion of the concept, see "The Question Concerning Technology" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1977), pp.3-35.

[101] Agamben, "What is a Dispositive?" (2005).

the way in which it appears to us. As Agamben notes,[102] and as Heidegger infers at one

point,[103] mood can be conceived as a displacement in that it reveals our being

fundamentally "not at home" in the world, disclosing our being "thrown" into a historical

context that is not of our making. In that we are always exposed to an attunement, a

certain mediating presence through which the world is opened, *Stimmungen* show that

Dasein is never at one with Being or with world. As such, Agamben points out that the

consonance and harmony of dispositive *Stimmung* is at the same time a dissonance and a

scission.[104] Indeed, this might be extended to think of experience in this cinema as one in

which our participation as viewers is an inhabiting of a perception and an intentionality

that is not entirely our own. One is positioned or situated as a participant in this cinema,

displaced within a milieu and a way of seeing as means of contemplating a certain quality

of experience. In speaking here of disposition, then, I think both of a displacement within

a filmic world and the orientation positing the mode through which we correspond with

it.

In relation to this immersion in disposition, physical environments take on a

primary function. In Tarr's cinema, setting and, especially, the landscape is said to appear

as a character in his films.[105] This is a concept the director has expressed repeatedly in

interviews, where he stresses that the face of a landscape has the same importance to

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[102] Giorgio Agamben, "Vocation and Voice", trans. Jeff Fort in *Qui Parle* 10, no.2 (Spring/Summer 1997), p.93.
[103] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected "Problems" of "Logic,"* trans. Richard Rojcewicz & Andre Schuwer (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp.139-140.
[104] Agamben, "Vocation and Voice," p.95.
[105] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).

him as the face of an actor.[106] And while Tarr repeats as often a denial of there being two separate periods in his oeuvre, in speaking of *Damnation* with Emile Breton, in an interview itself cited by Kovács and worth quoting at length here, the director states:

> This was when I wanted to have a different approach to cinema. To me this is a landscape film. … Fundamentally, the question is how you can bring life into the picture independently of narration. It is due to this film that I came to realise that the narrative has no importance whatsoever…What interested me in a scene was the falling rain, the awaiting for the most banal event to happen. I think the story in the film could be told in twenty minutes. For me, the important things are the time, the sky, the cranes, the machines in a factory, the gaze.[107]

In this, we find a number of points of contact with mood and environment. The first is the admission that *Damnation* represents a different approach to cinema than in his earlier films, and, more than this, that this is an approach conceived of by the director as nominally concerning environment, a "landscape film." The incorporation of the landscape into Tarr's cinema, in its concurrence with the incorporation of László Krasznahorkai into the director's company, will be explicated further in the next chapter; it is expressly for this reason that the current argument responds to Tarr's second period, beginning with this film. The second point of contact, already alluded to, is a disavowal of narrative density ("story") and the conventions of its representation, the fragmenting of time and space into slices of "information" (a classical continuity). In its place, a holistic

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[106] Béla Tarr, "Turin Horse," interview by Sean Welsh, June 23, 2011, https://edinburghfestival.list.co.uk/article/35180-turin-horse-bela-tarr-interview/ (Accessed January 29, 2018).

[107] Emile Breton, ''Quelques jalons dans une oeuvre vouee au noir'' in *Vertigo* 41 (2001), p.100. Cited in Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, n.1, p.71.

phenomenological continuity seeks to bring *life* – sky, rain, waiting, watching – "into the

picture." Where this is by no means a definitive or entirely unproblematic

characterisation of the director's work, and will become clearer later in connection with

Benjamin's "The Storyteller," it nevertheless serves as a tangible indication of the poetic

emphasis that structures the experience of environment in Tarr. Rather than relating to a

schema of causally motivated actions, the milieu presents a medium of disposition in an

encounter with those presences – material, temporal, atmospheric - that co-constitute

the "life" of an environment. Both aligned in each case with a central protagonist and yet

undertaking autonomous, "anthropomorphic"[108] movement in the service of

investigating the milieu to which that protagonist is disposed, the camera mediates

between these centres of intentionality and renders them neutral. Speaking of *The Man

from London*, but with regard to a central disposition that is effected throughout his

cinema, Tarr stresses that, "the camera is inside and outside at the same time."[109] Kovács

echoes this sentiment in his reading of *Damnation*, and takes this position to reflect the

status of Tarr's characters – all of them "outsiders," all of them inextricably linked to an

(uncanny) environment with which they share a "textural similarity";[110] where, "the

bodies and faces of the characters" are "part of the material environment."[111] This is one

way of viewing the specific mechanics of Tarr's long-take. The camera perambulates as if

embodied of its own consciousness, an omniscient observer that surveys the scene and

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[108] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.50.
[109] Tarr, "Temptation Harbour,"p.55.
[110] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.60.
[111] Ibid. p.63.

positions us within it in a particular way, among its minutiae and material textures. It is, at the same time, decidedly engaged in the disclosure of a subject's relation to their physical environment, a form of paranarrative narration that represents their inextricable enmeshment within it.

Figure 2

Jacques Rancière suggests in relation to *Damnation*'s opening sequence that Tarr "films the manner in which things cling to the individual...that surround, penetrate, or reject them."[112] The gravity of the camera is drawn less toward the presentation of causal activity in either of speech or physical interaction, so much as to an immersion within the

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[112] Rancière, *Béla Tarr, The Time After*, p.27.

locus through which these take place: the ground of possibility in which they emerge. But this is not a matter of setting a scene, or a plot, in that, as Rancière asserts, "action is ultimately only the effect of what they see and feel."[113] In a palpable sense, the camera seeks to present the ways in which characters are actively imposed upon by the bearing of their physical environment, that which embodies the existential situation in which they are situated, and in which they find themselves. As both Daniel Frampton and Kovács identify, there is a tendency from *Damnation* on for shots in which no human subject is initially present, but which reveal them either through the camera's movement or by intersection with theirs.[114] The camera seeks not to frame a direct access to action or agent so much as to locate them within the "pure relationship"[115] of their environment. The above is a first example of this tendency (at a critical juncture in the development of Tarr's work). The opening sequence of *The Man from London* similarly interpolates us into a position of observation, slowly ascending from the waterline, scaling the prow of a ship before rising through the floor as we join our protagonist Maloin in his watchtower; the camera's alignment with his point of view is, however, made ambiguous – at one turn scanning across the window, then returning in a close frame that reveals (and tracks with) Maloin's profile, before re-entering and re-surveying the harbour as an observer of a scene unfolding in the surrounds. Where this is the most conventional establishment of causality in Tarr's later oeuvre, it critically disposes us into the particular time,

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[113] Idem.

[114] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.64. Daniel Frampton, *Filmosophy*, (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), p.149.

[115] Frampton, *Filmosophy*, p.149.

atmosphere and texture of Maloin's daily existence, while positioning us "inside and outside at the same time." But as well as these shots where a subject enters an "empty" frame, Tarr frequently displays the inverse tendency also, sustaining an image of departure for long enough that its subjects have receded into blurs on the horizon of the landscape. This is a notable feature of *Satantango*, by some way the longest of these films, in which "dead time" accumulates through extended sequences of walking (and not only them). Where these at points track closely behind (as with our initial introduction to Irimias and Petrina) or in front (as in Estike's "death march"), there are a number of instances where the camera remains fixed while a human figure is swallowed up at the limits of a landscape, or tracks away in order to effect the same withdrawal. In *The Turin Horse*, too – a film in which we enter a "dwelling" and remain there throughout - we watch as our protagonists depart over the hill that is their horizon (followed shortly after, in the same shot, by their return). In each case, and whether in a mobile sequence (of movement) or with a fixed frame, an equivalence is drawn between an environment and those that exist there, between a milieu and the disposition it effects.

Figure 3.1

Figure 3.2

Figure 3.3

Figure 3.4

Figure 3.5
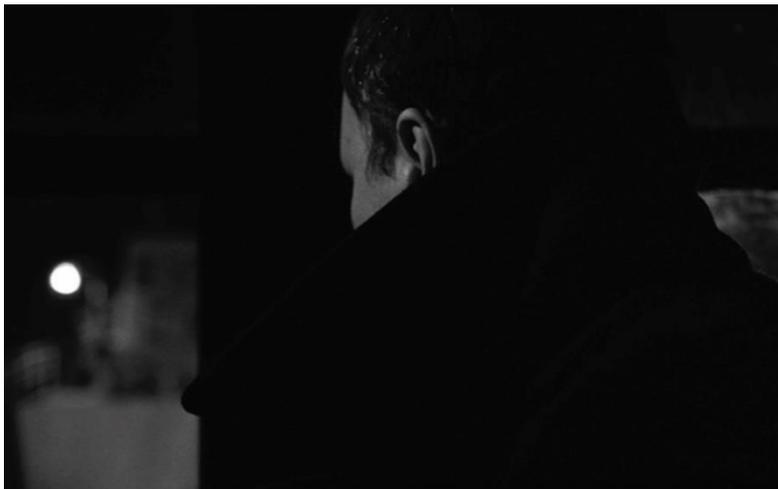
Figure 3.6

Figure 3.7
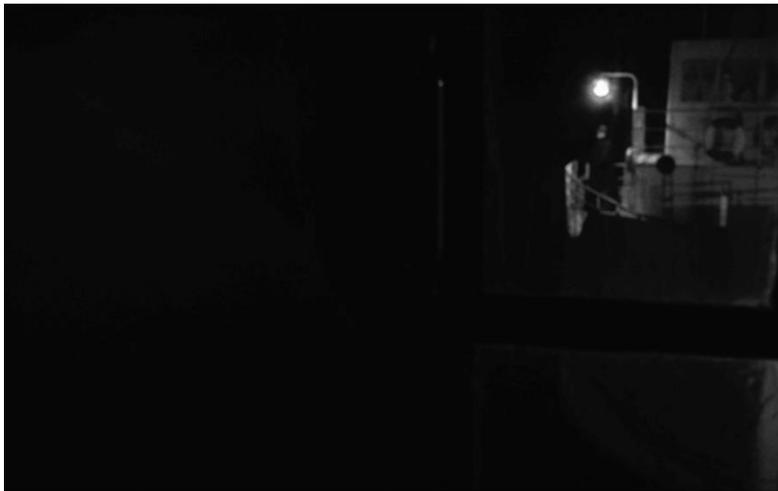
Figure 3.8

More than merely a backdrop, then, the physical environment and its constitutive

milieu come to embody something of a state of mind, an affective plane that addresses

us as viewers, by which we are situated and toward which we are comported. As a

concept (or even as metaphor), the formulation of this idea has a strong precedence with

Tarr's compatriot and early film theorist, Béla Balazs, who states, "Landscape is a

physiognomy, a face that all at once, at a particular spot, gazes out at us. A face that

seems to have a deep emotional relationship to human beings."[116] Balazs directly

addresses the inter-related phenomena of landscape and mood in cinema:

> Since films sets out to depict human destinies rather than to assist the teaching of geography,
> 'nature' cannot appear as a neutral reality. It is always a setting, a background for a scene, and its
> task is to convey, underscore and accompany its mood…just as painting is an art because it
> provides more than just a photographically accurate copy of nature, so film too has the
> paradoxical task of using the camera to paint images of mood…For what matters in the work of art
> is that the entire picture should be the product of a single conception and that nature, the setting,
> should have the same atmosphere as the story that is being told…nature in film is an organic
> component of the story…In general, film has up to now made far too little use of the poetic
> possibilities of having the landscape join in the drama as a living soul, an active participant, so to
> speak…[117]

Some minor points of context are worth noting here in expanding on the phenomenon of

attunement in Tarr. Balazs, though Hungarian by birth, was of German descent, writing in

German, and speaking of "mood" in terms of *Stimmung*.[118] That he is speaking expressly

of silent film, and in service of the critical movement advocating for its recognition as an

artform, is also significant given that Tarr has been associated with a silent era

aesthetic.[119] Without going further into that too-simple comparison, we might still

recognise an illustrative commonality of certain features that would allow for that

evaluation in a broad sense, and so enable this association with Balazs' discourse on

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[116] Béla Balazs, *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), p.53.
[117] Ibid. p.52-53.
[118] That Balazs is speaking to the same idea is confirmed in comparison with the German original, *Die sichtbare Mensch* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001).
[119] Rancière, *The Time After*, p.5.

silent cinema. Most obvious is a shared use of monochrome, but, more than this, a lack

of spoken dialogue - as totality for the silent cinema, and in a heavily reduced fashion

with Tarr. That this disables the communication of auditory information necessitates an

emphasis on graphic, gestural, and tactile imaging, toward which Tarr has stated (and

practiced) preference. "Metacommunication", the director says,"…is more important

than verbal communication."[120] But where the silent cinema (an unwieldy concept, given

its sheer bulk of individual instances) can be said to have developed visual strategies for

the elaboration of story in lieu of audible information, Tarr's rarefied aesthetic and

reticence toward directive dialogue seeks to disavow story in favour of a steadied focus

upon the material world. Cinema, says Tarr, is a "concrete" medium, a "primitive"

language.[121] Phenomenal reality becomes in this way a source of concrete visual

narration that expands beyond a framework of directed action, where "the story is

always part of the image…The question lies in where you put the emphasis on what's

most important."[122] What concerns us most, in the allusions drawn by Balazs, are the

formulation of film's "task of using the camera to paint images of mood," and also the

equivalence he draws in so doing between setting, atmosphere and narrative – to which

we might add those inhabiting it – as a "single conception."

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[120] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).
[121] Idem.
[122] Béla Tarr, interview with Steve Erickson, http://home.earthlink.net/~steevee/bela.html (Accessed January 29, 2018).

The Long Now

In *Damnation*, a relentless deluge is one apparent cause of the manifest decay that pervades an Eastern European any-town and the being of its downcast inhabitants. It is also one ostensible root of a degeneration which is reflected, as if in the pools formed by its steady accretion, throughout the film's bleak monochrome world. Balazs' ideal of a unified conception of atmosphere, setting and narrative takes on a special gravity in this setting, which is emblematic of the second period Tarr. Across all facets of the mise-en-scène and through the fatalistically engineered debasement of our protagonist, Karrer, there transpires a vital correspondence between this degraded environment, its peculiar atmosphere, and the grave sense of ennui through which this world is disclosed. It is this disposition toward the world screened that is introduced in the film's opening scene, where, insofar as landscape can be said to be something of a state of mind, this particularly flat, grey and sodden expanse might represent the uniformity that conditions a certain *Stimmung* of boredom. As Carlo Salzani points out, "boredom is not precisely and clinically defined by Benjamin, but rather identified descriptively through images…boredom is associated to images of dreary sky, fog and rain."[123] This association is made on account of the monotone that they effect, their muting of light and occlusion of clear delineation. It is worth noting, then, that Heidegger too mobilises a comparable imagery in suggesting, "Profound boredom, drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and men and oneself along with it into a

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[123] Carlo Salzani, "The Atrophy of Experience: Walter Benjamin and Boredom" in *Essays on Modernity and Boredom,* eds. Barbara Dalla Pezze & Carlo Salzani (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), p.140.

remarkable indifference."[124] This is echoed by the coat-check lady from *Damnation*'s

Titanik Bar, a figure of apocalyptic vision who at one point warns our protagonist to

button up his coat, lest he fall prey to a fog which, "gets into the corners, into the lungs. It

settles in your soul." But, more than relating symbolically with the dull uniformity of grey

weather (a powerful and invariable presence, it must be said, within Tarr), the *Stimmung*

of boredom has as its more significant issue that of time. Unlike Benjamin, Heidegger's

boredom is rather exhaustively defined, and motions decidedly in this direction. Where

Heidegger's most noted analytic of a *Stimmung* is that of *Angst*/anxiety, by far his most

extensive lies in the consideration of a phenomenology of boredom.[125] He posits

boredom as the "fundamental attunement of our contemporary *Dasein*,"[126] that which

holds us in thrall and yet leaves us disinterested - empty. In boredom, we find ourselves

seeking to pass a time that oppresses us (being-bored-by), or to stand it aside in order for

its casual use (being-bored-with). We are captivated by an indifference toward things as a

whole, which are no longer revealed to us as meaningful or useful – we are "delivered

over to beings' telling refusal of themselves as a whole."[127] But, Heidegger stresses, this

refusal is telling in that it is a "calling"; it points toward possibilities lying meanwhile

inactive, held in suspense, while gesturing toward what makes that potentiality

possible.[128] By his reading, this is time itself, that temporality that we ourselves are.

Boredom broadens perception of this time. It entrances us by its withdrawal into a

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[124] Martin Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" in *Basic Writings,* ed. and trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), p.101.
[125] Heidegger, *FCM*, pp.74-172.
[126] Ibid. p.160.
[127] Ibid. p.139.
[128] Ibid. p.143.

lengthening "now" that eclipses future possibilities as well as their possibilisation by the past. Boredom's intensification into its "fundamental" or "essential form," into *tiefe Langeweile* ("Profound Boredom"), impels the possibility of a self-disclosing "moment of vision" (*Augenblick*), rupturing this captivation and revealing the pure time and potentiality - the freedom - of *Dasein*.[129] In short, there is a degree of being-bored that can, in the suspension of potentiality, illuminate our existentiality. It reveals our ownmost time and possibilities: our finitude, and "being-towards-death."[130] In these terms, we might read boredom as it applies to Tarr in two interrelated ways: as a mode of making material and legible the density of the present as presence, as a "long now," and, in so doing, to allow for a certain attunement to the situation to which this temporality belongs, as well as an "awakening" within it. It will be interesting to note, in this respect, the connection by which profound boredom, as a way of showing up the mattering of possibilities, is related conceptually through boredom to acedia, which means etymologically "without care";[131] and so is anathema to Heidegger's existential ontology, in which *Sorge*, "care," takes on a fundamentally central position.[132] This is a tension in each of the conceptual realms of melancholy and of boredom (which are themselves related conceptually through the area of acedia - between one's distance from the world and one's deeper involvement in it - which exists at a fundamental level in Tarr's cinema, too.

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[129] Ibid. p.152-153.
[130] Heidegger, *BT*, p.296.
[131] Barbara Dalle Pezze and Carlo Salzani, "The Delicate Monster: Modernity and Boredom" in *Essays on Modernity and Boredom*, p.8.
[132] Heidegger, *BT*, pp.225-256.

Where boredom has as its nature a particular experience of temporality in

Heidegger, it might be said of Benjamin that his boredom pertains to notions of not only

the temporality of experience but also its historical structure. That is, his writings on

boredom tend to concern the historical condition of modernity, and become as such

stratified into thinking of this *Stimmung* in its connection to each of modern and pre-

modern social forms, and through the implications these have in material and

experiential terms. Like Heidegger, he is concerned to show the contemporaneity of a

disposition of boredom, its colouring a modern way of relating to the world. Modern

boredom is, to Benjamin, characterised by distraction, by disconnection and shock in an

eternal repetition of the new (such that it becomes the same, and, so, only a semblance

of the new); hence the title of Convolute "D" of his *Arcades Project*, "Boredom, Eternal

Return."[133] But, as Salzani notes, Benjamin's construal of boredom depends on the

orientation by which he comes to think of this *Stimmung* and on which account of

experience he wishes to expound;[134] he is, in such a way, split between critiquing

boredom as the sign of distraction in modernity and mobilising its potential to act as "the

threshold to great deeds,"[135] a force of "awakening,"[136] with this latter broadly

comparable to that *Augenblick* posited by Heidegger. In this Benjamin follows the

bifurcated conceptual history of the idea of boredom, demonstrated by Babara Dalle

Pezze and Salzani. In this, the English term "boredom" is considered either as an

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[133] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p.101.
[134] Salzani, "The Atrophy of Experience," pp.131-132.
[135] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p.105.
[136] Salzani, "The Atrophy of Experience," p.143.

evolution of historical discourses on acedia and melancholy, on the one hand, or as a

newly emergent concept of the 18th century responding to new forms of experience,

buffeted by a concurrent coinage of "interest" as an antinomy.[137] Against the poverty of

modern experience, its tending toward overstimulation and distraction, Benjamin

considers a constructive boredom that is a heightened state of mental relaxation, and

which is a product of the habitual rhythms of traditional life.[138] It is in a slackening of

active intellect that he recognises the original situation of storytelling, arising from the

more relaxed repetition through time of those menial tasks and natural routines that

constitute the locus for a translation of individual lived-experience into a common sense.

As Agamben notes in this connection,

> …the everyday – not the unusual – made up the raw material of experience which each generation
> transmitted to the next. Hence the unreliability of travellers' tales and medieval bestiaries; in no
> sense 'fantastical', they merely demonstrated that the unusual could not in any way be translated
> into experience.[139]

Storytelling is in this way a matter of practical use, of maintaining a fabric of

understanding – we might call it, in Heideggerian terms that will become clearer in turn,

"world-forming." To this, Benjamin posits that, "people that are not bored cannot tell

stories. But there is no longer any place for boredom in our lives."[140] This is in itself

interesting to consider in relation to Tarr, in that, arguably, his cinema seeks to open an

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[137] Dalle Pezze & Salzani, "The Delicate Monster," p.8.
[138] Benjamin, "The Storyteller," p.91.
[139] Agamben, "Infancy and History," p.16.
[140] Walter Benjamin, "The Handkerchief," in *Selected Writings Vol. 2: 1927-1934*, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al., eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2001), p.658.

anachronistic place for the experience of a (hopefully) constructive boredom; and with

this, the concomitant orientation of his filmmaking away from conventional narrative

representation and toward material description. As Benjamin argues in "The Storyteller,"

the conditions under which a constructive boredom might be experienced are becoming

rare, as our experience of the world becomes characterised by *Erlebnis* rather than

Erfahrung, which has "fallen in value."[141] As regards storytelling itself, as a connective link

to the memory and community implied by the "red thread" of *Erfahrung*,[142] "the gift for

listening is lost and the community of listeners disappears";[143] instead of the practical

"wisdom" communicated through storytelling, we now have the transmission of

"information." We might put this otherwise, in calling this practical wisdom a structure of

understanding contiguous with a human situation, against which information is an

instance sectioned off from it. Against the custom of story we have the interest of the

news item, the fragment of information against the medium of received understanding.

Here again, we find a comparable scission to that we identified between the object of

knowledge and the constellation of Truth, possession and immersion.

In this formulation, and taking particularly the figures of the listener (or

community of listeners) and of "information" as our particular points of entry, Benjamin's

position resonates within Tarr's own discourse on cinematic narrative. Tarr takes his own

filmmaking to be informed by a particular attentiveness to the world which he relates as

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[141] Benjamin, "The Storyteller," p.84.
[142] Walter Benjamin, "Sketched into Mobile Dust" in *The Storyteller: Short Stories*, trans. and ed. Sam Dolbear, Esther Leslie & Sebastian Truskolaski (London; New York: Verso, 2016), p.90.
[143] Benjamin, "The Storyteller," p.91.

"always listening to life," to "real people," as a means to be "thinking about what is happening around us."[144] This is an intriguing sentiment given the major transition in this oeuvre, which the director regards as a progressive development from a social to an ontological to a cosmic perspective; "the shit," he says, "is much bigger than I believed when I was 22."[145] The director's formative concern with representing the "dignity" of the poor and outcast, "the beauty of the destitute,"[146] remains central despite this widening scope. It is in this sense, most of all, that the director rejects the separation of his work into periods, where the entirety of his oeuvre shares in this ethic. Over its course, documentary realism tends toward an emphasis on phenomenality and metacommunication. As Kovács shows, dialogue drops by 50% between *Almanac of Fall* and *Damnation*,[147] and is given an uncanny poetic quality that is unbefitting of the socio-economic scenario where it does appear.[148] The "poetic quality" of speech that emerges with *Damnation* attests to the hand of the writer, Krasznahorkai, at a point where an earlier tendency toward improvisation diminishes along with lengthy dialogue. The impulse to listen is thus not connected to verbal expression *per se* - the issue of language, which will be the focus of following chapters, is bound up for Tarr with "story," power and manipulation. Instead, "listening" is the crucible of a sensitive receptivity to the significance of life and a quality of experience, to the material density of everydayness.

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[144] Béla Tarr, "Waiting for the Prince – An Interview with Béla Tarr," interview by Fergus Daly and Maximillian Le Cain, *Senses of Cinema* 12 (February, 2001), http://sensesofcinema.com/2001/feature-articles/tarr-2/ (Accessed January 30, 2018).
[145] Tarr, interview by Selavy, (2012).
[146] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).
[147] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.142.
[148] Ibid. pp.48-49.

This is part of what turns a social ethic into an *ethos*, a mode of dwelling and an environmental texture to which we are "attuned." Tarr speaks of filmmaking as a "call."[149] In this, he channels Heidegger, who speaks of a "call" emanating from Being, the responding to which is to be the task of his fundamental ontology; we might recall here that the telling refusal of meaning in the attunement of boredom was described by him as a "calling," to take notice of and agency over one's time. Tarr's listening, too, would seem to have an implicitly temporal dimension, a stepping out of the time of active intention and becoming instead the passive medium of, not "information," but "life" - the experience of "real people," the material stuff of story. In extending this to the opposition "wisdom" and "information," it is interesting to note that not only Tarr, but his student, significant collaborator and fellow filmmaker Fred Kelemen also, cast "information" as the negative side of a cinematic communication of something more significant. Tarr says that, in watching a mainstream film,

> ...what I see is a really simple thing. They are following the story line – information/cut/information/cut/information/cut, or action/cut/action/cut/action/cut. But what do we call information? What do we call action? Maybe dying is also information. Maybe a piece of wall, or when you are just watching the landscape and it's raining outside, is also a part of time – and also part of our lives and you cannot separate that. And when we only give information, which just connects human action, we are in the wrong...[150]

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[149] Tarr, interview by Levine and Meckler (2012).
[150] Tarr, interview by Selavy (2012).

And, perhaps more fittingly in this context and given his greater proficiency in English, we have the cinematographer for Tarr's final two films, Kelemen:

> I think film, cinema, is not this kind of image factory with just information. I think a film artist has to give something else. When I let him walk, you experience it. That's the difference between experience and information. We are flooded with information today, but we don't know so much because knowledge and information are something different. Knowledge comes from experience, and I think if I go with someone in a film for some minutes, I know what it means to walk, and I know from myself that when I walk a long time, it has to do with time, it is quite meditative.[151]

In these terms, we might characterise the poetics of Tarr's filmmaking, as well as that of his followers, as one in which a density of narrative information is decentred in favour of the affect of quotidian movement, gesture and temporality, as the material expression of intensive qualities, as metacommunications.

More than this, Tarr's cinema contrasts the adherence to the logic of a storyline - as an organising principle which passes over or "kills" time as a means towards an end-goal - with an alternative structure in which spaces have a logic and time is its own locale,[152] the medium or milieu through which situations are realised and transposed into a continuum of experience; and, more than this, that these aspects of a phenomenal reality are inseparable from one another. Further, as Kovács establishes and which will be discussed in turn, the narrative "line" in Tarr is in fact a circle[153] (or, we might say, a

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[151] Fred Kelemen, "Seeing in the Dark: Interview with Fred Kelemen," interview by Robert Chilcott & Gareth Evans, *Vertigo* 3, no.3 (Autumn 2006), p.11.
[152] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).
[153] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.118.

spiral, which returns to its point of origin but not on the same plane). For where the filmmaker says repeatedly that he does not care about story, that all stories are the same (or, to Karrer, "stories of disintegration"), we can take this in two ways. The first is to mean that conventional cinematic narrative systems, insofar as their causally motivated story line is conventionally represented as a multiplying of human actions/"information" toward a determinate telos, are divorced from the fabric of lived experience, the flow of duration and of everyday being-in-the-world; in this, we might posit it as the sign of *Erlebnis*, whose characteristic forms are those of shock and transience, examples of which we might take to be the frenetic pacing and shot-reverse-shot structure of the mainstream montage of which he appears to be speaking. The second gloss on Tarr's attitude is evinced further in his claiming that all stories are the same since the time of the Old Testament, that "you cannot create new stories. It is not our job to create new stories. Our job is very simple, just to try to understand how we are doing the same old story."[154] This, too, might be read as an appeal to a traditional logic of storytelling as a medium of *Erfahrung*, as the transmission of a certain way of understanding, the material of which is, to Benjamin, human life (or everydayness, by Agamben's astute extension). What Tarr seems to be saying is that the story is the same because a certain human nature not only remains but in fact inheres in the narratives by which we represent ourselves, as "information connecting human actions." This might otherwise be located in a majoritarian conception of history and a strictly chronological view of time, that which conveys the myth of human progress and its unceasing higher development, a

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[154] Tarr, interview by Selavy (2012).

means-ends rationality under the guise of which our species' worst atrocities have occurred; ("everything is in there," Tarr goes on to say, "how it started, Cain kills Abel, and then someone fucks their mother, and then there's the holocaust and the mass murders, everything is in there").[155] We might extend this idea toward thinking of the storytelling/mythmaking traditions of human cultures as being structured around certain narrative *topoi*, the idea of which retains an etymological connection between place and a common knowledge contained therein. As a link to this, we might add the "common sense" of the experience that takes as its form this continuity of understanding,[156] and ethos as a "habitual" or "accustomed place." What interests Tarr more than a progression of actions is an immersion in the affective tonality of the physical space and the existential situation from which they are borne, being drawn into a "circular dance" within the material stuff of "life."

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[155] Idem.
[156] Agamben, "Infancy and History," p.20.
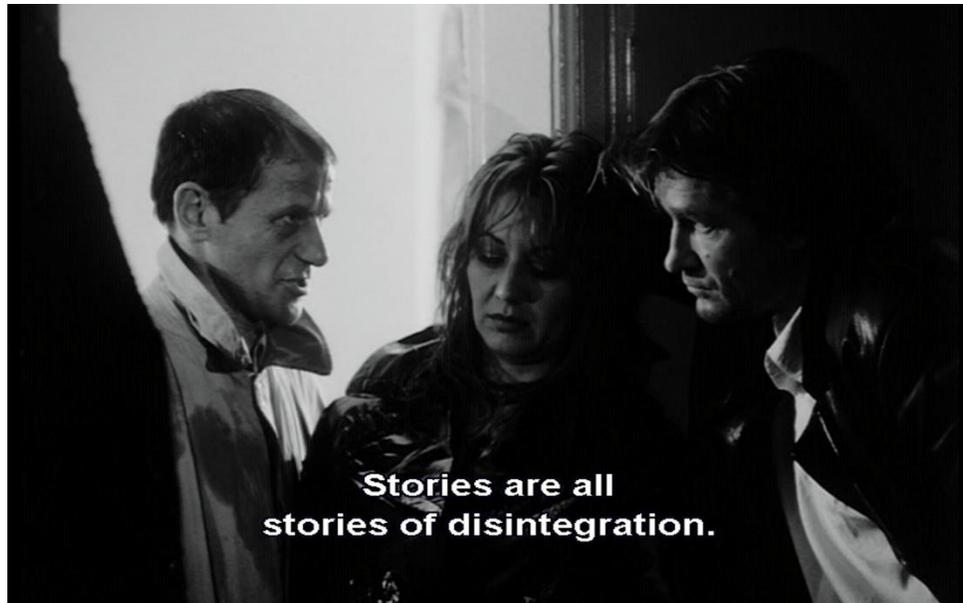
Figure 4

Continuing to channel Benjamin as we return to Heidegger, and taking the observation that the material of the storyteller is human life or the everyday, we might recognise the latter thinker's consideration of the temporal character of existence. It is significant, in this respect, that *Langeweile* – boredom – translates directly as "long while." It thus gestures toward the fundamental temporal aspect of this attunement, and so the grounds for why it can be read as a condition of Tarr's work. Heidegger writes, "What is at issue in boredom [*Langeweile*] is a while [*Weile*], tarrying a while [*Verweilen*], a peculiar remaining, enduring. And thus time, after all."[157] Tarr's films are, notoriously, characterised by this unswerving dedication to the experience of lived time, uninterrupted temporality within meticulously constructed mobile sequence shots, by which durations extend into cinematic endurance. The nature of his engagement with

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[157] Heidegger, *FCM*, p.96.

time is not, however, a strictly formalist practice, but the means of invoking a certain

quality of experience, "the quality of life." Story, he says, is secondary to a human

situation, to a way of showing something about the way that humans exist, about the

while they live.[158] The nature of this life (its time, as well as its dissolution), might just as

well be described by Heidegger's "peculiar remaining, enduring." For this is a basic

archetype of Tarr's films, and particularly from *Damnation* on. Rancière states a simple

formulation that is significant in this respect, that, "Realism opposes situations that

endure to stories that link together and pass to the next."[159] Putting aside the directors

own reservations over notions of realism,[160] to be addressed further below, it is the

enduring of an enduring condition that is significant here. For it is in such a situation that

inhabitants of Tarr's marginal universe go about their minor customs in an attempt to

escape them. They bear their time in rundown public bars while proclaiming the sickness

of the world, at length, in a poetic, melancholic speech. To pass time, they drink

incessantly, and dance in circles, or spirals, which unfurl the essential stasis their lives

represent. Tarr is concerned to show the quiet dignity of resistance in absurd situations

of material and existential deprivation, where possibility appears to be hemmed in by a

web of conspiracy and corruption that is cosmic in dimension. The destitute remain,

bound to the last vestiges of faith in a progress that recedes slowly into the grayscale of

the image, in situations played out to ends that appear no further advanced than their

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[158] Tarr, interview by Ballard (2004).
[159] Rancière, *The Time After*, p.7.
[160] Tarr says that "I hate realism," and follows by saying, "I prefer things to be dirtier or more elegant than 'reality'." Tarr, interview by Andrew (2007), p.19.

beginnings, the limits of which invariably run up against the illusion of a coming

redemption. This is not only a situation of peculiar enduring but, by implication of its

repetition across various sites and times, an enduring situation also.
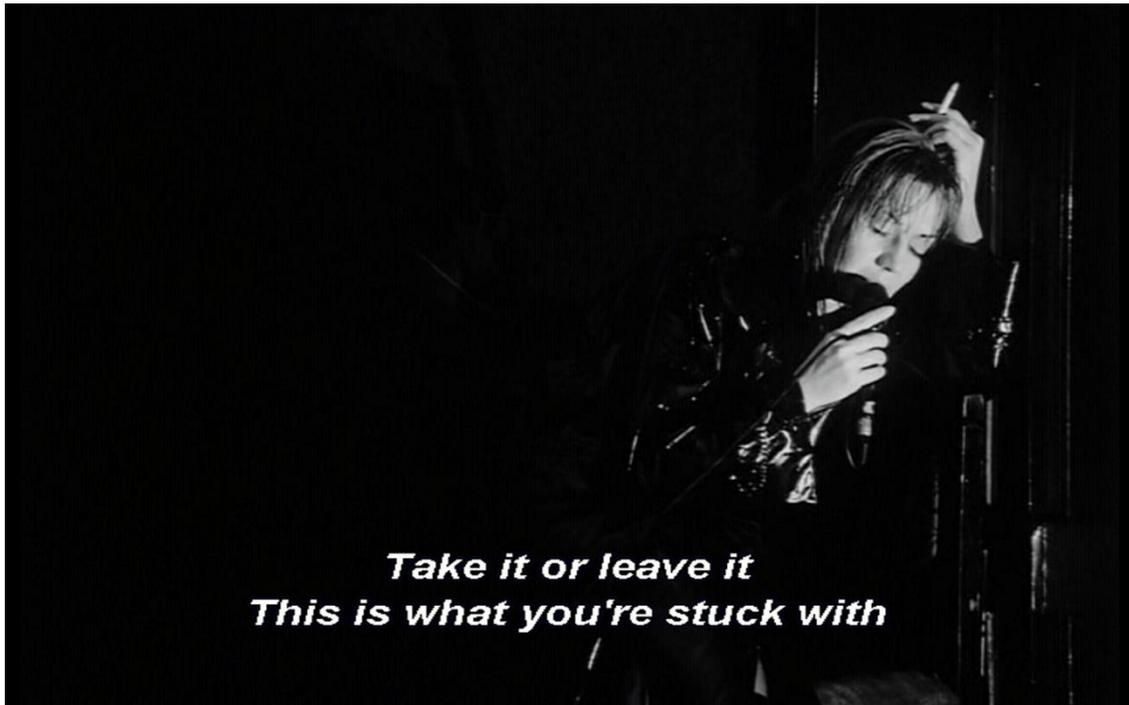
Figure 5

Dwelling on Time

In this situation and its enduring, we find two notions central to Benjamin's consideration

of a constructive boredom, these being repetition and the state of waiting. As Salzani

demonstrates, repetition is another expression in Benjamin that is coloured by the

context of its figuration.[161] The eternal recurrence of disconnected shocks that condition

modernity's experience-as-*Erlebnis* evinces repetition in a sense connected to the

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[161] Salzani, "The Atrophy of Experience," p.129.

replication of mechanical process – machine time – and so with the destruction of the

relaxed rhythms of pre-modern life, of habit. "Habits," says Benjamin, "are the armature

of [*Erfahrung*], whereas they are decomposed by [*Erlebnisse*]."[162] This is an armature

that, as Salzani suggests, "creates a web of connections," by which one relates, "to their

environment and history."[163] But habit, too, is recurrent, formed of a cyclical constancy

that is a necessary condition for storytelling as this transmission of environment and

history, of experience-as-*Erfahrung*. As such, the habitual dwelling that is grounded in

quotidian recurrence forms the inverse image from which Benjaminian modernity is

articulated as a site of discontinuity and distraction. Seen in this way, the operative

difference between these forms of repetition, and the modes of experience pertaining to

them, is a matter of *pace*, and, so, of *temporality*. In another sense, we can view it as a

matter of the form of time that is impressed through repetition – whether organic,

material or mechanic; this is an idea that will return in the final chapter on rhythm.

Repetition is for this reason a central principle of Tarr's treatment of time and narration.

This is especially true of *Damnation* and *The Turin Horse*, chronologically the first and last

of Tarr's films under specific consideration here, each representing the rhythm, the

temporality, of a droll daily life displayed in all of its particularity. This is a rhythm first

represented through the slow tracking of cable-cars in *Damnation*'s opening shot,

described above, and which is maintained throughout that film. It is a view and a

viewpoint that is repeated in the film's course, where Karrer takes up his entrancement

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[162] Benjamin, "Convolute J [Baudelaire]" in *Arcades Project*, p.341.
[163] Salzani, "The Atrophy of Experience," p.130.

by this landscape twice more. The same visage is also the initial image from which a slow pan across reveals to us Karrer's ultimate "conquest" (in one of the most inert, joyless lovemaking scenes in film history). More than this, and as is often the case throughout Tarr's oeuvre, the predilection for situation over action, mood over plot, manifests in a limited variety of spaces and, so, their studied repetition. In this, slightly shifting descriptions of the same or similar milieu allow not only for a more intimate familiarity with the essentially circumscribed spatial dimensions of this filmic environment, an immersion within it, but in such a way for it to become a complexly rendered con-texture through which to survey the in/action of its inhabitants. Repetition is most forcefully figured in *The Turin Horse*, in which it structures an "anti-creation"[164] narrative that fulfils the director's final dissolution of "story." "The daily repetition of the same routine," says Tarr, "makes it possible to show that something is wrong with their world."[165] Each day we follow this same routine, but in each instance with the force of an occlusion to the structure of an environment, until that environment can no longer be said to exist, not only in terms of the film's internal logic, but likewise in the continuity of those environments of which Tarr's filmic universe consists. The "lines connecting human actions" can no longer structure narrative, where the ground of action's possibility is removed – in this, it is a culmination of a discourse, running throughout the director's oeuvre, on dignity in the face of exposure to corruption, powerlessness and destitution.

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[164] Béla Tarr, interview by Paul Sbrizzi, November 30, 2011, http://www.hammertonail.com/%20interviews/a-conversation-with-bela-tarr-the-turin-horse/ (Accessed January 30, 2018).
[165] Tarr, interview by Petkovic, (2011).

Where further analysis of this film will become central in later chapters, what is important to note at this point is that this film both takes repetition to a new limit and then ceases this repetition as a final gesture, as the endpoint of Tarr's cinema. Through repetition as recurrence (rather than replication), the director is concerned to show the way in which even the most colourless processes of life are made up of incremental difference through the multiplicity and vicissitudes of time. We might connect this back to Tarr's notion of repeating the same old story, his rejoinder to which is instructive: "…but of course everybody is different and everybody has some power to influence their own lives…the differences are always interesting…every day there is always some difference."[166] Hence, repetition is here a principle means through which to grasp time as an intensive quality, which is not passed over, but instead lived in and through. Boredom as a captivation by the present moment, which is most of all an attunement to time, itself becomes the structure of our experience of temporality.

It is in this sense that, with each of these films, repetition can be viewed as the condition of waiting, for the end of an old order, and – if it indeed follows – the start of some new way of being. Whether represented in an explicit figure or as a condition of the time they inhabit, waiting is an emblematic state of being in Tarr. This is part of the essential indeterminacy that underscores Tarr's films, which reel at the edge of crisis, apocalypse or nothingness. Frampton suggests a kind of tension in *Damnation*, by which the mobile camera that images inactive human subjects "thinks" through "ideas" of

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[166] Tarr, interview by Selavy (2012).

movement (or growth) and stasis.[167] We might recognise here as well that the figure in

which movement and stasis find synthesis, the circle, is one that has recognised

structural force in Tarr. The state of waiting thus becomes consistent with the suspension

that Kovács suggests is characteristic of Tarr's narrative circle, with the spectator

implicated in the ruse of expecting a qualitative change. We become ourselves

suspended in this milieu, in the time (as well as the vicarious act) of watching and of

waiting. In his clearest definition of boredom, Benjamin similarly relates the state of

boredom to waiting,

> We are bored when we don't know what we are waiting for. That we do know, or think we know,
> is nearly always the expression of our superficiality or inattention. Boredom is the threshold of
> great deeds. Now it would be important to know: What is the dialectical antithesis to boredom?[168]

To Andrew Benjamin, the power of this final question resides, "in part in the answer not

being found in any attempt to identify the content of 'what we are waiting for'."[169] Its

answer, Salzani seeks to demonstrate, is "awakening…into a stage of historical

wakefulness."[170] Terminologically, this "awakening" is strikingly similar to Heidegger's

task in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, to "awaken" profound boredom as a

fundamental attunement, as a structure of experience and as a way toward thinking

Being authentically. He posits the method of "ascertaining" (which we might align with

acquiring, possessing, knowing) against the "awakening" that "means making something

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[167] Frampton, *Filmosophy*, p.149.
[168] Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p.105.
[169] Andrew Benjamin, "Boredom and Distraction: The Moods of Modernity" in *Walter Benjamin and History*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London; NY: Continuum, 2005), p.164.
[170] Salzani, "The Atrophy of Experience," p.143.

wakeful, letting whatever is sleeping become wakeful";[171] further, and aligned with the

sense by which we read Benjamin's rebuff to intentional consciousness, "all ascertaining

means bringing to consciousness. With respect to attunement, all making conscious

means destroying, altering in each case, whereas in awakening an attunement we are

concerned to let this attunement be as it is."[172] In a similar vein, Salzani points out that to

Benjamin, "Boredom is thus a waiting without an object."[173] We might recall here that

emotion and mood are distinguished by intentionality: the objectlessness of mood

contrasts against the direction of emotion towards specific objects (of affection).

Boredom's waiting is, to Salzani "a transformation – a threshold – of the experience of

time";[174] such that time can appear, we might say, in Truth: not as a succession of

moments but as the quality of a pure potentiality. It is as this threshold – taken as a

liminal zone that is at the same time a passage – that Benjamin finds the constructive,

indeed revolutionary potential of the attunement of boredom. Andrew Benjamin writes,

"what matters is the structure of an awaiting rather than filling in that structure with

specific images of the future."[175] Thus, boredom as a liminal zone or transitional state of

being is a "locus of ambivalence," whose crossing Andrew Benjamin takes to necessitate

thinking "beyond a conception of the future that is already pictured."[176] A future already

pictured is a projection of the present as succession, a conflation of futurity with our

given image of it; but to await in ambivalence is to remain suspended within a state of

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[171] Heidegger, *FCM*, p.60.
[172] Ibid, 65.
[173] Salzani, "The Atrophy of Experience," p.142.
[174] Idem.
[175] Benjamin, "Boredom and Distraction: The Moods of Modernity," p.165.
[176] Idem.

indeterminacy, which allows for the condition of its interruption, an "awakening." This indeterminacy might be viewed in the broader context of Benjamin's notions of "dialectics at a standstill" and of "pure means," precluding as they do the imperative to form an image of succession or narrative of historical progression. "If images are forbidden," says Andrew Benjamin, "the imaging of the future involves the continual encounter in the present – an encounter that works equally to construct the present – with what is there";[177] in this sense it is aligned with Heidegger's, "letting whatever is sleeping become wakeful." What is there, "sleeping" or obscured by the restless production of the modern, the "new," is a historical consciousness and the relation it forms with primordial time. Waiting transforms our relation to time; allows time to be dwelled within rather than used up or passed over toward an intended image of futurity, and so experienced as a quality of pure potentiality. In this sense, time is experienced as a quality of pure potentiality. The present becomes a site of possibility extending beyond the succession of already-actual structures. It thus presents the opportunity for a more radical encounter with the possibilities inhering within the "now," gesturing toward new interpretations of an existing situation, or situatedness.

Waiting and watching orient the disposition of Tarr's second period cinema, from the establishing shot of *Damnation* to the last light of *The Turin Horse*. Through them, the present moment is distended, made present, along with – and as constitutive of - the material environment that situates it. This "long now" becomes the site for an

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[177] Ibid. p.170.

attunement to, or a dwelling within, the time and existential contexture of a state of

being. With the notion of a "dwelling" within time, I refer both to the immersion in

everyday temporality that characterises experience in Tarr, as well as the way in which

this might be said to portend the ethical engagement that this cinema seeks to present

(as presence). This implies the orientation toward the common or habitual through which

a connection between *ethos* and *Stimmung*, ethics and attunement, can be realised. As

has already been suggested, ethos originally refers to an idea underscored by notions of

the habitual, an "accustomed place" or a "dwelling" (and hence with an implication of

temporality, of historicity and habit). The extension into ethics, then, would seem to be

undergirded by a similar logic to that contained in the etymological origins of *topos*,

denoting as it does a "common-place," and so a figurative marker around which historical

structures of understanding become organised and conveyed (as story). This, too, can be

considered the origin for ethics, which become an armature of the individual, but which

are by nature intersubjective, concerning as they do not the one but as much and more

so the "other," being with others. Ethics can be viewed as a matrix of attitudes and ideals,

which coalesce as the site of a social formation while at the same time structuring its

limits. As such, ethical thinking arises from the historical continuity of being-in-the-world

(which is, Heidegger stresses, always a "being-among-others").[178] In reference to its

etymology, then, *ethos* regards a habituation to and inhabitation of a structure of

understanding, in the sense of which we might relate it to *Erfahrung*. In its later (though

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[178] Heidegger, *BT*, p.157. In Macquarrie & Robinson, "being-among-others" is translated as 'Being "among they'."

still classical), rhetorical denotation, *ethos* refers to appeals made by a speaker to the

beliefs of their audience, posited against the appeals to the emotions expressed by

pathos, which means, etymologically speaking, "what befalls one." The clear inference

here, their distinction, is between *ethos* as fundamentally situated, being spatial,

temporal, and historical, where *pathos* refers to the singularly affective, the suffering,

passion or emotion that occasions the individual (in the moment/instant). *Stimmung*, in

the terms here discussed, lies somewhere in between – or indeed connecting – these two

poles, of situation and subjectification. *Stimmung*, taken to be the ontic manifestation of

a way of being historically/ontologically situated, is something like the *pathos* of *ethos* –

the passion that befalls one's dwelling, or which arises as the affect of one's situated ek-

sistence. It is significant to note, then, that the distinction between pathos and ethos is

one that is taken up by Elsaesser in discussing the vital difference between *Erlebnis* and

Erfahrung in the cinema, where he states,

> …'pathos' rather than 'ethos' defines the affective regime of modernity, if we consider Benjamin's
> *Erfahrung* to be retrospectively constructed and integrated, while *Erlebnis* is self-presence without
> self-possession, and 'pathos' the affect appropriate to *Erlebnis*: singular, intermittent,
> discontinuous, transitory.[179]

But where Elsaesser takes Benjamin at (a particular implication of) his word in suggesting

that *Erfahrung* is no longer a possibility under conditions of modernity, he nevertheless

takes the classical model of continuity and closure to best exemplify a structure of

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[179] Thomas Elsaesser, "Between Erlebnis and Erfahrung: Cinema Experience with Benjamin" in *Paragraph* 32, no. 3 (2009), p.295.

Erfahrung as it pertains to cinematic narrative.[180] This he clarifies in recognising that in the classical cinema, "the function of narrative is to facilitate this process of turning discontinuous *Erlebnis* into transmissible *Erfahrung*; hence Benjamin emphasises montage as cinema's specific contribution to modernity."[181] The classical cinema of *Erfahrung* is, as such, "an ideological construct, a nostalgic or reactionary shoring up of the fractured nature of modern experience."[182] It is, Elsaesser suggests, a form of catharsis through a narration of progress, from ignorance to recognition, an integration and development that he equates with experience-as-*Erfahrung*.

In this view, post-classical cinema responds to the status of experience in modernity. Elsaesser regards this cinema to be a normalised medium of excess, of shock-*Erlebnis* (without re-semblance into *Erfahrung*), which represents an "exposure to limits and the recovery from extremes" (of experience).[183] These limits structure cogent modalities of narration, perception and affect. Elsaesser identifies the *pathoi* of various generic modes (e.g. neo-noir, action, body horror), as an indication of those limits of body ("and embodiment"), agency ("and helplessness") and time ("and its apparent irreversibility") that characterise the experiences of post-classical cinema.[184] In so doing, Elsaesser draws parallels between the cinematic event and the experience of trauma he finds to be its contemporary emblem, both of them conditioned by a "failure of experience," by its breakdown and reconstitution from fragments. Trauma constitutes

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[180] Ibid. p.294.
[181] Ibid., p.295
[182] Idem.
[183] Ibid. p.293.
[184] Ibid. p.297.

what Elsaesser calls "a new 'economy of experience'," whose, "shortcuts, blackouts and gaps are what saves the self from a ruinous psychic investment in the multitude of events observed."[185] In this, the post-classical cinema's structure of breaks and elisions – its "disarticulation of body, sense, memory and speech" - form a kind of coping mechanism against the excess of shock that same form presents.[186] In the terms of the current argument, we can thus recognise this trauma as a "structure of experience," in a similar form to that of *Stimmung*. But even where making reference to "minimalist states" that are "experiences at the edge of everyday perception," Elsaesser's scope is firmly affixed to trends in the Hollywood cinema to which Tarr is strictly counterposed; and, even where directly referring to many of its more independent or experimental exemplars, he does not touch upon an art-cinema such as that which forms our focus here – where a "failure of experience" structures a totalised milieu, rather than a narrative device. Nor does Elsaesser engage the perspective from which to characterise cinematic experiences that are not in some way generically coded, or otherwise predominated by a narrative typology. Where Tarr does consciously tap into generic conventions in certain instances - notably the formal nexus of Expressionism-Film Noir, by way of French "poetic realism," in *Damnation* and *The Man from London* – it is significant that the director acknowledges he does so only in terms of his memory of their "mood."[187] This impression is strengthened where *The Man from London* - the only film among our selection not originally written by (or with) Krasznahorkai - is based on a story by Georges Simenon; an

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[185] Ibid. p.309.
[186] Ibid. p.308.
[187] Tarr, interview by Andrew (2007), p.19.

unconventional crime fiction writer, more concerned with descriptions of atmosphere,

morality and psychology than with police procedure. It is a story that becomes a vehicle

for this "mood," and Tarr's exploration through it of "the totality of man and nature."[188]

Indeed, Tarr likes to speak of his cinema in terms of such a totality, which his treatment

of time, environment and its metacommunication seeks to represent. Where Elsaesser

views cinema to attempt a cathartic amelioration of the shocks of modernity (in the

classical mode) or to reflexively channel them in recognition of their conditioning the

medium itself (in the post-classical), we can view Tarr's *ethos* in quite another sense. If it

seeks to transmute subjective *Erlebnis* into *Erfahrung*, it does so not by way of narrative

completion (as in the Classical mode), but with regards to a perceptual attunement to a

fabric of experience. It invokes an attunement to atmosphere and materiality, an

immersion in a disposition and an environment, which is effected through studied

observation of a continuity in time, space and movement. In this, it is poised conceptually

(if not ethically) against the fragmenting of time and space in the montage-based

narration characteristic of mainstream cinema, whose operating principle has in recent

times become more and more the appeal to somatic sensation. Erika Balsom, who

likewise finds that Tarr "restores something of the quality of long experience or

Erfahrung," posits in a similar context,

> While for critical theorists such as Benjamin and Kracauer, the cinema constituted the modern
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> form of distraction par excellence, now the darkened theatre can become a privileged site of

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[188] Tarr, "Temptation Harbour," p.55.

contemplation, in which the spectator is forced to give him or herself over to the time of the film…experiencing the heavy weight of time's passing.[189]

In a cinema whose primary formal principle consists in mobile editing, and whose continuity thus refers to phenomenal space, time and atmosphere, the conventional predominance of sensation over sensibility, of *pathos* over *ethos* (or of a *pathos* disconnected from *ethos*), is emphatically reversed. We enter a time and an environment, toward which we are disposed and attuned, and through which is revealed an experience of (a mode of) dwelling, of *ethos*.

An attunement allows things to show up as meaningful, or not, in specific ways, and so mediates our relation to the world. It is a "medium for thinking and acting" and, more than this, a disposition into meaningful perspective. When recognised accordingly, our mode of being, or dwelling, can be seen with new regard. It is significant, in this sense, that the concept of emotion and, more properly, mood, in the elicitation of ethical experience is gaining currency in Film Studies. The cognitive film theorist Carl Plantinga says, for instance,

> Moods are gestalts that combine ways of feeling with ways of thinking and perceiving. As such, both art moods and their associated human moods have marked implications for the ethical and ideological import of narrative films.[190]

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[189] Erika Balsom, "Saving the Image: Scale and Duration in Contemporary Art Cinema" in *Cineaction* no. 72 (Spring, 2007), p.29.
[190] Carl Plantinga, "Art Moods and Human Moods in Narrative Cinema" in *New Literary History* 43, no.3 (Summer 2012), p.469.

Leaving aside the distinction (or interaction) between "art moods" and human moods -

which Plantinga posits as the "*conscious* experience" of a film's "affective character or

tone"[191] - we find here the particular impulse which underscores the situated attunement

of Tarr's cinema. Where Plantinga posits mood as "clearly central to understanding," he

accords with many of those principles we have been working under to this point, even

though he does so in reference to the cognitivist psychology of aesthetic affect. His

interest is in distinguishing and then denying the equivalence of "art" and "human"

moods in order to theorise their affective interaction, a notion of mood as a primer to

emotional or somatic body responses[192] and central to the phenomenological experience

of narrative.[193] But, like Elsaesser, Plantinga's is a generalised view on narrative film, and

as such can only contend so far with the specialised poetics of Tarr's cinema. Even so, in

seeking to show the way in which moods, in film as otherwise, "constitute ways of

perceiving and thinking of the world," he nevertheless comes close to the major concepts

underpinning my position. As Plantinga relates through Hwanhee Lee's Heideggerian

reading of mood in Terrence Malick, certain films "express but do not explain the

character's moods, or more broadly, their mode of being."[194] This he takes to be a matter

of sensibility in advance of psychology, foregrounding mood in relation to plot, by which

"poetic scenes…serve less to drive the plot forward than to lyrically illustrate the mindset

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[191] Ibid. p.461 & p.469. (My emphasis).
[192] More explicit in Greg Smith's "mood cue" theory, but, as John Rhym points out in a similar context, Plantinga works with Smith and likewise, "assumes that viewer interest…is a given and overlooks the emotional disengagement central to the watching of a film that generates boredom." See John Rhym, "Towards a Phenomenology of Cinematic Mood: Boredom and the Affect of Time in Antonioni's *L'eclisse*" in *New Literary History* 42, no.3 (Summer 2012), p.481.
[193] Plantinga, "Art Moods and Human Moods in Narrative Cinema," p.473.
[194] Ibid., p.471

of his characters."[195] Certainly, the de-privileging of "story" or plot – by which is implied a plotting of action – in favour of a lyrical illustration or description of a mode of being is central to the cinematic ethos of Tarr. But where Malick creates such a "fabric of experience" primarily through an aggregation of significant paranarrative moments, through montage – more directly invoking the mosaic or constellation described by Benjamin – our encounter with the poetic in Tarr is part of the dynamics of the sequence shot. "The story is part of the image," the director suggests in relation to the continuity of the sequence shot, which reveals the integral duration and metacommunication that conditions the experience of a milieu. As it pertains to Tarr, then, the environment might be seen to be the phenomenal realisation of a state of boredom, making material the temporality of waiting as a particular milieu or medium of experience. Rather than the image of a continuity constructed of fragments, we find instead a total spatio-temporal structure – a singular conception within a circular limit, in effect – which becomes a site of survey. Where the human agent becomes de-centred, environed, the affective tonality through which the situation is disclosed becomes a point of access with an equal force to any direct mode of identification through narration. As an immersion in an environment and a duration, in repetition and through waiting, the innate sensibility structuring this world becomes an experience of time that opens beyond the frame of the image or of "story."

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[195] Idem.

This chapter has looked to explicate the philosophical concept of *Stimmung,* as a framework through which to consider the mode of experience that emerges in the encounter with the weighty time and affective atmosphere of Béla Tarr's second period films. In this milieu, the function of *Stimmung* – taken as a concert of environment, atmosphere and temporality – is an entrance (or threshold) into a disposition of meditative contemplation in relation to the presentation of a situation onscreen. It is a medium of experience and a perceptual attunement. We can think of *Stimmung* as the *pathos* of *ethos*, the sensation arising from our dwelling in the world, in order to recognise the temporal extension through which attunement to a situation might transmute emotional orientation into an "awakening" of ethical thinking and the implication of *Erfahrung*. Rather than acting as a potential elicitor of affect intending toward the evocation of mood, an engagement with mood as *Stimmung* - as attunement to *ethos* and atmosphere - allows for an inner consideration of the conditions of that modality of mood, a situatedness within it. The condition of boredom that structures the temporality of this situation will be drawn, in the next chapter, toward the notion of a melancholic, "cosmic" perspective that emerges through Tarr's departure from "story" and toward metacommunication. This is a matter concerning the "primitive language" of cinema in distinction from language more broadly, and yet the natural-historical cosmology that it implies seems to be profoundly influenced by Krasznahorkai's prose writing. I will argue that the transposition from prose to image displays a poetic character, a resistance to conceptual understanding, which can be framed in terms of the notions of a free indirect discourse and the mode of "being-with" that is effected by it.

2.   A Cosmic Poiesis: Natural-History, Melancholy and The Language of Reality

László Krasznahorkai is critical to the development of the poetics of Béla Tarr's second period films. The writer enters into collaboration with Tarr for *Damnation*, and is the last of those members to join Tarr's collective of contributors and then remain involved through to *Turin Horse* (the others being editor/co-director Ágnes Hranitzky and composer Mihály Víg, both of whom predate Krasznahorkai).[196] Of the films produced in this period, *Satantango* and *Werckmeister Harmonies* are based upon novels written by Krasznahorkai, and *The Turin Horse* is developed from his short essay, "At Latest in Turin."[197] The writer had a strong hand in two other Tarr films, adapting George Simenon's *The Man from London* and forming the scenario and screenplay for *Damnation*. Further, Krasznahorkai's role in developing the script is also evident to those that have encountered his prose. The pessimistic monologues that dot Tarr's cinematic landscape - and which, in the context of these films' often reductive use of dialogue, take on a special gravitas – are inimitably Krasznahorkian, and echo those core ideations from the writer's own conceptual cosmos which come to reverberate throughout the Tarr universe. And while the director's approach to his auteur status is exemplarily democratic, elevating and crediting his contributors to a commendable degree, the exact

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[196] Incidentally, the role of cinematographer becomes the most disposable – the significant demands placed upon them by the director resulting in a higher turnover than in any other role – although Gábor Medvigy and Fred Kelemen stand out among contributors.
[197] László Krasznahorki, "At Latest in Turin," trans. George Szirtes, in *Music and Literature* 2 (Spring, 2013), pp.24-25.

nature of Krasznahorkai's influence - in both its thematic and formal aspect - remains a

point of contention that does not extend to either Hranitzky or Víg. Over the next two

chapters, the crucial continuities and marks of distinction between Krasznahorkai's prose

writing and Tarr's filmic realisation of it will frame my examination of the director's

representation of temporality and paranarrative environmental tonality. The basic

premise of this discussion begins with Tarr's insistent view on cinema in

(contra)distinction from the written word – framed in terms specific to the relationship

between writer and director, film and novel, and marking their distinction by virtue of the

different "languages" through which they communicate. Of cinematic language, the

director offers that, "Film as a genre is always something definite, because that piece of

instrument which we call the lens can only record real things, which are there."[198] With

reference to this perspective, Tarr maintains a rhetorical border between parallel texts

that is at once instructive and restrictive, and, what's more, instructive in its terms of

restriction. This is especially the case when considering the director's prickly anti-

theoretical bent against the writer's claim of offering "philosophical background" as well

as "background atmosphere" to Tarr's films, claims that respond directly to the current

argument's assertions regarding the affective atmospherics of these films' worlds.[199] Tarr

enlists two operative terms which I take to be key descriptors of his own distinctly

cinematic language: "concrete," in respect of his medium-essentialist perspective

regarding the "objective" materiality of film images, as in the above quote; and

[198] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).
[199] Krasznahorkai, interview by Hopkins.

"primitive," to denote an apparently innate, pre-grammatical understanding of the "visual" that inheres in our experience of phenomenal reality. Taken together, the primitive and the concrete refer to a core initiative of Tarr's discourse on his work. The director orients interlocutors away from overly conceptual or symbolic interpretation, and instead toward the experience of materiality, temporality, and atmosphere which are, he strongly suggests, meaningful in and of themselves. "Don't think about it too much," Tarr says, "…it's a very primitive language."[200] Taken separately, however, the primitive aspect of visual literacy and the affective presence of a concrete materiality to which it responds give rise to distinct sets of implications, which do not so much undermine Tarr's self-conception as shade in some of that background to which Krasznahorkai refers. Indeed, Tarr's anti-conceptualism appears in itself rhetorical, where it takes on the aspect of a formal-theoretical principle concerning cinematic expression and experience, and especially when considering the dynamics whereby the director's rejection of "story" and its apparent connection to a "cosmic" perspective echo concepts evinced through Krasznahorkai's work. In this direction, the notions of "primitive" imagination and "concrete" realisation will form the core issues around which the following two chapters will be structured - the first establishing an outline of Tarr's special association with Krasznahorkai's world picture, the second delineating the specifically cinematic character of the director's approach to representing it. With the notion of cinema's "primitive language" as a platform, this chapter will explore the

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[200] Tarr, interview by Ballard (2004).

transposition from prose to image - from one language to another - of the uncanny

cosmos delimited in Krasznahorkai's rich and densely weighted prose.

This transition is, I will argue, poetic – not in the sense that poetry implies

"thinking in images," but instead an ontogenetic category of language. In its original

Greek, *poiesis* denotes a "production into presence," the act of "bringing into being (out

of nothing)," and implies a primary articulation (an origination) of the experience of truth

or meaningfulness.[201] In this view, prosaic language is a socio-historical abstraction of the

original creative activity through which things are first articulated within the sphere of

human understanding, of meaning and discourse. This notion of primacy will become

increasingly significant as it comes to the discussion of "concrete" presence in the next

chapter. As it comes to Tarr's discourse on a cine-linguistic primitivism, the idea of a "fall"

- from poetic truth, into the fragmented codifications of propositional language –

resonates strikingly with the director's disdain for "story" and "information." Tarr's

intensive formalism can be regarded in this way. Just as significantly, this trajectory (of

downfall) mirrors other, related themes in Krasznahorkai and Tarr: time, history, nature,

and ideas concerning the way in which language formalises our conception of existential

phenomena and, in turn, our experience of the world. We find a precursor to a number

of these considerations in an unlikely source: Pier-Paolo Pasolini's essay on the "Cinema

of Poetry,"[202] and its figuration of film history as a fall from poetic expression into prosaic

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[201] This definition is explicated in Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp.68-69.
[202] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The "Cinema of Poetry"," in *Heretical Empiricism,* ed. Louise K. Barnett, trans. Ben Lawton & Louise K. Barnett (Washington D.C.: New Academia Publishing, 2005), pp.167-186.

narrative convention. The "pre-grammatical" "language of reality,"[203] which Pasolini

takes to be the mythic arche of cinematic imagination, is an avenue which opens Tarr's

anti-theoretical perspective on film language toward a wider frame of reference. The

expressive formalism advocated in Pasolini's essay is recognisable in Tarr, as is the socio-

historical consciousness which Pasolini found crucially lacking among his contemporaries.

That this consciousness emerges through films which intend no allegorical meaning and

which are dissociated from real-world specificity can be viewed partly in terms of a

further point of contact with Pasolini, and in a way that re-implicates Krasznahorkai on

both formal and thematic levels.

As a model for "The Cinema of Poetry," Pasolini enlists the literary mode of "free

indirect discourse," a device which Krasznahorkai frequently employs, and through which

many of the most conceptually resonant images in his novels are articulated. Free

indirect discourse is a perspective which dwells within the space between first and third

person, mediating between the personal experience of a represented subject and an

outlook exterior to them, where "subjective" and "objective" points of view inflect one

upon the other. As it comes to film, Pasolini suggests that "free indirect subjectivity"

describes the way in which a director's consciousness can become reflected in the

experiential world of their film's protagonist, the latter forming the pretext for a

paranarrative exploration of aestheticism and affect. Deleuze later extends this concept

in a way that resonates with the previous chapter, regarding the structure of *Stimmung*

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[203] Pasolini, "The Written Language of Reality" in *Heretical Empiricism,* pp.197-222.

and disposition. Deleuze associates Pasolini's "free indirect subjectivity" with a "generalised semi-subjective image," and draws it toward the notion of a "cinematographic being-with."[204] The latter refers at once to a Heideggerian social-ethical imperative and to a way of being positioned in the cinema. This notion of "being-with" speaks to the poetics of Tarr's long-takes, and not only in the concrete terms of their frequent gravitation toward, or around, human figures. These shots display a tendency to mediate between psyche and environment by way of intensive excursions through time, traversing the space between "human" and "world" and, in so doing, transgressing the borders between "subjective" and "objective" points of view. More than this, or as its result, it is by relation to the being-with implied in such movement that we come to dwell within the state of being that the director offers in resistance to the schematic causality of conventional narrative representation. The viewer is implicated in an expectation of qualitative progress in narrative or its resolution, the suspension (and eventual failure) of which becomes figured as a "circular dance," or an "eternal return." The course of this back and forth dance traces the outline of the image of the world, or cosmic perspective, which is shared between writer and director across their respective media, and which reflects an ethico-political consciousness concerning the experience of time, nature and history.

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[204] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London & New York: Continuum, 2009), pp.73-78.

A Cinema of Poetry

Tarr's ostensibly medium-essentialist view of the cinema responds to the notional ability

of the art to record and transmit the brute, affective presence of the material world. The

director turns to the films themselves to implore, "Please, trust your eyes: everything is

very clear and very simple. Watch. That's important. Don't think about it too much.

Everyone can understand it if they don't complicate it…It's a very primitive language."[205]

In speaking of film-as-language, this "primitive language" that is distinct from the

descriptive or propositional forms of prose and philosophy, Tarr seeks to approximate

what Pier-Paolo Pasolini calls the "pre-grammatical" dimension of our phenomenal

experience of the world.[206] Indeed, there are a surprising number of points of contact,

conceptually and terminologically, between Pasolini's film theory and Tarr's discourse on

cinematic language. Each director is concerned with the "primitive" essence of the

medium, even where tending in different directions in the final analysis: Pasolini's

theories are "semiotic," critically-engaged, facing outward toward the world of art

cinema in its reflection of contemporary society, while Tarr's ideas are resolutely anti-

theoretical and incline toward his apparently singular point-of-view (even where speaking

of the medium in general). Pasolini practices a peculiar form of semiotic film theory,

addressing the cinema as a poetic medium that can transcribe and realise meaningful

aspects of phenomenal reality. For Pasolini, there is a pre-cultural (or –historical)

"language of reality," of which the cinema provides a unique means for inscription. That

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[205] Tarr, interview by Ballard (2004).
[206] Pasolini, "The "Cinema of Poetry"," pp. 170-171.

is, in this view, "reality" relates to the cinema as oral language does to its written form.[207]

To Pasolini, action (or, perhaps, being) – which he equates in its "simplest terms" with reality - precedes the verbal codes that would represent and transmit it as sign, concept, or knowledge.[208] Cinematic images are taken from the natural "chaos" of inter-action with the world rather than from the socio-historical codification of the language that is found in dictionaries; they access the "natural" perception through which humans mediate their relation to the presence of (the) world.[209] For Pasolini, this is our specific attunement to phenomenal reality. Pasolini finds cinematic expression to correspond essentially to this "reading" of the phenomenal, which is pre-verbal, imagistic and irrational (without human measure or logic, *logos*), and thus marks a refusal to be drawn into the antinomy between culture and nature which structures semiotic (and, in a wider sense, metaphysical) discourse.[210] It is by virtue of this "irrationality" - or semantic multiplicity - as a correlative to the material resistance of poetic disclosure, that Pasolini identifies a "language of poetry" as mythic arche of the cinema.[211] He views the art of cinema as having been subjected to a "fall" from an essentially poetic nature, which, in this case, takes place through the predominance of the "language of prose narrative" over the more fundamental and expressive "language of poetry."[212]

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[207] We might note here the resonances with the concepts of listening and storytelling that formed part of the previous chapter, in relation to narrative experience in Tarr

[208] Pasolini, "The Written Language of Reality," p.204.

[209] Pasolini, "The "Cinema of Poetry"," p.169.

[210] Pasolini refers to "reading" reality in "A Cinema of Poetry," p.168. The antinomy between culture and nature is central to metaphysical thinking and the hermeneutic field that Gumbrecht identifies, and is singularly significant to a reading of Heideggerian aesthetics. These will become central focuses in chapter three.

[211] Pasolini, "The "Cinema of Poetry"," p.172.

[212] Idem.

Pasolini finds the pre-textual archetypes for cinema's fundamental "im-signs" (image-signs) to be the inherently non-logical languages of gesture, environment, memory and dreams, which are, he says, "pre-human events, or on the border of what is human."[213] Implicated in this view is not only a notion of dialogic contact with environment – with what Tarr calls its "metacommunications" – but, in extension, the way that the affect of this correspondence with presence (whether physically constituted or not) operates at the register of poetic *experience* (in its distinction from prosaic *knowledge*), as per concepts in the previous chapter. Elsewhere, in apparent recognition of the intermedial non-exclusivity of their qualities, Pasolini qualifies the cinematic language of poetry as a hybrid form, of "narrative poetry."[214] Pasolini explains in an interview with Oswald Stack that this cinematic language of poetry operates on two levels, apparently inseparable. The first of these inheres in cinematic imaging *per se*: any film text, he says, can be observed poetically on some level given its relation to the "mute chaos" of the world of objects. Pasolini speaks of the "pre-historic, almost pre-cinematographic" aspect, where "physicity is poetic in itself, because it is an apparition . . . full of mystery . . . ambiguity . . . polyvalent meaning" and thus that "the cinema by directly reproducing objects physically, etc. etc. is substantially poetic."[215] What is "substantially poetic" in physical reality is that it always exceeds the possessions of our knowledge, and occurs in phenomenal experience with an enigmatic contingency, or

[213] Ibid, p.169.
[214] Pasolini, "Living Signs and Dead Poets" in *Heretical Empiricism*, p.251.
[215] Oswald Stack, *Pasolini on Pasolini: Interviews with Oswald Stack*, (London: Thames and Hudson/BFI Publishing, 1969) pp.153-154.

gratuity[216] - the reproduction of "reality" is doubly so for being appropriated by the filmmaker as the *realisation* of these qualities. It is in this direction that the second aspect - always in reference to the first – denotes the way in which this "language of reality" becomes inscribed as a matter of form, through the adoption of certain techniques. It is in this way that a filmmaker inscribes their personal meter and syntax of expression upon this encounter with the "real" - their handwriting, so to speak.[217] Viewed as such, the innately poetic potentiality of phenomenal reality is, as it comes to film, only part of what constitutes a "cinema of poetry"; it must also be realised through a formal perspective or disposition. In this sense, the tendency toward the poetic appears uniquely responsive to the notion of *Stimmung* current in our last chapter. Robert Sinnerbrink, in particular, views mood-as-*Stimmung* as the "'paranarrative' or expressive dimension of cinematic aesthetics" (and refers to Béla Tarr explicitly in this connection).[218] The poetic is this personally expressive element of a film style, which escapes the determinism of narrative convention in the direction of a filmmaker's image of the world.

No sooner does Pasolini describe the poetic substratum of "reality" underlying cinematic expression than he embarks upon identifying the particular mode that formalises his "language of poetry." He takes its model, counterintuitively, from prose - "free indirect discourse." This is an unusual form of third-person narration which refers

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[216] The "givenness" of Being was an important frame of thought for Heidegger, in consideration of connotations in the German language, where "es gibt" - equivalent of "it is"/"there is" in English - translates directly as "it gives." See Heidegger, *BT*, p.255, n.1., for Macquarrie and Robinson's discussion of this implication.

[217] Stack, *Pasolini on Pasolini*, pp.153-154.

[218] Robert Sinnerbrink, "*Stimmung*: exploring the aesthetics of mood," p.155.

to a first person perspective, wherein the thought or speech of a character is conveyed

not directly (through marked quotation) or indirectly (without direct quotation, as

interior monologue for instance), but instead merged with that of the author: first person

experience is fused with a third person omnipotence, in a way that conflates (and, so,

undermines the valency of) "subjective" and "objective" points of view. Pasolini says it

"serves to speak indirectly…in the first person…"[219] In German, this mode is referred to as

erlebte Rede, or "experienced speech/discourse," and is associated particularly with

Krasznahorkai's greatest influence, Franz Kafka.[220] That Krasznahorkai writes frequently in

a free indirect manner is a mark of this influence, which extends to Tarr.[221] This mode of

discourse appears as a link toward delineating the director's own poetics of *Stimmung*,

his approach to cinematic form through a rejection of "story." The allusion in *erlebte*

Rede to *erlebnis*, experience in its self-referential dimension, is to a form of discourse that

refers to the foundation of its expression, in a consciousness of lived-experience; or a

"subjectivity" that is objectively constituted, and which thus resists direct identification or

empathy. As it comes to cinema, Pasolini finds that free indirect discourse becomes a

"free indirect subjectivity" which is displayed in the director's way of representing and

reflecting on the experience of an-other within the form of their own aesthetic vision.

This perspective is ciphered through, and formed around, the narrative figure of a

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[219] Pasolini, "The "Cinema of Poetry"," p.185.
[220] Widely referred to; a short discussion can be found in the opening section of Clayton Koelb, "Kafka Imagines His Readers: The Rhetoric of 'Josefine die Saengerin' and 'Der Bau'" in *A Companion to the Works of Franz Kafka*, ed. James Rolleston (Columbia, S.C: Camden House, 2006), pp.347-359.
[221] Of this influence, Krasznahorkai suggests, "When I am not reading Kafka I am thinking about Kafka." László Krasznahorkai, interview by George Szirtes, September, 2013, www.thewhitereview.org/interviews/interview-with-laszlo-krasznahorkai (Accessed January 30, 2018).

protagonist – an "immersion of the filmmaker in the mind of his character."[222] It is in this sense that Pasolini speaks of two films (or film languages) produced, but co-responding to one another, in the cinema of poetry: the one a prosaic structure of narrative causality, the other formal, poetic, and expressive of the director's aesthetic sensibility.[223] Pasolini discusses the "language of poetry" in films directed by Antonioni, Bertolucci, and Godard, as indicative of a "technical/stylistic tradition…taking form."[224] In other words, the cinema of poetry thus pertains to an ideal of Art Cinema, in a way that implicitly evinces the genetic connection between art and *poiesis*.[225] And yet, for all that Pasolini appears to be encouraged by these developments - the emergence of a self-reflexively formal aestheticism that departs from classical narrative logic – his essay also criticises the lack of socio-historical consciousness in these films. Implicit in Pasolini's essay is a justification of his own aesthetic mores and political ideology, against which he finds his contemporaries to be ideologically constrained, or reactionary.[226] The poet's class consciousness and admiration for spoken (i.e. non-codified) dialect influenced his poetically inflected representation of a minoritorian (and semi-mythic) "sub-proletariat," in literature as well as cinema. In this we find another point of contact with Tarr and Krasznahorkai (both of whom draw on comparable sociological inspirations) as well as a path toward delineating the role of the free indirect in the collaboration between writer and director. As with Pasolini, but with a less "delirious" sense of aestheticism, Tarr's own

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[222] Pasolini, "The "Cinema of Poetry"," p.175.
[223] Ibid. p.172.
[224] Ibid. p.182.
[225] Pasolini's reference to the poetry of Chaplin does not, I think, diminish this link.
[226] Pasolini, "The "Cinema of Poetry"," p.184-185.

"obsessive" vision and style is prominently foregrounded. His cinematic universe is invested with an expressive disposition toward the material world. This is realised as an affective environmental atmosphere that is rendered in stark monochrome and within the extended durations of mobile sequence shots. In these films - and taking on the appearance of a cinematic *dispositif* - the camera is "felt" in its autonomous deliberations, and made a subject and participant in the poetic disclosure of a situation. This is the exploration of what the director calls "a tension between the human being and the world,"[227] a *Stimmung* which conditions the director's style and the form of vision to which the viewer is disposed.

Beyond a shared sensibility toward cinematic expression, and in addition to the role of free indirect discourse in the Tarr-Krasznahorkai collaboration, further meaningful areas of proximity emerge in the comparison between Pasolini and Tarr. Specifically, with each of these directors, the shift toward a poetic free indirect style can be viewed in terms of a transition from a broadly realist aesthetic toward a more personal stylistic register. Indeed, in both instances, and partially affirming the problematic socio-political contentions concluding Pasolini's essay, we see a movement from stylistic aberration within pre-existing (and nominally "realist") national-cinematic models toward a novel, expressive transgression of realist conventions. Pasolini's essay is now widely seen to develop from, and respond to, the film he had made immediately prior to presenting it[228]

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[227] Tarr, Robert Chilcott (2007), p.10.
[228] Pasolini first gave a reading of the paper at the 1965 Pesaro Film Festival, shortly after completing *Il Vangelo Matteo*. It was poorly received, but was published soonafter. See Naomi Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Cinema as Heresy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp.92-93.

– *Il Vangelo Matteo* – an account of the life of Christ mediated by the vision of a "non-believer" (albeit, one with a lively religious consciousness). Prior to this, however, the first two films that Pasolini had made – *Accatone* and *Mama Roma* – were recognisable descendants of Italian Neorealism (a neo-Neorealism). The milieu of the Roman "borgate" in these films, and its association with the binds of poverty and social injustice that tie people to slums, crime and corruption, has a decidedly Neorealist quality; this is a cinematic tradition with which Tarr, too, has been associated.[229] Against earlier Neorealist preoccupations with the naturalistic rendering of a "transparent" social reality, however, Pasolini's cinema employed expressive stylistic registers that respond to the director's sensibility for the religious, the mythic, and the "primitive." The director's approach to neorealist scenarios was tempered by his contradictory impulses toward transcendence and fatalism, the sacred and profane, brute reality and its poetic realisation, in a way that undermined ostensible "objectivity" and gestured beyond the contemporary "real." In a similar fashion (but in a different socio-historical context), Tarr's early films appear broadly within the guise of social-documentary realism,[230] albeit with the characteristic critical fatalism that underscores the entire continuity of his corpus (the logic of circularity,[231] or of no-exit situations).[232] This is the first phase in the development of Tarr's cinema, in its development from a "social" to an "ontological" to a "cosmic" perspective. For both Tarr and Pasolini, a departure from representing

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[229] By David Bordwell, for instance: "The sarcastic laments of Béla Tarr", www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2007/09/19/the-sarcastic-laments-of-bela-tarr/
[230] Part of the so-called Budapest School, based out the Béla Balazs studios.
[231] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.100.
[232] Rancière, *The Time After*, p.15.

contemporary social justice issues invokes an ethico-political consciousness that is constituted expressionistically, through aesthetic style and treatment of subject-matter. In each case, the realist context is re-figured, if not de-realised.[233] Regarding Pasolini's "Neorealist" use of (non-professional, "sub-proletariat") actors and on-location shooting (albeit in Southern Italy, rather than Palestine), Greene observes, "…the play of oppositions characterising Pasolini's early films is…reversed in *Il Vangelo*, where the subject is mythic and epic; the style realistic."[234] The adoring devotion which casts the epic misfortunes and degraded physical milieu of pimps and prostitutes in an almost saintly aspect - what the director calls "reverential style," his desire to "reconsecrate things" – was "gilding the lily," in the case of an already sacralised figure.[235] In *Il Vangelo Matteo*, the gospel of Saint Matthew provides the pre-text – literally, the script - for a re-interpretation of the historical figure of Jesus Christ through the eyes of a gay, Marxist poet. As with his earlier films, a liberal use of pieces from the Christian musical canon - and J.S. Bach in particular – refers to a sacred tradition. In *Accatone*, this presents a disjunct between holy music and a forsaken milieu; in *Il Vangelo*, the musical counterpoint extends to a more connective (rather than ostensibly contradictory) role, where not only Bach but also (Christianised) African chorals[236] and African-American blues/spirituals invoke both a transhistorical and a global element to Pasolini's Biblical exegesis. The director experiments with modernist techniques to realise,

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[233] John Orr, *Contemporary Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p.13.
[234] Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini,* p.75.
[235] Stack, Pasolini on Pasolini, p.83.
[236] Pasolini uses the "Missa Luba" settings of Christian Mass to traditional Congolese music, performed by the choir "le roi du Badouin."

expressionistically, a figure of Christ that is at once scriptural and modern – emphasising

the element of social consciousness in the word of the gospel. Jesus takes on the

appearance of a revolutionary upstart, if not a Socialist, brimming with rage at a corrupt

religious order established in the name of his Father. Following the life of Christ as a

movement - both a literal procession and politico-religious campaign - the camera is

"felt," as a presence and a participant. That is, expressive techniques are foregrounded,

as representation, rather than disappearing into the flow of images, of narrative

(information). Pasolini experiments with cinema-verite-like documentary realism (the use

of shaky, handheld cameras as an embodied POV), while also deploying telephoto zooms,

and the abrupt cutting techniques of a modernist/new wave editing, to effect a striking

impression of Christ's historical appeal. In so doing, the director produces the double

aesthetic register, and tension between style and theme, that John Orr reads as implicit

in *Cinema di Poesia*[237] – a dialogic encounter which produces an expressive resonance

between "form" and its "content."

Pseudo-realism and Poiesis

In contrast to the expressive intertextuality of Pasolini's *Il Vangelo*, the minimal style of

Tarr's films is more hermetically conceived and constituted within a singular vision. The

notion of a free indirect subjectivity – in which an aesthetic perspective is formalised

around the pretext of a protagonist-figure – is one which the director seems, indirectly,

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[237] Orr, *Contemporary Cinema*, p.5.

to affirm. The disassociation of Tarr's "image of the world" from the conventions of "story" develops into a formal-structural engagement with the affect of lived-time and -space, duration and environment, a singular aesthetic practice formed around the lived-experience of subjects and counterpoised against narrative "information." Evoking a similar trajectory to that taken by Pasolini toward his "Cinema di Poesia," Kovács describes the transition from the "first-" to the "second-period" of Tarr's films as a negotiation between verisimilar filmic "realism" and a creatively generative artifice that he classes as "poetic/lyrical."[238] Kovács further suggests that this transition represents an aesthetic shift from an "objective" description of real social conditions to a more authorial expression of a point of view representing the "true" reality of a human nature that undergirds those conditions.[239] Essentially, says Kovács, there occurs here a conflict not so much between realism and artifice, but between "a personal and an impersonal representation of reality."[240] He takes this conflict to effect the development of (the) two fundamental figures in Tarr's film-worlds: the environment (setting, spatial orientation, landscape) and the characters (primarily in terms of their dialogue and disposition).[241]

Charting the structural shift in Tarr through this period, Kovács identifies the "first" period as "realist" in both its environment and characterisation, and the somewhat-anomalous *Almanac of Fall* as representing realist characters in a "poetic/lyrical" environment. It is by reversal of the latter, from *Damnation* onwards, that

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[238] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.49.
[239] Ibid, p.39
[240] Idem.
[241] Ibid, p.49.

the basic structural logic of the mature Tarr style is inaugurated; Kovács dubs this

schema, placing "poetic" characters in "realist environments, "the pseudo form of the

real."[242] Kovács finds that the introduction as set-designer (and actor) of Gyula Pauer – an

esteemed artist of the Hungarian avant-garde, who had in the 1970s initiated a

movement of so-called "PSEUDO art"[243] – had greatly influenced Tarr's filmmaking

practice. This partnership inspired the emergence of an apparently postmodern self-

reflexivity, in which a conscious intermingling of "realism" and "artifice" created, as

Kovács puts it, "the feeling of reality in an artificially created pseudo-world."[244] In so

doing, however, Kovács considerably downplays the role of Krasznahorkai – to whom he

ascribes the (admittedly significant) innovation of a circular narrative form, and a poetic

diction through which to formulate an uncanny disjuncture between characters and their

social milieu.[245] For Kovács, the idea of circular time that Tarr reads from Krasznahorkai

inspires the elevation of a pre-existing theme – entrapment – to the level of narrative

structure. With *Damnation*, Kovács suggests, "the illusion that there is hope for a big

change" renders a formerly static circle - a proscribed limit to "progress" - as a more

dynamic, temporalised cycle (of return).[246] But thinking through the transition between a

literary free indirect discourse and its cinematic equivalent presents a suggestive line of

comparison between Tarr and Krasznahorkai that goes far beyond poetic verbalisation

and cyclical narrative form. As previously stated, Krasznahorkai writes frequently in a free

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[242] Ibid, p.39.
[243] Ibid, p.40.
[244] Kovács, "The World According to Béla Tarr."
[245] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.39.
[246] Ibid. 119.

indirect discourse, or, more properly to his inspirations, *erlebte Rede*. The stability of

subjective perception is often undermined through the writer's representation of

aberrant environments (degraded, animated) and the psyches (angst-ridden,

melancholic, manic) that respond to them; these appear, as in Tarr's cinematic

Stimmung, to be mutually and indivisibly constituted. Krasznahorkai oscillates between

intimacy and detachment, interior process and peripheral phenomena, in reflection of a

wider tendency to form "systems" that link the universal with the particular, the abstract

with the concrete, the sublime with the mundane – representing their mutual reflection

in one other. A polyphony of voices and perspectives are shown to interact within this

layering of discourses, where, in the coursing of Krasznahorkai's impressive prose style,

we encounter free-floating citations of thought and language, *figures of speech* strewn

amongst the "lava flow"[247] of verbiage. Direct quotation is often parenthetical,

unattributed, or signals an internal thought-process or association that is not distinctly

voiced as emanating from a delimited consciousness; "monological", official and

intellectual lines of thought overlap with discourses of a more social or personal nature,

those of hearsay and memory. Time and space become malleable, or indefinite, where

the borders between states of being and consciousness are repeatedly transgressed in

the course of the writer's wending sentences. At the same time, and for all of this agility,

Krasznahorkai's prose takes on a particularly labyrinthine quality, characterised by manic

digression, extenuation and correction – *circumlocution*, even - in the free indirect

description of its subjects' psycho-physical experience; the manic quality of

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[247] George Szirtes, "Foreign Laughter : Foreign Music" in *Music and Literature* 2 (Spring 2013), p.97.

Krasznahorkai's prose also displays the significant influence of the Austrian writer Thomas

Bernhard, to whom, as Zsuzsa Selyem suggests, he pays tribute in the "screenplay" for

The Turin Horse.[248] This circumlocutory tendency retards the progressive plotting of

narrative and extends instead toward a reflexive awareness of *erlebnis,* the happening of

lived-experience in the "real-time" of its perception, which accords with (or inspires) the

obsessive observation of Tarr. In this sense, it is not only the total form of these

narratives, but their affective tone and estranging method of description that is

transposed to film – even before considering the thematic content of Krasznahorkai's

novels.

Much has been made elsewhere of the comparable stylistic tendencies that can

be found in the novels of Krasznahorkai and in Tarr's films.[249] Most often, these

evaluations will recognise that the long and rambling sentences of Krasznahorkai's prose

find their correlative (or adaptation) in the Slow Cinema, long-take aesthetic of Tarr's

films. Where this is certainly a meaningful comparison, it does not go fully to the heart of

the translation of literary concept into environment as it occurs in the audio-visual

composition of Tarr's films. The comparative length of their "utterances" does little to

ascribe the particular nature of their conceptual correspondence; Tarr's aesthetic-poetic

vision and forming of a disposition are undoubtedly inspired in the first place by the

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[248] The Nietzschean neighbour is named as Bernhard, while the father is Ohlsdorfer – after Ohlsdorf, where Bernhard lived for many years, and where his memorial museum currently stands. Szusza Selyem, "How Long and When: Open Time Interval and Dignified Living Creatures in The Turin Horse" in *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* 10 (2015), p.110.
[249] Jonathon Romney, "End of the Road" in *Film Comment* 37, no.5 (September/October, 2001) pp.61-62; James Wood, "Madness and Civilisation: The very strange fictions of László Krasnzahorkai" in *New Yorker* (July 4, 2011 Issue): www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/07/04/madness-and-civilisation

scenes, situations and figures of Krasznahorkai's novels. To give an impression of the free indirect discourse in Krasznahorkai's prose, its uncanny affective atmosphere as well as the melancholic, apocalyptic character of the creaturely cosmology it seeks to convey, the following - a single sentence[250] from *Satantango* - is worth quoting in full:

> His imagination was bewitched almost to the point of paralysis by the notion that this estate with its rich, generous soil was, only a few million years ago, covered by the sea…that it had alternated between sea and dry land, and suddenly – even as he conscientiously noted down the stocky, swaying figure of Schmidt in his soggy quilted jacket and boots heavy with mud appearing on the path from Szikes, hurrying as if he feared being spotted, sliding in through the back door of his house – he was lost in successive waves of time, coolly aware of the minimal speck of his own being, seeing himself as the defenceless, helpless victim of the earth's crust, the brittle arc of his life between birth and death caught up in the dumb struggle between surging seas and rising hills, and it was as if he could already feel the gentle tremor beneath the chair supporting his bloated body, a tremor that might be the harbinger of seas about to break in on him, a pointless warning to flee before its all-encompassing power made escape impossible, and he could see himself running, part of a desperate, terrified stampede, comprising stags, bears, rabbits, deer, rats, insects and reptiles, dogs and men, just so many futile, meaningless lives in the common, incomprehensible devastation, while above them flapped clouds of birds, dropping in exhaustion, offering the only possible hope.[251]

Here, within the one movement, we enter the imagination of "the Doctor," digress from it to relate his notations on occurrences happening simultaneously outside, while transitioning from internal experience ("he was lost in successive waves of time") to a

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[250] The ellipsis in line 2 is in the original.
[251] László Krasznahorkai, *Satantango*, trans. George Szirtes (London: Tuskar Rock Press, 2012), pp.58-59

metaphorical register that is *as if* anterior to it ("it was as if he could already feel the gentle tremor beneath his bloated body"). It is worth recalling here that Tarr read this novel, and expressed interest in adapting it to film, in 1985[252] – after *Almanac of Fall*, but prior to *Damnation*; in the same year, he first heard Krasznahorkai read the short piece "At Latest in Turin," which formed the inspiration of the director's final film, *The Turin Horse* (and remained a figure of thought for him in the 26 intervening years).[253] To be clear, to reference this neat confluence - the outline of Tarr's "second period" - is not to discredit the originality of the director's work, nor the authenticity of his comment upon it. The Krasznahorkai connection is by no means unrecognised; and, in any case, Tarr regularly acknowledges his close collaborators, recognising their share of responsibility, in interview (for which he tends to act as spokesperson for these films) as much as in the film credits themselves (where the names of core contributors are presented together, with Tarr). But what becomes evident in reading the above text is that it in fact shows, as both writer and director are keen to point out in their own ways, the absolute difference between film and literature – and how this difference becomes a chasm when speaking of the use of a free indirect discourse/subjectivity, representing spatio-temporal fluidity and perspectival flux. Suffice to say that Tarr, with his affinity for the concrete presence of phenomenal objects and rejection of special effects, does not seek to represent this scene as it is conveyed in words – and yet he is, as he says, interested in "psychological

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[252] Tarr, interview by Selavy (2012).
[253] Tarr, interview by Petkovic (2011). More than this, the quote that prefaces the novel, from Kafka, speaks to a central thematic in Tarr-Krasznahorkai: "In that case, I'll miss the thing by waiting for it. –FK"

processes"[254] as they emerge from these situations from Krasznahorkai. Against the anti-theoretical stance of Tarr, Krasznahorkai claims that the director used him "as a philosopher…I told him always something about the philosophical background, or questions, not exactly about the scene."[255] Perhaps tellingly - though not referring to Krasznahorkai – the director admits that, starting specifically with *Damnation*, "I've always thought about the questions: what is the power of humanity, what is the power of nature, and where we are, because we are a part of nature."[256] As much as it is the case that Tarr's entire oeuvre displays a continual development of formal elements and critical spirit, it is with regard to these concerns that Tarr's pessimistic humanism takes on its properly cosmic dimensions. Indeed, the vision of an increasingly "cosmic" disorder underpinning the development of Tarr's perspective can be found equally, and first of all, in Krasznahorkai's novels. It is surely no coincidence that this inclination in Tarr becomes apparent from *Damnation* on, the beginning of their working relationship.

In that first collaboration between Tarr and Krasznahorkai, the urban environment and landscape become a plastic material, fashioned in such a way as to achieve a particular affective atmosphere and mode of experience. This was a tendency that had ostensibly begun with Pauer's "PSEUDO art" stylistics in the chamber melodrama of *Almanac of Fall*, but which takes a distinct new form with the writer's arrival, through which the natural world enters at the same time as it becomes de-naturalised in stark

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[254] Tarr, interview by Ballard (2004).

[255] László Krasznahorkai, "Conversations with László Krasznahorkai," interview by Mauro Javier Cardenas, December 12, 2013, www.musicandliterature.org/features/2013/12/11/a-conversation-with-lszl-krasznahorkai (Accessed January 30, 2018).

[256] Tarr, interview by Selavy (2012).

monochrome. Krasznahorkai speaks explicitly of lending "background, atmosphere to

these movies by Béla Tarr"[257] – a view which, again, supports my reading of the

environmental atmospherics of mood. The writer's influence thus extends beyond the

terms of narrative and its structure, and toward the (trans)posing of certain questions, if

not the particular quality of *Stimmung* or articulation of disposition by which these

questions become formed as a discursive image of the world. This image bears the

reflection of Krasznahorkai's self-professed melancholy – a relation to (and perception of)

the world, things, and time that has forever been associated with strange and uncommon

insight – a negative imprint of the quotidian world, of time and history.[258] *Satantango* is,

the author says, "really about the world at a deeper level," than contemporary concerns

of a social, national or political nature.[259] It presents a universal image that is cosmic, if

not mythic, in quality. Indeed, Rancière suggests that we can "more simply" refer to the

"cosmological" dimension of Tarr's cinema – that which develops through contact with

Krasznahorkai - as the "mythological."[260] Elsewhere, and perhaps more keenly, Rancière

reads the landscape and milieu of *Damnation* as mythological and the historical at once:

a town abandoned by the Soviet project in which hordes of dogs roam, where the

"wrecks of the socialist voyage into the future" and the "threat of animality…merge into

the same element, the rain."[261] Further, Rancière suggests that this deluge, likewise, is,

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[257] Krasznahorkai, interview by Cardenas (2013).

[258] László Földényi, *Melancholy*, trans. Tim Wilkinson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), pp. 191-192.

[259] László Krasznahorkai, "This society is the result of 10,000 years?" interviewed by Richard Lea, August 24, 2012, www.theguardian.com/books/2012/aug/24/laszlo-krasznahorkai-interview (Accessed January 30, 2018).

[260] Rancière, *The Time After*, p.54.

[261] Rancière, "Béla Tarr: The Poetics and Politics of Fiction," pp.246-248.

"at the same time, an entirely material element and the condensation of a whole situation."[262] This elemental convergence of the material and existential speaks directly to the idea of *Stimmung*, and Rancière recognises its construction as one in which sensible moments become condensed into a "global affect"[263] – a term which resonates with the concept of (totality in regards to) mood-as-attunement discussed in the previous chapter.

But this milieu that mediates between the temporal (historical) and atemporal (mythological), this disposition by which the character of a situation is made present through climate and environmental texture, is, again, recognisable in Krasznahorkai's *Satantango.* Its milieu is broadly but recognisably similar to that of *Damnation*, taking place in an unnamed Soviet collective that exists under a condition of social collapse at one and the same time as it is beset by deluge. More than this, it is a setting within which the materiality of environment is vitalised, animated, in accordance with these dynamics – where the natural and the historical become entangled, coalesced, within Krasznahorkai's free indirect consciousness. Directly following the above passage from *Satantango*, the same figure – "the Doctor"– experiences a disquieting realisation, sensing the spectre of a (pre-)historical suffering that is invested, and ingrained, in the object-world surrounding him ("somehow preserved in time").[264] It is as if the revelation of a natural-historical creaturely cosmology (and one, moreover, that appears in the throes of its devastation) has attuned the Doctor to the spectral life of his milieu. "The

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[262] Ibid. p.247.
[263] Rancière, *The Time After* p.34; "Béla Tarr: The Poetics and Politics of Fiction," p.249.
[264] Krasznahorkai, *Satantango*, p.59.

evidence of suffering does not disappear without a trace," he remarks to himself, a thought extended in the same sentence to suggest that these "prehistoric screams" are "raised by the rain, like dust."[265] The animation of environment that Tarr's long-take produces, and the perception of meaningful materiality to which it responds, run in parallel to such scenes in Krasznahorkai – which tend to inhabit the free indirect field of indetermination between the experience of subjects and the phenomenal reality which conditions it. But where Krasznahorkai can imaginatively conceptualise and describe processes that evade empirical perception, which can mediate between a variety of temporal and perspectival planes, Tarr remains wedded to the concrete materiality of situations – a constraint that takes on central value in the filmmaker's work. This means that his focus is intrinsically linked to substantial presence and, more than this, to the present – to a weighty presence of time. Where this marks a major point of difference between Tarr and Krasznahorkai, it is one that takes place with regard to medium, rather than worldview. Tarr's engagement with time is one that seeks to reveal the "face" of a landscape or location, to attune his viewers to the address of environment, to that metacommunication of material presence evinced by an immersion in the minutiae of a milieu. In other words, it seeks to see things from that melancholic, cosmic perspective that is shared between writer and director: one that seeks to frame a perception that is at once exterior to the human world while gesturing toward a deeper involvement with it.

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[265] Idem.

Melancholy Economy

What is presented through Tarr-Krasznahorkai is not a statement but, rather, a perspective, a way of perceiving, and conceiving of, the world and reality. Where Krasznahorkai earlier in *Satantango* describes the "nervous conversation" between household objects ("that had so far been merely listening"),[266] there is an intimation of the metacommunications of beer glasses, of decaying walls, and of what goes on "beneath the table" that become so significant in Tarr. In response to the above recognition of animate nature (if not the supernatural), the Doctor notes down the cryptic words "cosmic *wirtschaft*" (before reconsidering, and questioning his hearing).[267] There is no further explication of the phrase, but it presents an intriguing idea within the broader context of that "cosmic perspective" developing in Tarr – and particularly given that it is taken up in, but relocated to a crucial point near to the end of, the film (remaining unexplained there, also). *Wirtschaft* is the German word for "economy,"[268] but which, in current usage, can additionally refer to the sense of (literally, domestic) management or arrangement that is implied by the original Greek concept, *oikonomia.[269]* This is a sense largely lost in connection with the more etymologically proximate English term, but which broadens the semantic scope of the German to refer also to households,

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[266] And repeats it at end, in the concluding lines of the repeated narrative. *Satantango*, pp. 5 & 274.
[267] Krasznahorkai, *Satantango*, p.60.
[268] There is a more etymologically equivalent word, *oekonomie*, but which tends to refer to economy more at the theoretical level, i.e. as an academic discipline, the equivalent to the English "economics".
[269] Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), p.1055.

businesses, bars and inns.[270] By this implication, *wirtschaft* denotes a system for

regulating human affairs. *Kosmos* itself also refers originally to a system of order or

arrangement, which only later – and, significantly in the world of Tarr-Krasznahorkai, by

way of Pythagoras – comes to refer to the physical universe; we have already noted the

notion of disposition as a mode of organization under external influence to which cosmic

connotations have historically accrued. The etymological resonances between

disposition, *oikonomia* and *kosmos* (as concentrically related system-conceptions) are not

accidental in this sense, but part of the dialogic process of linguistics – or, from another

perspective, the fall from poetic "truth" - in which inflection serves to splinter concepts,

which then harden into common definitions.[271] Given this ostensive "doubling" of words

that connote a form of systematic relationality, and in correlative sets that trace widening

arcs of influence, what, if anything, might the idea of cosmic economy seek to articulate?

There is some precedent for the term in the work of the esoteric Russian

"Cosmist" Nikolai Fedorov, concerning the notion of a human domination over the

natural universe – over death itself - which poses our ultimate vocation as a drive to

"defeat its destructive forces";[272] this way of thinking is, however, anathematic to Tarr-

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[270] These are commonplace settings for Tarr-Krasznahorkai, such that "cosmic wirtschaft" could in itself
describe their aesthetic environment – the opening sequence from Werckmeister Harmonies, in particular,
stages the movement of the universe with drunks in a bar.

[271] Significantly, Agamben suggests that it is as an appropriation - by the Latin church - of oikonomia as
dispositio that we originally derive the concept of disposition, as well as its reference to a state – as in an
order, or administration. For Agamben, this reflects on the constitution of the nation-state, and the
dispositif for its management; in the current argument, we may refer this concept to the situatedness of
mood, and the psychic displacement effected in the existential-environmental dialogism of a Stimmung.
See Agamben, "What is an Apparatus?," in *What is an Apparatus?,* trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella
(Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp.11-12.

[272] The only reference I can find is a secondary usage, a commentary on a commentary, found in: Dmitry
Shlapentokh, "Life/Death – Cosmos/Eschatology: Nikolai Berdiaev and the Influence of the Fedorovian

Krasznahorkai, and the Soviet cosmology pertaining to it is explicitly disavowed by the director in strong terms.[273] A response more fitting with the conceptual orientation of Tarr-Krasznahorkai, whose perspective appears to gesture in the very opposite (but no less "cosmic") direction, can be made with reference to the English language translator of *Satantango* (and *The Melancholy of Resistance*), the poet George Szirtes. Szirtes finds that - as with Tarr - in Krasznahorkai "nothing...is about plot," but what the translator instead calls "system."[274] "Story" in Krasznahorkai, Szirtes suggests, is formed in the movement between (or circulation within) "complementary patterns."[275] Among those he identifies, an oscillation between "microcosm" and "macrocosm" is at this point especially significant. Their common root, -cosm, is itself a derivation of *kosmos*. Considered in this way, the sense of intersecting and mutually reflective "worlds" - universal and particular, cosmic and domestic— appears a strong implication of the Doctor's enigmatic phrase. Just as important, in this sense, is the implication of a complementarity which connects and characterises these "patterns," of which the image of "cosmic *wirtschaft*" would be emblematic. Szirtes is perceptive, in this sense, in not conceiving of these complementary patterns in view of their apparently antinomic terms, lest they then become read as a formal dialectic – which would portend progressive development toward a teleological ideal, a synthesis, rather than a more qualitative encountering of paradox.

Vision" in *Life: Phenomenology of Life as the Starting Point of Philosophy*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), p.308.
[273] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).
[274] Szirtes, "Foreign Laughter : Foreign Music," p.106.
[275] Idem.

While not a work that is directly associated with Tarr, Krasznahorkai's *Destruction and Sorrow Beneath the Heavens* – written in the period between *Werckmeister Harmonies* and *The Man from London,* and first published in 2004 – gestures specifically in this direction at one point. Significantly, it is a novel in which an analogue of Krasznahorkai (named László Stein) travels through China in an attempt to establish how - and, more to the point, *if* – the country's Classical culture (of art and philosophy, in particular) survives within its late rush toward a globalised modernity. László Stein, responding to an interlocutor who fears the "horrific speed" of progress and a "terrifying" ubiquity of "knowledge," suggests (through his translator) that,

> Only a new metaphysics can be of help. But such a metaphysics cannot be built on any kind of dichotomy, it cannot be built on contradictions, on duality, on some new kind of enigmatic designation, it cannot be built on expression with its redemptive strength. He does not believe…that words can have any role in it. Nor, he believes, can concepts.[276]

It is intriguing, in this sense, to find that Krasznahorkai – in a way befitting Tarr's own discourse – evinces a mistrust of words and concepts. At the climax of Stein's discoveries, however, in a chapter titled "The Spirit of China," he admits that he could never exist without words.[277] He does so in a surprising encounter with a sagacious interlocutor, Wu, who invokes - by way of abstract poetic compositions that refer directly to the philosopher - a Heideggerian ethos of poetic truth, *aletheia*; a concept of the ontogenetic

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[276] László Krasznahorkai, *Destruction and Sorrow Beneath the Heavens*, trans. Ottilie Mulzet (London; New York; Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2016), pp.214-215.
[277] Ibid. 257.

truth of poetry, *poiesis*, which we will return to in the next chapter. Wu continues in his

next composition to propose,

Things next to one other   unspeakable   density[278]

The phrase "cosmic *wirtschaft*" may be taken as a poetic image of such "unspeakable

density" – that is, of a concept that evades definite conception. It effects an intersection

of the two orders of being that Tarr references above: "the power of humanity...the

power of nature," as micro- and macro-cosm; or a recognition of an infinite regress in

articulating one without reference to the other ("...because we are part of nature"). In

signalling this uncanny proximity between the cosmic and the mundane, such as we find

repeatedly in Tarr, the figure of a "cosmic *wirtschaft*" also meaningfully implicates a set

of related patterns in Krasznahorkai's work. Within this conceptual constellation, the

oscillation between chaos (tending toward disintegration, destruction) and order (as a

socio-historical category, the sign of human culture) is also recognised by Szirtes, and

becomes legible in Tarr.[279] This constellation in itself invokes the dynamics of system, the

articulation of pattern upon either of disorder or, more properly, nothingness – the

Greek *khaos* means "void" or "abyss," and named a primordial god out of whose

atmosphere emerged a "heaven," Earth and Eros.[280] *Khaos* and *kosmos* thus lie along a

continuum. Most explicitly in *Werckmeister Harmonies*, but implicit throughout his

oeuvre, Tarr's films demonstrate a reciprocal relationship between the violence (physical

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[278] Ibid. 264.
[279] George Szirtes, "Things Fall Apart" in *Fireflies* 2 (May 2015), pp.28-31.
[280] H.J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p.14.

or otherwise) that establishes and maintains order,[281] and its reflection of an equally consistent universal order - that of entropy, the agent of transience and irreversible decay. In the source text, *The Melancholy of Resistance*, Krasznahorkai makes the connection to entropy explicit, in a description of biological decay which mirrors that of geological forces in *Satantango*.[282] Toward the end of a detailed account of the chemical process of putrefaction - in which is revealed the truth that, "from the moment of birth every living organism carries within it the seed of its own destruction"[283] – Krasznahorkai describes of the elements of the human body how,

> ...a superior organism welcomed them, dividing them neatly between organic and inorganic forms of being, and when, after a long and stiff resistance, the remaining tissue, cartilage and finally the bone gave up the hopeless struggle, nothing remained and yet not one atom had been lost. Everything was there, it is simply that there was no clerk capable of making an inventory of all the constituents; but the realm that existed once – once and once only – had disappeared for ever, ground into infinitesimal pieces by the endless momentum of chaos within which crystals of order survived, the chaos that consisted of an indifferent and unstoppable traffic between things.[284]

It is in regards to this cycle between order and chaos that Kovács most perceptively writes about Krasznahorkai's role in these films – and convincingly implicates the process whereby, "the forces of order appear as the forces of nature," as part of the "circular logic" for which he argues more pressingly.[285] Kovács links this logic to the Nietzschean

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[281] It is this cycle to which Benjamin refers when formulating the idea of "pure means" in "Critique of Violence."

[282] Krasznahorkai, *Satantango*, pp.55-58. Laszlo Krasznahorkai, *The Melancholy of Resistance*, trans. George Szirtes (New York: New Directions, 1998), pp.310-314.

[283] Krasznahorkai, *The Melancholy of Resistance*, p.313.

[284] Ibid. p.314.

[285] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.133.

idea of circular time, or eternal return, which he elsewhere argues as the basic connection between Tarr and Krasznahorkai. But for Kraszahorkai, at least, it would appear that it is "once and only once" that a human life (as "realm," or microcosm) *ek-sists* (that is, "stands out") in(to) this "unstoppable traffic between things": a cosmic economy.

Furthermore, and whether intentionally or not, the circle of eternal recurrence as here described by Kovács (in its conceptual, rather than temporal dimension) invokes the idea of "second nature" as it appears in Georg Lukács.[286] This is not the "second nature" that commonly refers to habit, or at least not in the sense by which we have used habit to this point. Lukács' "second nature" is "the nature of man-made structures,"[287] the reified "world of convention" which modern human (more particularly, the Western bourgeoisie) inhabits. Lukács suggests that, "…despite its regularity, it is a world that does not offer itself either as meaning…or as a matter, in sensuous immediacy."[288] To Lukács, "first nature" (or just nature) is *immediate* and potentially meaningful: "mute, corporeal and foreign to the senses." What he calls "second nature" is, by contrast, a historically produced matrix of conventions that have become alienated from the meaningful conditions of their production. It thus speaks to a "fall" from a "meaningful" to a "meaningless" world.[289] Second nature has lost its vital grounding in a fabric of

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[286] I use the Germanicised version of (György) Lukács' name in order to be consistent with my sources. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1971), pp.62-65.
[287] Ibid. 63.
[288] Ibid. 62.
[289] Adorno sets up this dichotomy explicitly in his reading of Lukács. See Theodor Adorno "The Idea of Natural-History" in Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Things Beyond Resemblance: collected essays on Theodor W. Adorno* (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2006), p.260.

experience, but also, by the same turn, the recognisable quality of human artifice, in that

its products take on the appearance and status of permanence. The ostensive durability

and otherness of the world of convention becomes experienced with the mythic,

manifest a-historicity of natural phenomena. But where Lukács seeks a redress to the

spectre of second nature in a "metaphysical act of reawakening,"[290] it is with Theodor

Adorno and his reading of Benjamin that this concept finds new life. Second nature is

taken up by Adorno in his important early essay on, "The Idea of Natural-History," an idea

that he reads with particular reference to Benjamin (in relation to Lukács and Heidegger).

With it, Adorno seeks to formulate a critical imperative that might, "dialectically

overcome the usual antithesis of nature and history," without, however, collapsing them

as categories.[291] As Adorno relates, "Natural history is not a synthesis of natural and

historical methods, but a change of perspective."[292] History (as process, progressive

change) would be regarded as a natural condition (that is, mirroring nature rather than

"overcoming" it), *at the same time* as nature (as ahistorical background) could be

interpreted as a historical category (that is, as meaningful process). More important for

the current argument than the method of this dialectic, however, is its intended affect:

the "change of perspective," which Adorno relates to an experience of *thaumazein*.[293]

This Ancient Greek word is translated here as "shock," but is more often accorded the

status of "awe" or "wonder" – and is, famously, the *Stimmung* which is said to found

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[290] Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, p.64.
[291] Theodor Adorno, "The Idea of Natural-History," p.252.
[292] Ibid. p.262.
[293] Adorno, "The Idea of Natural-History," p.261.

philosophical insight.[294] Indeed, Max Pensky takes the idea of natural history in this sense

to be an (uneasy) analogue to the notion of world-disclosure in Heidegger's fundamental

ontology,[295] which is – as discussed in our first chapter – bound to the concept of

Stimmung therein. To reiterate: *Stimmungen* serve a disclosive function, revealing the

relation between *Dasein* and world in the form of environmental tonalities. But if "natural

history" can effect a change of perspective, a shock of insight, this disclosure is not, or

not only, to be characterised in terms of wonder. Indeed, as with the thematic of

profound boredom, this "shock" might be viewed broadly in the terms of Heidegger's

Augenblick and Benjamin's "awakening."

More specifically, the idea of natural-history can in this sense be regarded as the

awakening of an attunement, of melancholy – for it is by relation to Benjamin's discourse

on allegory and melancholy in Baroque aesthetics that Adorno situates this dialectical

image (a "dialectics-at-a-standstill") of "natural history." What this means in effect is

given a neat summary in Eric Santner's suggestion that,

> For Benjamin, natural history ultimately names the ceaseless repetition of…cycles of emergence
>
> and decay of human orders of meaning, cycles that are for him…always connected to violence.[296]

It is in this direction that Adorno, referring to the "other side of the phenomenon" of

"second nature," enlists Benjamin to assert that, "The deepest point where history and

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[294] ""Wonder is the only beginning of philosophy," Plato has Socrates say." See John Llewelyn, "On the Saying that Philosophy Begins in *Thaumazein*" in *Afterall* 4 (2001), pp.48-57.

[295] Max Pensky, "Natural History: the Life and Afterlife of a Concept in Adorno" in *Critical Horizons* 5, no.1 (2004), pp.233-234.

[296] Eric Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p.17.

nature converge lies precisely in this element of transience...nature itself is seen as transitory nature, as history."[297] As Tom Whyman indicates, the concept of transience is later amended within the Adornian schema, to be replaced by that of "decay."[298] This shift in terminology resonates with a return to Kovács, where he goes on to write of Krasznahorkai-Tarr that:

> Artificial and social orders are unnatural and oppressive; natural order, on the other hand, is impersonal and destructive...social order is a conspiracy...the only goal of which is to maintain the existing oppressive hierarchy. The only power that is greater than this is the unstoppable natural process of disintegration, the result of which is decay as well, and thus the circle closes.[299]

As aforementioned – and with reference here to the final chapter of Krasznahorkai's *Satantango,* "The Circle Closes" – Kovács identifies the structural sign for these works to be the figure of a circle, in an eternal return of the same (situation). This follows particularly from a postmodern (or, perhaps, pre-historical) turn in its narration, where the Doctor becomes author, or demiurge, writing the world of the novel into existence; both book and film conclude with a re-description of the opening scene, implying that the narrative begins again (and again, and so on). More than this, the very image of a Satan's tango is one that connotes return, tracing six forward steps before retracing them backward. But while this figural circularity is certainly legible and significant, it takes on another form with regards to the effect of decay, and in regards to the perspective of

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[297] Adorno, "The Idea of Natural-History," p.262.
[298] Tom Whyman, "Understanding Adorno on 'Natural-History'" in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 24, no.4 (2016), p.463.
[299] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.133.

eternal transience - the shock-optic of natural history serves to shatter the illusion of permanence, of any totality of meaning, such as the metaphysics of eternal return would effect. In other words - viewed from a certain angle we may see a circle, but at the local level its ends do not appear to meet. By virtue of tone and thematic, and the non-metaphysical, anti-transcendental existentiality implied by them, the orientation of this figure becomes clear. Descending – however imperceptibly slowly – ever downwards, this spiral thus traces the outline of the melancholic imagination toward an endpoint in apocalypse, *khaos*. But *khaos* is that abyss from which *physis*, concrete physical nature, rises up; and apocalypse does not denote a final devastation, but only "an imminent end of the present world" - and, more than this, by the terms of its etymology, a form of *revelation* or *disclosure*.[300]

Figure 6.1

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[300] "apocalypse, n.," *OED Online*, January 2018 (Oxford University Press), http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/9229?redirectedFrom=apocalypse (Accessed January 27, 2018).

Eternal Transience

From this perspective of natural history, the (re)deployment of the key phrase, "cosmic *wirtschaft*," in the film of *Satantango* becomes significant. Where in Krasznahorkai's prose passage, "cosmic *wirtschaft*" is a concept occurring to the doctor ostensibly in relation to an awakening of (trans)historical consciousness, a spectral animation of creaturely suffering such as underlays the concept of natural history in Benjamin and Adorno, it occurs within the film's concluding sequence as an even more ambiguous proclamation. The Doctor is recording observations in a ledger, unaware that the estate has been abandoned – it is at this point in the novel that he first conceives of a demiurgic power, a realisation that is, in the film, a final and non-self-conscious revelation. Reflecting on the character of the collective, the doctor notes down that, "their dull inertia leaves them at the mercy of what they fear most." After a pause, we hear a slow ringing in the distance; the Doctor considers this occurrence for a time, takes a drag of his cigarette, before noting down the words, "cosmic *wirtschaft*" (taking a moment further before noting, "my hearing is getting worse" – as with the novel). The sound that we (both) hear, or variations of it,[301] has arisen several times throughout the film. It is ostensibly the sound of church bells, but formed of the layering of at least three "tracks" that ebb and flow discretely. The first we hear is the least diegetically discernible, a dissociating tape or synthesiser loop that evokes an eerie and disquieting harmony of the spheres – its droning waveforms oscillating in rounds. On another track, echoing the first,

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[301] There is a similar sound that occurs in relation to Irimias, but I have not included it as sufficiently "bell"-like enough to warrant direct comparison.

we hear the slowly resonating ring of a large, church-style bell (or gong). Last is another

field-recording of bells, which are smaller, less resonant, and more repetitively struck.

The description of these bells in the first (and last) pages of the novel, as "ringing-

booming" and "ghostly,"[302] closely befits these tones as they occur in the film: the ringing

of small bells, the booming of large ones, and a ghostly harmonics (from which they

emerge, in which they converge, but which maintains a distinct presence). The ghostly

tone arises, almost imperceptibly at first, within the whistle of wind that is the constant

background to the film's infamous opening scene, of which there is no direct equivalent

in the novel. It shows – as is revealed in hindsight – the collective's cattle, whose sale is

the initial pretext for each version of *Satantango*. Starting with a fixed long shot, we

observe this herd enter and fill an empty, mud-sodden town-square, then track their

course on a parallel path through the deserted hamlet, before finally halting again to see

them exit at its far edge – at which point the tubular hum fades out. This shot lasts for

close to eight minutes. The whistle of wind continues as the screen fades to black, itself

waning as a voiced-narration begins – reciting the opening sentences of the novel.[303]

These speak of the town's seasonally inflicted physical isolation, the sound of bells which

one of its inhabitants, Futaki, has woken to hear, and how its source sounds close by,

despite any possible location for it being impossibly distant and, so, mysterious. The first

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[302] Krasznahorkai, *Satantango*, pp.3 & 5; repeated on pp. 272 & 274.

[303] I am of the belief that the translation of sub/intertitles has caused some discrepancy between texts, but that, if there are differences between them, they appear insubstantial, and will have been overseen by Krasznahorkai in his role as screenwriter. Kovács, a native Hungarian-speaker, refers to chapter titles in the film which are identical to the Szirtes translation of the novel, but which, in the English subtitles on the Artificial Eye DVD, are shown to have been alternate translations. With close inspection of text and –titles, I gather that any differences are in vocabulary rather than underlying idea or structure – to the extent that I believe them to differ only in translation.

chapter ("The News Is They Are Coming") is then announced through intertitle, before we are introduced to a dark space, at the other side of which daylight is rapidly gaining through a window frame's silhouette. The sound of what are now more distinctly bells begins. Futaki approaches the window, looks out, before returning toward the camera as the sound stops – at which point it resumes, he stops, and returns to the window. The bells fade into the droning hum of electrical appliances and disappear as Futaki returns to bed and bedfellow, dismissing his observations to her as "nothing." Two chapters later, we view this same scene from opposite - a binocular-effect framing the direct point of view of the Doctor, inspecting Futaki peering out the window while he sits at his own. Throughout, but for a more extended duration than in the earlier instance, the same sound of the bells can be heard while the Doctor scans across to observe the town's decaying facades, stray animals and running taps, fading out more suddenly as we cut to view him in a close profile. He does not, at this time, appear to notice the sound, or at least notice it as remarkable.

Figure 6.2

At this point in the novel, and in the same section of the film I've just described, the Doctor frames his obsessive observation as itself a "system."[304] It is his own form of resistance against "the decay that consumed everything around him…the triumphal progress of the wrecking process…the power that ruined houses, walls, trees and fields";[305] he feels he must note down even "the apparently insignificant" to its smallest detail, lest he "fall a silent captive to the infernal arrangement whereby the world decomposes but is at the same time constantly in the process of self-construction."[306] In other words, the doctor stages the resistance of word and memory - of history as eye-witness - against the cycle of endless decay and renewal that characterises natural being. At the end of *Satantango*, however, the Doctor's observation – or his observance of order – becomes either (historical) recollection or (divine, demiurgic) creation. In either case, the nominal transience of these concrete events takes on the form of cycle, a naturalised permanence - which is to say, an ahistorical temporality, such as is projected by mythic (or "primitive") consciousness. Prior to this return, or recurrence, however, it is this sound of bells that the Doctor observes, which seem to signify to him a "cosmic *wirtschaft*," and which draws him out from his observation post in order to locate their source. The camera frames the Doctor approaching from a distance along the length of an unsealed road, with the volume of the bells slowly gaining as he slowly nears. The camera pans to the right with him as he goes to pass but, as he comes to a stop and turns, we cut to an apparent POV that itself pans across an antediluvian landscape for

[304] Krasznahorkai, *Satantango*, p.55.
[305] Ibid. p.54.
[306] Idem.

close to 180 degrees. The ringing rebounds across this primeval swamp of bare, drowned

fields as far as the eye can see, as if from all directions – an enveloping and disorienting

resonance. We cut to see a ruined chapel on a hill, from which the more repetitive, less

resonant tolling seems to be emanating. The Doctor enters the frame from behind, and

we begin to closely follow his dark form lumbering toward it. As we get closer, the audio

dynamic shifts further, so that the deeper reverberations fade out to the lesser tolling; a

person calling rhythmically along with it becomes audible, shouting repetitively but

without expression, "The Turks are coming." This is both emphatically not the sound we

hear at a distance but, more significantly, not some kind of message from beyond the

physical realm (as the Doctor himself later says, to himself, "I took a common bell for the

Great Bells of Heaven…I'm an idiot!") Entering the ruined building, the Doctor comes

upon a dishevelled older man striking a metal bar against a rusty iron beam that is

suspended from the ceiling; departing from the Doctor, the camera closes in on the face

of this lunatic in close up, staring skyward as he continues to deliver his "warning" while

acknowledging neither his visitor nor the hand that the Doctor has placed upon his "bell"

(without, however, affecting its tone). And yet, as we continue to watch the straining

features of this manic figure in the process of his enigmatic calling, the more global

harmony of the spheres re-emerges, re-establishing the cosmic cacophony that this

deflationary discovery has just severed. In the following shot, we track backwards and

away from the doctor as he walks toward the camera, along the path back home, during

which time the tolling of the "bell" continues over the ghostly harmony, with the latter

fading out. Returning home, he begins to board himself into his observation post, into

complete darkness, in which he begins to "write" the self-same narration with which the

film begins – and during which, the ghostly, ringing-boom of the bells begins again.

Where the narration cuts out for the credits, the tubular drone of bells continues after

even they are finished.

Figure 7.1

Figure 7.2

Figure 7.3

Figure 7.4

Figure 7.5

Figure 7.6

Figure 7.7

Figure 7.8

With reference to *Satantango*'s structure and Tarr's faithful representation of it, Kovács locates Krasznahorkai's major contribution to the director's project in this circular narrative dynamic, or in its animation of a preceding thematic principle. This follows what he calls a "dialectics of hope and hopelessness,"[307] which in the earlier films had been marked by a cycle of inertia that, after Krasznahorkai, proceeds along an ostensive, if deceptive, causal linearity. Where before we rotate on or around a central axis, as if held by some magnetic force, with the narrative structures of Krasznahorkai we are loosed to advance along an outer edge, but become unaware of the inwardly curving arc of its trajectory. This new direction, then, plays out thematically at the level of narrative structure – or as a reflection of content by form – in which the earlier "dialectics of hope and hopelessness" engender a more extensive discourse on "story." "In each of these films," the director states, "you can see a combination of faiths, beliefs and interests. But each faith is revealed as based on illusion. And then it spreads thin and disappears."[308] Each narrative cycle belies the self-same lack of qualitative development that figures a loss of faith in progress, reflecting an historical consciousness which takes on universal, mythic proportions. This is the "post-historical" condition which Rancière posits as a central subject of his study, and describes as "the disenchantment regarding the capitalist promise following the collapse of the socialist one."[309] It is part of the historically conditioned atmosphere with which the films become increasingly infused, an affective existential mood that responds to "the morose, uniform time of those who no

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[307] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.100.
[308] Tarr, interview by Erickson.
[309] Rancière, "Béla Tarr: The Poetics and Politics of Fiction," p.246.

longer believe in anything."[310] This is the time against which Rancière posits a "time

after" (time, history, story), which the "radical materialism" of the films present through

their departure from literature.[311] Neither book(s) nor film(s) are "about" the dissolution

of Communism, nor its previous course, nor that of any historical period in particular; the

writer says that it is enough to know that they are set in the 20th century. Both of Tarr

and Krasznahorkai are more directly concerned with material poverty as a cultural

condition, which the writer calls, "a kind of universal domain of human experience which

has its own world; destitution, by contrast, only means that instead of having this world,

you merely exist in the fact that you have no money at all, in a system where others

do."[312] The loss of this culture of poverty (in globalised capitalism) forms part of the

background image for both of their work, toward which Rancière too gestures: the loss of

vocation, of meaning, of experience in its communal dimension. With *Satantango*, and in

a way that affirms the structure of experience named by *Stimmung*, Krasznahorkai was,

"only concerned to explore why everyone around me seemed as sad as the rain falling on

Hungary and why I myself was sad, surrounded as I was by such people, in the rain."[313]

While the author is speaking here of a particular, and historically resonant, time and

place – Hungary during the slow "thaw" of the Soviet period – we must recall that he

takes this perspective to be "about the world at a deeper level," or in other words,

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[310] Rancière, *The Time After*, p.9.
[311] Idem.
[312] László Krasznahorkai, "Retreat Beneath the Earth!," interview by Noemi Aponyi and Tibor Sennyey Weiner, trans. Ottilie Mulzet, in *Music and Literature* 2 (Spring 2013), p.33.
[313] László Krasznahorkai, "Anticipate Doom: The Millions Interviews László Krasznahorkai," interview by Paul Morton, May 9, 2012, www.themillions.com/2012/05/anticipate-doom-the-millions-interviews-laszlo-krasznahorkai.html (Accessed January 30, 2018).

concerning the phenomenal qualities of time, place, situation and psychology that together underlay the totalising, artificially harmonising plot of narrative pattern. The dense richness of his prose seeks to describe and analogise the unseen intersection of those orders of being within which the "story" of "history" occurs and recurs, winding between the universal and its particularities, between abstract forces and their concrete manifestations.

It is in this relation that Kovács has foregrounded the idea of eternal return, where, "Circularity for Krasznahorkai, just like for Tarr, does not appear in a static closed form, but rather in the eternal return of the same situation, always flashing the possibility of a change and always falling back to the same misery."[314] Whether, or to what degree, this figure of eternal return is specifically related to the Nietzschean aphorism is a subject of contention, as is the extent to which this would be the initiative of either Tarr or Krasznahorkai. In an earlier essay, Kovács himself had identified a "closed, circular time-concept," which was proof of their mutual inspiration by Nietzsche.[315] Rainer J. Hahnshe's essay on Nietzschean thematics in *Satantango* offers compelling analysis of the psychology of freedom and order, and a sharply drawn reading of *amor fati* in the central child suicide.[316] But Nietzschean affirmation of the will to power, the object of the thought experiment figured by eternal recurrence is severely undercut by Tarr's final cinematic statement, *The Turin Horse* – inspired in the first place by the great

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[314] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.123.
[315] Kovács, "The World According to Béla Tarr."
[316] Rainer J. Hanshe, "Circulus Vitiosus Diabolus: Nietzschean Thematics in Satantango" in *Pennsylvania Literary Journal* 4, no.1 (March, 2012), pp.73-86.

philosopher's inability to suffer the practical weight of his own theories. Furthermore, it should be added that eternal return and cyclical time are not specifically Nietzschean innovations, and had roots in both Ancient cosmology and its modern interpretation. Rancière calls Krasznahorkai "Schopenhauerian," with reference to the philosopher who most closely prefigures eternal return in Nietzsche, inspiring the latter's (active) affirmation of life as a reaction to the former's (passive) pessimism.[317] At least one interviewer has posited to Krasznahorkai that Eliade Mircea's idea of eternal return in the form of myth and ritual, the alternation of sacred and profane time, may also have been an inspiration – which the writer, in part, affirms, while expressing his eventual disillusionment with Mircea's thought.[318] Reflecting on their work together in the same interview, Krasznahorkai proposes a more profane explanation that both mirrors Kovács and fruitfully expands the idea of circular of time toward the notion of habit (and away from the metaphysics of eternal recurrence). "What Tarr offers," Krasznahorkai suggests, "is a vision of the circularity of time, of the small rituals we perform to protect ourselves, as well as a certain luminosity, flashes of light that show us another way."[319] This raises the question of what it is that we humans are supposed to be protecting ourselves from – "what we fear most": the cosmic economy of creaturely existence, of biological vulnerability, the gratuity of being and its eternal transience, the signs of which are death and entropic decay; but, also, viewed from outside the human, regrowth and renewal. The "small rituals" through which we contend with this cosmic fate can be viewed in

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[317] Rancière, *The Time After*, p.32.
[318] Krasznahorkai, interview by Hopkins.
[319] Idem.

terms of those systems of faith, their narrative patterns and habitual customs, through

which chaos is made governable, or forgettable - manifestations of the hope that a

totality of meaning might become revealed *in time*. Kovács posits in this connection that,

for Tarr and Krasznahorkai alike, "fate…is the unchanging, the eternal return."[320] We

might refer to "the unchanging" as ahistorical, or "mythic" – a connection that Adorno

makes in terms of the atemporality of nature, whether primary or "second."[321] As to the

"flashes of light," illuminating "another way": where Krasznahorkai can describe the

illumination of, and awakening to, this mode of consciousness – as in the sentence from

Satantango – Tarr seeks alternative means through which to make this perspective

concrete, or *present*.

Mitsein, or Being-with

As Tarr's clearest statement on Nietzsche reminds us, the point made clear in the

anecdote of *The Turin Horse* is that "we have to understand and get closer to the real

things"[322] - to their "unspeakable density" - rather than to create theories governing or

anticipating them. This is implicit, too, in Pasolini's "Cinema di Poesia" – seeking to

overcome the binds of ideology in the direction of "reality," in its "pre-grammatical"

dimension. In this view, words and concepts do disservice to the experience of this reality

– to the chaos that order seeks to articulate, or make intelligible. This is a distinction Tarr

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[320] Kovács, "The World According to Béla Tarr."
[321] Adorno, "The Idea of Natural History," p.253.
[322] Tarr, interview by Selavy (2012).

makes, or otherwise implies, repeatedly. His filmmaking rationale is based upon this "primitive" nature of cinematic language, which marks the distinction between his own work and Krasznahorkai's – poetry and prose, word and image, theory and praxis. It is significant, in this respect, to note Kovács' observation of an almost 50% decrease in time devoted to dialogue between *Almanac of Fall* and *Damnation*.[323] Being lost for words - not only led astray by them, as remains consistently the case - becomes a strongly thematic element from the point at which they become most inspired by prose. Like Pasolini in his modelling of the cinema of poetry on prose technique, Tarr's cinema becomes more "primitive" and poetic by relation to its literary pretext. Indeed in *Damnation*, "the singer" muses on this subject - "you lose your words," she croons, in a prefiguration of the film's final scenes; there, our protagonist is left barking at dogs, described by Tarr as going, "into nature."[324] Earlier, the same character, Karrer, reflects that, "all stories are stories of disintegration" – a view that is held in more or less identical terms by the director. This preoccupation is evident in a short piece, "Why I Make Films," which Tarr wrote during preproduction of this film, where he states,

> I despise stories, as they mislead people into believing that something has happened. In fact, nothing really happens as we flee from one condition to another. Because today there are only *states of being* – all stories become obsolete and clichéd, and have resolved themselves. All that remains is time.[325]

[323] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.142.
[324] Tarr, interview by Ballard (2004).
[325] Béla Tarr, "Why I Make Films" in *Béla Tarr: A Cinema of Patience* (Chicago: Facets Video, Feb 2006).

This is an early example of Tarr's insistent view upon the repetition of "the same old story, since the Old Testament," which is resisted in his cinema through the representation of experienced time. In this direction, Agamben posits in an essay on "Time and History" that,

> Every conception of history is invariably accompanied by a certain experience of time which is implicit in it…Similarly, every culture is first and foremost a particular experience of time, and no new culture is possible without an alteration in this experience. The original task of a genuine revolution, therefore, is never merely to 'change the world', but also – and above all – to 'change time'.[326]

Insofar as Tarr is involved with his particular conception of time, the foregrounding of it as the medium of experience, life, he is responding to a certain conception of history. To this end, Tarr's repeated reference to the Old Testament - whether wittingly or as a more rhetorical figure - locates *story* within *history*. That is, linear and, so, properly historicised time – a positive progression toward a (messianic, or otherwise utopian) telos - is a Judeo-Christian innovation.[327] Within the circular concept of time that had predominated in the West beforehand there is no experience of historicity as we now conceive it.[328] Perhaps as important, given the tone and trajectory of Tarr's oeuvre, is that it is also from this same point that the idea of an *end* to time first enters the Western psyche, in the Christian eschatology of apocalypse and judgement day. It is in this direction that Kovács' claim of eternal recurrence/narrative circularity might best be re-positioned. As covered

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[326] Agamben, "Time and History" in *Infancy and History*, p.99.
[327] Ibid. 104.
[328] Ibid. 102.

in the first chapter, the narrative circle is a means toward implicating the viewer in the ruse of expecting a qualitative change in the circumstances of those inhabiting its milieu, habituating an awareness of environment and a mode of being-in-the-world in which we become mutually suspended by temporal distension. With reference to the above quote from Tarr, this mode of implication presents us with the apparition of story while instead positioning us within a *state of being* – its integral *dispositif* implies a displacement into a certain disposition, a disclosure of situatedness that produces an affective psycho-physical *Stimmung*. In so doing, the narrative circle in Tarr figures, at its structural level, a fatal path – the time in which the human story meets its dissolution beneath a higher power, the realisation of time's destructive force. This appears to be recognised in itself by Irimias in *Satantango*, the chief manipulator whose superior verbal dexterity elevates him within this world to the position of (false) messiah. His first expression, in novel and film alike, speaks to time and fate: referring to two clocks, neither of which shows the "correct" time, he speaks to the one pointing into the future as showing, "not so much time as the eternal reality of the exploited, and we are to it as the bough of a tree to the rain that falls upon it: in other words we are helpless."[329]

With regard to this dissolution of narrative into fate, and with reference to Szirtes' assertion that Krasznahorkai's novels are less about plot than "system," I would like to suggest that this disposition can be viewed, with only minor diversion, as an implication of free indirect discourse; and, so, the "cinema of poetry." Specifically, in speaking of

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[329] These are the words of the novel rather than the subtitle translation on the kinoeye DVD which, as I noted above, appears less trustworthy; between the two, the novel gives a somewhat clearer idea. Krasznahorkai, *Satantango*, p.23.

Pasolini's "free indirect subjectivity," Deleuze refers to Jean Mitry's notion of a

"generalised semi-subjective" viewpoint in cinema, which he associates with a mobile

camera that, "no longer mingles with the character, nor is it outside: it is with him."[330]

With reference to this with-ness, Deleuze expands Mitry's observation by re-coining this

perspective as a "truly cinematographic *Mitsein*."[331] *Mitsein* translates from German as

"being-with," and holds a prominent position within Heidegger's analytic of *Dasein*'s

being-in-the-world. Indeed, Heidegger suggests that *Dasein* ("being-there") and its being-

in-the-world are essentially also *Mitsein.* Being-with refers to the fundamentally social

context(ure) of being-in-the-world, the dialogic character of human being, through which

meaning, or understanding – as discourse (*Rede*, as in *erlebte Rede*) - is collectively

formed, shared and projected.[332] Even being alone is a being-with in this sense, given

that an understanding of solitude can only be formed with reference to the social body

(from which I exclude myself). Deleuze, however, is less interested in this phenomenon

from within its socio-ontological aspect than as a formal-technical device which oscillates

between subjective and objective points of view, or which renders them indiscernible. His

formulation speaks of free indirect discourse as testament to "a system which is always

heterogeneous, far from equilibrium,"[333] constituting a semi-subjective perspective that,

"sets itself up as an autonomous vision of the content."[334] It is a special form of

"perception-image" (or image of perception) that reflects (and is transformed by) a

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[330] Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p.74.
[331] Idem.
[332] Heidegger, *BT*, pp.153-168.
[333] Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p.75.
[334] Ibid., p.76.

"camera self-consciousness" that, "no longer marks an oscillation between two poles, but an immobilisation according to a higher aesthetic form."[335] This is a significant point of resonance, given the foregrounded status of perceptual experience in Tarr's cinema: not only as attunement, but also in terms of the observer and seer-figures that populate these films, and around whom the camera's autonomous excursions orbit. Our acquaintance with the Doctor's life-consuming duties at his observation post – the filling and filing of writing ledgers, in which he records verbal and pictorial notes – is a key example here, evincing a veritable "cinematographic being-with." In a single shot, the camera looks directly out a window (at a dog drinking from a puddle), before slowly drawing back and scanning down, across a desk and the objects assembled upon it, until we have a close-up of a notepad being drawn upon, and which, resting momentarily, we come to view from over the Doctor's shoulder. From this (classical) point of view shot, we draw back further, to then watch the doctor from behind, at his window – a recurrent image in Tarr, from *Damnation* through *The Turin Horse*, to be discussed further in the next chapter. The Doctor rises, with difficulty, and the camera rotates to observe him cross the room, pick up a few more notebooks and return to his post. Movements then proceed in reverse to again watch out the window from beside the Doctor's perspective and again look over his shoulder as he transcribes the events happening outside, before again scanning across various items on the desk, and returning to a direct view out of the window. It is in the course of moments such as these that the relation of camera-consciousness to character perspective becomes most "felt," while least distinctively

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[335] Ibid. p.78.

discernible. Like the Krasznahorkian sentence, in which we pass back and forth between frames of perspective, here we are at points interpolated into the doctor's point of view more or less directly, while becoming entirely autonomous at others; such transitions in Tarr occur most often within the same movement, a continuum, as is the case here. We observe the observer as much as identify with his perspective (while sharing in his particularised "vocation" in so doing). In these encounters, the camera traverses the free indirect space between centres of perspective, becoming autonomous, embodied, in slowly but continuously seeking out an angle on the "action." Our "being-with" becomes as much discursive as it is proximal – the integral purpose or "meaning" of the shot becomes the revelation, or de-limitation, of this form of life as an environed being. A mobilised and foregrounded perception effects, either sequentially or simultaneously, a sense of accompaniment as well as distance; of being-in-a-world while reflecting upon it – without, however, referring it toward some higher (symbolic or allegorical) meaning.

Figure 8.1

Figure 8.2

Figure 8.3

Figure 8.4

Figure 8.5

Figure 8.6

Figure 8.7

Figure 8.8

Figure 8.9

Figure 8.10

But there is another way to view the formal heterogeneity of being-with, with

regards to a particular sense of what "with" itself implies. We see this in the way that

Thomas Elsaesser invokes *Mitsein* in reflecting on the politics of representation and

identity in the "postheroic narratives" of contemporary European cinema.[336] This is a

cinema no longer grounded in "national" or "independent" models, or in identification

with the kind of "heroic" narrative which would imply a self-other schemata, but which

would affirm difference and incompatibility as principles of a new form of community

(that is irreducible to self-identity). It is, as such, positioned within a "new thinking of the

"we" *after* the collective and *after* the subject,"[337] and with relation to the context of that

postmetaphysical thinking which forms the background of the current argument.

Elsaesser mobilises Jean-Luc Nancy's critique of Heidegger's *Dasein* and his extension of it

toward thinking a community founded on a "being-with," in which,

> "With" implies proximity and distance, precisely the distance of the impossibility to come together
>
> in a common being. That is the core of the question of community; community doesn't have a
>
> common being, a common substance, but consists in "being-in-common". From the starting point
>
> it's a sharing, but sharing what? Sharing nothing, sharing the space between.[338]

Seen in this way, "with" neither produces difference nor collapses identity, but renders

them neutralised – "inoperative" – in the impossibility of a common being, of unity as/or

identity. This is an idea that we will return to, with Agamben, in the final chapter.

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[336] Thomas Elsaesser, "European Cinema and the Postheroic Narrative: Jean-Luc Nancy, Claire Denis, and Beau Travail" in *New Literary History* 43, no.4 (Autumn, 2012), pp.703-725.
[337] Ibid. p.709.
[338] Ibid. pp.712-713. Elsaesser cites a Round-table discussion held at the European Graduate University in 2001, http://www.egs.edu/faculty/nancy-roundtable-discussion2001.html

Elsaesser builds on Nancy's designation in order to posit that, in avoiding binary

opposition and instead "sharing the space between,"

> Mit-sein would thus be a constantly shifting relation of distance and proximity, of contiguity and
>
> presence, of the field of vision and its effacement or invisibility, of the single point of view and its
>
> multiple, impossible refractions.[339]

As it comes to cinema, it is a model that, he says, would break with "traditional notions of

identity and difference," and with the corresponding epistemologies that think the screen

as mirror (of subjectivity) or window (onto objective realism).[340] Tarr's cinema, and its use

of a free-indirect image, can be positioned in this "space between," in this "being-with."

Indeed, Elsaesser places Tarr among a group of filmmakers who operate in this

"postheroic" interstice, who are not "beholden to either a nationalist or an antination

agenda" and who present,

> a cinema of contemplative purity, of images uncontaminated by narrative, genre, or message, and
>
> thus of a world washed clean again, reborn as it were, in the spirit of cinematic poetry and
>
> presence.[341]

This is a description that befits the current discourse on Tarr. Indeed, the idea of a world

"washed clean" of story, ideology and identity could be taken as mode of being that has

awakened to its "second nature"; one which, (Elsaesser later implies) opens onto "the

(liberating, renewing) meaninglessness of the world, and our being in it."[342] With Tarr in

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[339] Ibid. 713.
[340] Ibid. p.711.
[341] Ibid. pp.705-706.
[342] Ibid. p.719.

particular, the long-take functions as the special means of invoking this poetry and presence. More specifically, Tarr invokes the poetry *of* presence, such as that which inspired Pasolini when he suggested that, "physicity is poetic in itself, because it is an apparition…full of mystery…ambiguity…polyvalent mystery"; an "unspeakable density." The literal sense in which we are "with" characters in Tarr extends beyond our witnessing their role in a series of actions, and instead toward an experience of the temporality, material environment, and affective atmosphere in which they are encountered.

And yet, insofar as these narratives are structured in the form of a circle, or spiral, which implicates the viewer in the illusion of qualitative change to the circumstances represented therein, the notion of "being-with" takes on a new, psychological dimension. Tarr posits his own suspicion of verbal communication, and practice of seeking metacommunications, within the scope of his attention to "internal psychological processes" and "the personal being-present of the actors and actresses";[343] "from here," he says, "it's only a short step to put it into time and space. And that's it."[344] The passage between materiality and psychology that is traced by *Stimmung* – by way of *presence*, the "concrete" subject of the next chapter - becomes in Tarr a primary initiative. Here we find, as well, a final path linking back to Pasolini's socio-historical consciousness, his dialectic of the sacred and profane, and the pre-historic language of images that serves to express it. Pasolini states that, "Misery is always – because of its deepest nature – epic."[345] His choice of words here is significant, given that it is with reference to the epic

[343] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).
[344] Idem.
[345] Cited in Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, p. 43.

mode of literature that Lukács first posits his theory of "second nature." In Lukács' view, the (Homeric) epic corresponds to an age of immanent sense and total meaning, a "first nature," and "gives form to a totality of life that is rounded from within"; the novel, which he finds to be its modern equivalent, corresponds to the age of "second nature," and, "seeks, by giving form, to uncover and construct the concealed totality of life."[346] That Pasolini views the "epic" quality of misery in similar terms, with regards to a primary (or primordial) totality of meaning, is established in his subsequent suggestion that, "In a certain sense, the elements at work in the psychology of someone who is wretched, poor, and sub-proletarian are always pure."[347] We might recall here that Kovács has identified circularity in Tarr-Krasznahorkai with "the eternal return of the same situation...flashing the possibility of a change and always falling back to the same misery," and that Tarr's self-description of his development engenders a path toward simplicity and purity. Along the same trajectory, the director places a greater emphasis on psychological states that are not verbally articulated, but instead realised on formal-aesthetic registers between speech and thought, as material and tonal qualities that are invoked through bodily gesture, atmosphere and environment. A certain mood and/as an experience of time inheres in these films' deferral of narrative development toward an exploration of existential condition and situation - a situation in which narrative expectations, or hope for deliverance from a cosmically ordained fate, are shown to be equally fictive. Narrative is schematised not along a line of causality, of problem and

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[346] Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, p.60.
[347] Cited in Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, pp.43-44.

resolution, where the corruption implied by it is instead shown to be essentially

irresolvable. It forms part of a larger continuum, between eternality and transience,

which projects an epic temporal cycle upon the qualities of its inherent events: an

ahistorical, cosmic perspective.

3. Uncanny Harmonies: Realism, Truth and the Presence of World.

Béla Tarr's concept of the "primitive" nature of cinematic language forms part of the

director's broader rejection of "story," which, in a seemingly contradictory fashion,

becomes more pronounced by association with the prose-writing of László Krasznahorkai.

It is significant in this sense that it is most often in connection with Krasznahorkai's prose

that Tarr speaks of cinema's primitivism, when responding to questions of his

"translation" of the writer's work. Where the director bristles at the concept of this

"translation," worse in his eyes is that of an "adaptation" from Krasznahorkai of

ostensibly symbolic or allegorical imagery. It is with reference to this kind of expression

that Tarr asserts that "such metaphysical things [as symbolism] are far from the genre of

film."[1] Film – or, at least, his own brand of it - pertains to the physical and the "real,"

rather than referring to the coded structures of meaning that humans abstract from, and

project upon, material presence. And yet, in Tarr's cinema, there is undeniably a

proliferation of strange phenomena that defy ready explanation, to which a seeking-out

of a metaphorical understanding would appear only natural. This is the case even before

considering the vital presence of myriad images (chiefly drawn from Krasznahorkai, who

also rejects symbolism) that are indeed pregnant with prior association: from the false

prophet Irimias,[2] to a stuffed Leviathan,[3] to a pair of "potato eaters" facing earth's

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[1] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).
[2] In *Satantango*; Irimias is a Hungarian version of the name 'Jeremiah'.
[3] *Werckmeister Harmonies*

darkest night. [4] As part of the same logic, Tarr claims that, "Film as a genre is always

something definite, because that piece of instrument which we call the lens can only

record real things, which are there."[5] Tarr locates this ostensible objectivity of the film

lens within cinema's "primitive" language and its intrinsic correspondence to "concrete"

reality. But even where bracketing this sentiment so that it applies to Tarr's own cinema

only, and respecting that it is a rejoinder to the "metaphysical" interpretations attached

to it, Tarr's position is problematic when taken purely at face value. Indeed, whether

intentionally or not, Tarr's position invokes a medium essentialist "direct realism" such as

was (in)famously attributed – with a significant degree of misapprehension – to Andre

Bazin. A formative voice in film theory and criticism, Bazin invoked the photographic

genesis of the film image as part of a broader discourse concerning the notion of its

ontological "realism."[6] Famously, the realism that Bazin advocates is closely associated

with long-takes, sequence-shots and depth-of-focus, as means toward the de-

dramatisation of narrative. These are conventions that gesture toward a preservation of

the phenomenal continuity and contingency of perceptual experience in the world, in

advance of an illusionism that would seek to master a total reality. Bazin's notable

aversion to dramatic or analytical montage is the emblem of this inclination toward a

more "transparent" filmic expression, which might reveal a sense of the *presence* of the

world of perception (rather than its re-presentation through abstracted fragments).

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[4] In The Turin Horse.
[5] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).
[6] Beginning with "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" in Andre Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. 1,* ed. & trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley and L.A., Calif.; University of California Press, 1967), p.9.

All of those techniques associated with "Bazinian realism" are, of course, staples of Tarr's aesthetic – to a degree not precipitated in Bazin's own time, but which may present an advance along the theorist's projection of a mythic "total cinema." And yet, for all that the director himself appeals to medium-essentialist filmic "indexicality," the world expressed in his films is far from transparent. Tarr himself says unequivocally that he "hates realism,"[7] and (more implicitly) filmic "naturalism." This he posits in terms of his affective use of monochrome, where "you see immediately that it is a creation"; in a revealing seeming-paradox, he finds that colour is too "naturalistic" and (so) "far from you." This, he says, is "not my style."[8] This style, its mode of *producing* a sense of *presence*, is, however, the essence of his filmmaking, and in a way that follows from this double-movement between a sensible realism and its becoming uncanny, or made-strange. This movement forms part of a tendency that we have looked into already, in terms of the interaction of (dialogic) stylistic registers and their production of a free-indirect subjectivity - that cinematic being-with through which we enter into, and mediate the polarities of, a "state of being."

Tarr's oeuvre is a formal excursion toward the eventual completion of this mode of film language, which is, as per the previous chapter, *poetic* in quality. The notion of poetry, *poiesis*, as this kind of "production of presence," and its formulation by Martin Heidegger as the fundamental structure of artistic truth-making,[9] recalls the Bazinian

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[7] Tarr says: "I prefer things to be dirtier or more elegant than 'reality'." Tarr, interview by Andrew (2007), p.19.
[8] Tarr, interview by Selavy (2012).
[9] In Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Perennial Classics, 2001), pp.17-86. From this point referred to as "the artwork essay."

distinction between what he calls "true-" and "pseudo-realism."[10] With reference to Hans

Ulrich Gumbrecht's reading of Heidegger's artwork essay,[11] we can view Bazin's "true"

realism within the context of a discourse on the desire for "presence effects" in an age of

metaphysical interpretation of deeper "meaning." In this way, the co-constitution of

presence and meaning in Tarr's cinema, or of meaning produced by encounter with

"concrete" presence, takes on the appearance of that "expression of the world both

concretely and in its essence"[12] that Bazin posits as the "true" form of realism.

Gumbrecht identifies a specific transition in the nature of human (self-)representation

toward a "meaning culture," taking place at the end of the Middle Ages. This is a period

to which Bazin himself refers, and which he admired as an aesthetic model. In a way that

gestures in this direction, Tarr's cinema seeks to inhabit and mediate that seemingly

irremediable fissure between rational mind and material being that is opened up in the

modern mentality. It is in this same connection that the current chapter will look into the

quality of melancholy that is formalised in the perceptual regime of modernity. According

to László Földényi, melancholy is an interpretation of human existence that is formalised

– or democratised – through (aesthetic) perspectivalism itself, a spatial regime that

renders an avenue into Cartesian subjectivism.[13] Tarr's "cosmic perspective" is tinged

with this melancholic character, a reference to the loss of pre-modernity's dwelling

within a more "primitive," cosmological disposition. This disposition is not mere nostalgia,

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[10] Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," p.12.
[11] Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Production of Presence: what meaning cannot convey* (Stanford, Calif.; Stanford University Press, 2004), pp.72-78.
[12] Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," p.12.
[13] László Földényi, *Melancholy*, p.125.

however, but a discursive model of time and experience. The melancholic disposition is implied through the director's explicit foregrounding of perception and its extension through duration, and doubled by virtue of the observers and seers that populate his cinema and form its figural pretext. These figures resonate within the conceptual constellation of melancholia, which illuminates the instability of historical meaning and the transience of worldly phenomena. In viewing a world conditioned by this *Stimmung* of loss and discord, however, new forms of meaning, or states of being, can become unconcealed as, and through, poetic experience – what Krasznahorkai calls a "certain luminosity." Indeed, the experience of this uncanny phenomenality speaks to the poetic device of *ostranenie*, "making-strange" or "enstrangement," which was theorised by the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky.[14] As with Heidegger's discourse on poetic truth, a rupture of ordinary perception or common understanding effects a momentary illumination of a new way of seeing and, in turn, of being. With reference to the "anti-anthropocentric" potential of cinematic realism, Tarr's appeal to a re-vision of Humanist perspective can be viewed in this light. Where Renaissance Humanism implies the pre-eminence of the human over natural being, Tarr explicates the central Humanist concept of "dignity" in order to displace the human from the centre of the universe, while re-situating its essential being within the "concrete" or material presence of the world.

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[14] See Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Device" in ed. & trans. Alexandra Berlina, *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader* (New York: Bloomsbury academic, 2016), pp.75-96.

"True" Realism

In the "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," Bazin famously references the shared word – *objectif* – that denotes both "lens" and "[the] objective" in French.[15] This programmatic exposition appears first among the theoretical essays that comprise the opening movement of *What is Cinema?,* and which have been widely read together to argue that the cinema, in being essentially a photographic medium, is indexically linked to the "objective real" by its optical automatization, which therefore harbours the potential for totally transparent representation – if not illumination – of the world. Several of these essays appear overtly polemic, railing against formal manipulation - especially that of dramatic-analytic editing (Soviet montage) and decorative staging (Weimar expressionism). But more than this, they are inflected with a religious terminology of faith, belief and revelation that can appear ambiguous. Taken selectively, Bazin's appeals to transparency in these essays can suggest a mythic trajectory toward a totally objective representation.[16] Read in this vein, it would appear that Bazin seeks to outline the process of achieving a true cinematic vocation: to reveal "the real" itself with an unprecedented degree of clarity, if not insight – a photographic transfer un-muddied by human intervention. Such a revelationist teleology, and its ostensive claim to unmediated transparency, was met with resistance upon its introduction to an Anglosphere in which cinema studies was held under the dominant influence of a

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[15] Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," p.13.
[16] Bazin's reference to a "Myth of Total Cinema" seems, at first blush, to support this idea. *What is Cinema? Vol.1*, p.17.

psychosemiotic "Grand Theory."[17] In effect, Bazin's reputation was tarred by a lasting

association with an apparently naïve or idealist theorisation of the medium essentialist

position, and his recognition was for a time maintained largely in contradistinction to

more rigorously structured theoretical models, or by virtue of his seminal role in film-

theory (and -history). Adrian Martin calls this initial characterisation, or caricaturisation,

"the pulverisation of Bazin's multifaceted critical practice into a dogmatic credo or

prescriptive theory."[18] A more considered inspection of Bazin's position has since re-

established the broader context and scope of his critical insight, his philosophical

background, and has drawn attention to the effect of the mistranslation of its concepts.

As Martin suggests, Bazin, "let films new and old suggest the aesthetic parameters and

possibilities of the medium of cinema as it unfolded in history."[19] As far as these

possibilities were concerned, the "realism" that Bazin posits is – by his own admission -

not a simple or singular notion, never directly defined, and is subject to a series of

dissections that respond to the question(s) of film style, its inspirations and implications.

As Dudley Andrew asserts, the closing statement of the "Ontology" essay (that, "On the

other hand, of course, cinema is also a language"[20]), "upends the huge claims made for

raw photography, which may be necessary for cinema, yet is evidently insufficient to

explain the full phenomenon that Bazin cares about."[21] It is a segue, from this attempt to

define a cinematic essence by way of photography, to the recognition that cinema is not

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[17] Thomas Elsaesser, "A Bazinian Half-Century" in *Postwar Film Theory and its Afterlife*, ed. Dudley Andrew & Herve Joubert-Laurencin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.10.
[18] Adrian Martin, *Mise en Scene and Film Style*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.67.
[19] Ibid, p.68.
[20] Bazin, "Ontology of the Photographic Image," p.16.
[21] Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!* (Malden, MA.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p.111.

simply this photographic ontology, but (as Bazin says elsewhere) "impure,"[22] in flux, just

like the (considerably "impure," intangible) world from which it is derived. For Bazin, the

medium enables a mediation between modes of representation familiar to other plastic

arts, while distinguishing itself - and exceeding them - in so doing.[23] As with language – a

dynamic, historically contingent medium of communication, if not being - the cinema

evolves through a system of representation that is not immutable or fixed, but which is

shaped as an impression (or ontological imprint) of the situation to which it responds. As

Bazin himself made apparent in his own praxis – founding *Cahiers du Cinema*, and,

through it, influencing the emergence of the Nouvelle Vague - the language of critical

discourse can force a change in cinematic language, and vice versa. To this end, the

"indexicality" of film images that Peter Wollen influentially reads from Bazin, via C.S.

Pierce, had seen the predominance of a semiotic conception of referentiality as

characterising his notion of realism (distilling its crux into the relationship between object

and representation, sign and signified).[24]

Against this impression, a renewed push has been made to think Bazin beyond

the implicitly linguistic notion of "indexicality" – a term he never used, but which has

become intimately tied to his thinking – in order to think beyond the apparent "truth

claim"[25] of the image (as a correlate to its facticity). This is an observation following Tom

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[22] I refer here to Bazin's essay, "In Defense of Mixed Cinema" in *What is Cinema? Vol. 1*, p.53, which was originally titled, "For an Impure Cinema."
[23] Bazin, "In Defense of Mixed Cinema," p.53.
[24] Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing, 1998), p.93.
[25] Tom Gunning, "What's the Point of an Index? Or, Faking Photographs" in *Still/Moving: Between Cinema and Photography,* eds. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p.24.

Gunning, who reads Wollen's "semiotic gloss" on Bazin as an attempt to rationalise what is necessarily abstruse – that, with relation to the still image in the first place, Bazin sees the photograph not as a sign of something, but as something that exceeds the facticity of representation[26]. Furthermore, the "ontology of the photographic image" is not the same as a cinematic ontology; even less than in still photography, the notion of indexicality – or of mimesis, or representational facticity – is not in itself what constitutes cinema, so much as it refers to one of its motivations (or attractions) at a psychological level. That we believe implicitly in cinematic images should not define our relation to them – that they take us in to a complicity of their apparent objectivity should be a start point, and not an end, to their claims to resemblance, or to realism. Indeed, and as will become clear through the course of the current argument, the "truth" of Bazinian realism is not mimetic, but rather phenomenological.

The non-human fidelity which characterises the medium of photography by virtue of its mechanical reproducibility is only part of the claim of cinematic images – one which Bazin, in the final analysis, views as a cause for (generative) scepticism.[27] Significantly, indexicality does not in itself constitute any guarantees to "realism." As Angela Dalle Vacche suggests, the "objectivity" of the *objectif* is significant for reasons other than this fidelity of representation, and more in the direction of its autonomy of perspective – or, rather, what she calls the "anti-anthropocentrism" of the medium.[28] In particular, and

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[26] Ibid. p.36.
[27] For more on Bazin as skeptic, see Prakash Younger, "Re-reading Bazin's Ontological Argument" in *Offscreen* (vol.7 n.1, July 2003), www.offscreen.com/view/bazin2
[28] Angela Dalle Vacche "The Difference of Cinema in the System of the Arts" in *Opening Bazin*, p.144.

drawing on concepts raised in previous chapters, the "indifferent gaze" of the camera has

an equalising potential, "to displace a human being from the centre and make a person

appear as an object like any other included in the field of vision."[29] Such displacement is a

special preserve of the autonomous camera-consciousness which characterises a free

indirect subjectivity. We can recall here the opening sequence of *Damnation* and the

tendency introduced with it, where the human element of a situation is not initially

present, but revealed through the movement of either the camera, or of a person

entering the frame. In Tarr, it is rare that a sequence will not encounter a human subject,

but common for this encounter to be displaced within a more excursive course of

movement that connects environment and experience. This forms part of a central

dynamic of Tarr's cinema. A focus on human bodies and faces is at once made central

(often in a distinct fashion: slowly circling a subject, or closely tracking them), while

becoming extended toward a figural equivalence between the human and the milieu that

surrounds and conditions them (a *medium* of experience). In a similar vein, Dalle Vacche

suggests that the autonomous camera can "mediate between the human and the

nonhuman, art and nature."[30] The formal disposition which she describes has particular

relevance to Tarr's cosmic vision of a *state of being*, which moves through the spatial

proximity between bodies and environments, psyches and milieus, such that they

become co-constituted as - and in - an integral lived-temporality or duration. In Bazin, the

anti-anthropocentric potential of film is particularly apparent in his distinction between

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[29] Ibid, p.150.
[30] Ibid, 148.

theatre and cinema, concerning the schism between (human) presence and absence, which defines the former and is problematized by the latter.[31] The theatre - from text, to drama, to architecture - is predicated on the physical presence of a human agent-actor.[32] But in the cinema, "everything takes place as if in the time-space perimeter which is the definition of presence,"[33] and yet its drama is freed "from all contingencies of time and space,"[34] or, from presence.

This ontological push and pull between presence and absence, or of a presence that is immaterial but spatio-temporally constituted and physically affective – and which thus challenges how we conceive of what is "present" - is among those cinematic anomalies that entertained and inspired Bazin's dialectical thinking. Within the same passage of "Theatre and Cinema," Bazin suggests, "The cinema does something strangely paradoxical. It takes a moulding of the object as it exists in time, and furthermore, makes an imprint of the duration of the object."[35] Cinema has the capacity to take an impression not only of an object at a moment in time, as in photography, but also to re-locate it within the opening up, the immanence, of its specific duration – its phenomenal existence or being *in time*. This double mimesis of cinematic temporality is what distinguishes it most of all from the other arts: its presence is a presentness of a past (as past, present, future, or their combination); it is presence in its *happening*, unfolding as an experience of (structured, or sculpted) time. The cinema not only incarnates, but

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[31] Bazin, "Theatre and Cinema" parts 1&2 in *What is Cinema? Vol.1*, pp.76-124
[32] Ibid, p.96.
[33] Ibid, p.98.
[34] Ibid, p.103.
[35] Ibid, p.97.

animates, an impression of worldhood – and this, too, as a matter of time in motion.

Elsaesser asserts that, "Bazin's ontology of cinematic realism is above all a theory about

the inscription and storage of time, rather than what we normally understand by image,

namely mimesis and representation," and indexicality.[36] To this end, Lee Carruthers

suggests that the significance of that ambiguity which opens up in cinematic temporality,

to Bazin, "shows us time, not as something we know in advance, or master

retrospectively, but as something that is opened up in experience, that solicits our

receptiveness and continued questioning."[37] In this same vein, Dalle Vacche posits that

Bazin's reference to perspective as "the original sin of Western painting"[38] is a mark of

the "illusory sense of mastery over space in depth"[39] which it entails. In a similar fashion,

Bazin judges dramatic montage as an equivalent technique in the representation of a

spatio-temporal integrity.

Against Bazin's reputation as a naïve theorist, he regularly recognised illusion,

artifice, and montage, as consistent with or conditioning cinematic realism – it is only

where the impression of a priori mastery of phenomenal reality overtakes that of an

impression of the happening of lived-experience that the cinema's realist potential

becomes disavowed. Carruthers takes ambiguity to be central to Bazinian realism, in a

way that serves to invoke, "the ambiguity of being – that is, the way it is never fully

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[36] Thomas Elsaesser, "A Bazinian Half-Century," p.7.
[37] Lee Carruthers, *Doing Time: Temporality, Hermeneutics and Contemporary Cinema* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2016), p.20.
[38] Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," p.7.
[39] Dalle Vacche, "The Difference of Cinema in the System of the Arts," p.149.

accessible to understanding, yet is always an issue for us."[40] It is in this context, within an

awareness of understanding and its limitations, projected in terms of artifice and its

mediation, that we can position Bazin's suggestion, in the "Ontology" essay, of two

discrete, but never wholly distanced, versions of "realism." Here, he delineates between,

> true realism, the need…to give significant expression to the world both concretely and in its
>
> essence and the pseudorealism of a deception aimed at fooling the eye (or for that matter the
>
> mind); a pseudorealism content in other words with illusory appearances.[41]

"True" realism, then, is something (significantly) more – but not entirely other – than

imitation. By way of illustration, Bazin offers that, "medieval art never passed through

this crisis" because it is "simultaneously vividly realistic and highly spiritual."[42] While

seemingly abstract as a precursor to cinematic realism, Dalle Vacche points to Bazin's

specific admiration for the Romanesque sculptural style as a means to illuminating the

special relevancy of this perspective. [43] What interests Bazin most, as Dalle Vacche reads

it, is a "dialectical reconciliation between material form and spiritual content,"[44] in which,

"Medieval art…openly calls attention to the symbiosis of concrete and abstract

elements."[45] Dalle Vacche quotes Bazin's essay to illustrate the lines running between

historically distant realisms (which would balance "spiritual and scientific values"),[46]

where he echoes his discourse on neorealism in suggesting that the Romanesque

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[40] Carruthers, *Doing Time*, p.24.
[41] Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," p.12.
[42] Idem.
[43] On which he wrote an essay, "Les Eglises romanes de Saintonge," published posthumously in Cahiers. See Dalle Vacche, "The Difference of Cinema in the System of the Arts," pp.148-149.
[44] Ibid. p.148.
[45] Ibid, p.149.
[46] Ibid, p.148.

sculptor, "shies away from major dramatic topics, he is an observer of daily life, addressing secular life and sacred themes with the same realism."[47] It is, in this sense, where art is able to mediate between abstraction and figuration, the ideational and the material, that it can lay claim to a "true" form of realism in the sense of which Bazin speaks of it.

The Production of Presence

To Dalle Vacche, the purpose of Bazin's true realism was, "not to fabricate a believable reality but to disclose the mysteries and epiphanies of lived experience."[48] While this again seems to echo the more ephemeral invocations of Bazin's discourse, with recourse to a further examination of the concept of presence, the significance of this idea takes on a more concrete appearance. Specifically, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht locates a significant transition in how Western culture saw – and, so, represented - the relation between humankind and the world, which takes place with the waning of the Middle Ages.[49] The effect as described by Gumbrecht goes to the heart of Tarr's disquiet with "story" and "metaphysics" - broadly, it is from this point that a conception of existence based on metaphysical principles begins its final ascendancy over pre-modern cosmology; a

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[47] Ibid, p.149.
[48] Ibid, p.148.
[49] Gumbrecht, *The Production of Presence*, p.24.

revolution in, "the concepts of self-description."[50] In this instance, the transformation

inheres in a,

> ...new configuration of self-reference in which men began to see themselves as eccentric to the
>
> world, and this position was different from the dominant self-reference of the Christian Middles
>
> Ages, when man understood himself as part of and surrounded by a world that was considered to
>
> be the result of God's creation.[51]

This new "eccentricity" produced the conception of the human's being a disimpassioned

observer of the world, a disembodied mind, privileged in relation to the entities existing

within it by virtue of its rational agency over them (this, rather than being intrinsically

enmeshed in a world of Divine Grace).[52] The notion of "worldview" could hardly be more

appropriate than in this instance of its transformation. This ideological shift in Western

self-conception was at the same time a scission, which saw a splitting of the "spiritual"

from its "material" (as well as "soul" from "body"). In this way, it reflects a metaphysical

interpretation of the world, given that metaphysics by its etymology implies this

distinction of physical reality from immaterial forces "above" it, outside or acting upon it.

More than this, and dovetailing with the discourse on historical time in the previous

chapter, this separation further implies that split in temporal projection which opens

between a plane of corporeal-material transience in its remove from the eternal,

atemporal realm of spirit or essence; the imperfect real as distinguished from a

transcendent ideal. Gumbrecht identifies this configuration as, "the origin of an

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[50] Ibid, p.23
[51] Ibid, p, 24.
[52] Ibid, p.82.

epistemological structure on which Western philosophy would from now on rely as the "subject/object paradigm.""[53] Some implications of this structure have been covered in the discussion of the concept of experience in the first chapter, but are worth renewing from this angle. The new, empirical worldview privileged the intellectual capacities of humankind over its sensory being or creaturely life, reaching a highpoint in the modern subject of the Cartesian *Cogito*. Gumbrecht, with reference to the Aristotelian concept of the sign current in the Middle Ages – which coincides a (spatial, material) substance and a (perceptual, ideational) form – indicates that there had previously been no such distinction between (the concrete) "material signifier" and (the essential) "immaterial meaning" in the way that modern, "metaphysical" thought determines.[54] It is only from this perspective that we transition from ritual, transformation and substantiation – of making meaning "present" – to representation, signification, and interpretation. It is these latter processes and faculties that enable the separation and, so, extrication of meaning from material form, but crucially now in a way through which the material itself becomes passed over or consumed in the acquisition of that knowledge.[55] As we have seen, Benjamin similarly constructs his dialectic between knowledge and truth according to the same set of concerns, formulated as it is in terms of the fleeting experience of illumination (of truth-constellations) against the categorical possession of conceptual knowledge. In each is implied, in other words, that the modern mind has lost touch with

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[53] Ibid, p.25.
[54] Ibid, p.29.
[55] Ibid, p.26.

concrete materiality, or its attunement to presence – to the mute but immanent

meaningfulness of a "first nature."

It is little coincidence, in this sense, that Lukács had located the late-Medieval

Dante as an intermediary figure between the epic and the novel, and, so, positioned

between an Ancient and Modern conception of worldhood. As John Freccero suggests,

"the world of the epic was experienced as homogeneous, a totality of which the hero was

part, while in the novel, the world was experienced as fragmentary and, with respect to

subjectivity, radically 'other.'"[56] Lukács finds that,

> In Dante there is still the perfect immanent distanceless and completeness of the true epic, but his
>
> figures are already individuals, consciously and energetically placing themselves in opposition to a
>
> reality that is becoming closed to them, individuals who, through this opposition, become real
>
> personalities...[57]

This description chimes with the dynamics of Tarr's approach to audio-visual

"storytelling," which de-centres the agency of subjects within an indifferent creaturely

cosmology, while at the same time feting the dignity of their resistance and individuality

of their presence. These personalities are at once shown to be inextricably linked to their

environment while at the same time existentially estranged from it. They are not-at-

home within world, an estrangement that produces an *unheimlichkeit*, or uncanniness,

which conditions the *Stimmung* of their worlds (as well as our encounter with them). This

estrangement reflects a corruption in the modern experience of "concrete" material

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[56] John Freccero, "Dante and the Epic of Transcendence" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Epic*, ed.
Catherine Bates (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.76.
[57] Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, p.68.

reality, which resonates throughout Tarr's anti-metaphysical cinematic discourse: its

rejection of "story" and of re-presented ideation. It is also a reference that takes on

special gravitas by relation to the central Nietzschean-Krasznahorkian monologue in

Tarr's final work, *The Turin Horse*, which describes the apocalyptic "end of the present

world" in that film as a consequence of cultural mores: "…to touch, debase and thereby

acquire, or touching, acquiring and thereby debasing. It's been going on like that for

centuries, on and on and on."[58] The neighbour (Bernhard), who delivers these words,

says that this is "a matter of man's judgement over his own self, which, of course, God

has a hand in." This speaks both to the shift in modern human self-conception and its

origins in that teleology which is set in motion by the eschatological mindset: when

secularised, it is transfigured into the narrative of historical progress and enlightenment

rationality, which would "complete" our mastery over nature (which is to say, death).

With regard to either utopia, it is not the presence of the present world that is the source

of meaning, but a state of conclusion apparently lying beyond (or above) the here and

now. To this end, it is significant that Gumbrecht's discourse centres on the particular

point in historical time from which "the plastic arts are relieved of their magic role," as

Bazin suggests,[59] and which coincides with the birth of a modern historicity itself. Both

Gumbrecht and Bazin thus gesture toward the period in which the temporal divide

between events and their re-presentation, rather than their "being-present" or

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[58] Written by Krasznahorkai. This monologue is delivered by a neighbour from 'over the hill', who comes to borrow some Palinka (fruit-brandy), and launches upon a lengthy spiel about the condition of their world and the presence of its impending extinction.
[59] Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," p.10.

"presentification" ("making-present"), became recognised and disseminated.[60] This is, as such, the transition from a spiritual-cosmological to a scientific-historical frame of self-reference and world-appropriation. In the scientific-historical paradigm, knowledge becomes the subject of (a subject's) "production" rather than Divine "revelation," and with it emerges the conception of real agency: "the idea of humans wanting and being able to change and transform the world."[61] It is worth recalling that Tarr himself stresses – as in the above monologue - that the corruption of our world is of a human origin, that if there is an evil cast to our cosmos then it is of our own making. From this new epistemology emerges "fiction," the manipulation of knowledge, as well as "feigning" and acting in character, where such states of deception can no longer be reconciled against the notion of a spirit, or animation, inhabiting material form.[62] In this last instance, the physical intimacy and logic of the medieval theatre – based in gesture, interaction, the production and playing out of unscripted situations – was overwritten in the separation of stage from audience by a curtain, and the refocusing through narrative textuality upon the unfolding of individual psyches, or subjectivities, in relation to a narrative telos.[63] Following Lukács, we might also place the novel within this relation. Tarr's rejection of story, and differentiation of film from literature, can be read in the same vein. It is not with regard to the completion of a narrative arc that his cinema is concerned, but with

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[60] Gumbrecht, pp.29-30.
[61] Ibid, p.26.
[62] Ibid, p.27.
[63] Ibid, p.30.

the experience of, and attunement to, the material presence of the world; and, in this way, to a meaningful realisation of the human situation within a cosmic order.

These are but a few among the complex of phenomena which demonstrate the transition to what Gumbrecht calls a "meaning culture," one that no longer views essence as inherent in, or strictly contingent on, a substantial material. This is, in a progressive sense, the supersession of a "primitive" outlook – held under the sway of religion, magic and symbology – by the critical rationality of empirical thought: that which looks to produce knowledge, rather than preserve those ideas that were seen to originate from inspiration, revelation, that was non-human (divine) in origin. It is, at the same time, the beginning of a new, anthropocentric order of the Western world, which has been increasingly questioned in the 20th and now 21st century. What is particularly novel in Gumbrecht's reading is the notion that this metaphysical thinking and its mode of knowledge-production has shaped a contemporary culture that predicates itself on the interpretation of a meaning that transcends the concrete presence of the things of the world.[64] In Gumbrecht's view, the implications of metaphysical thinking – which divides subject from object, mind from body, essence (or spirit) from substance (or matter) – inheres in the implicit hermeneutic bent of theory in the humanities.[65] That is, in much the same way that a subjectivity or interiority is parsed from objective materiality, the progression "beyond" ("meta-") the physical dimension in metaphysics determines the search for "meaning" (and its effects) in advance of what Gumbrecht calls "presence

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[64] Ibid, pp.21-22.
[65] Ibid, xiv.

effects."[66] "Meaning effects," in this view, transcend the substantial opacity of the object

of inquiry, to relieve the "silence" or "mute presence" of materiality in a transition to

transmissible knowledge; in contrast, "presence effects" produce lived-experience of an

object in its material, temporally-present and "thingly" aspect. Indeed, it is with

reference to both Gumbrecht's discourse and this intrinsic connection between presence

and duration that Asbjørn Grønstad posits the ethical-existential claim of slow cinema's

temporality. As Grønstad puts it,

> The *temps morts* of slow cinema…[is] something more than just empty time, empty shots; it is an
>
> attempted visualisation of that which cannot be visualised, presence…the process of making
>
> duration visible is a stylistic means by which to trigger an empathetic investment in the world
>
> depicted on screen. [67]

This notion - of the spectator's empathetic investment in, or attunement to, the

temporality of a filmic world - resonates powerfully with the current argument. In Tarr, a

realisation of the materiality of time - the affective experience of duration, or temporal

presence - implicates the spectator's entrance into a certain situation and experience of a

state of being. Furthermore, the central narrative dynamic by which this duration

becomes extended is one in which belief, or the search for meaning, is shown to be a

fatal illusion (if not an obstruction to meaningful experience). This melancholic

disposition responds to what Gumbrecht refers to as our contemporary "meaning

culture," in which what is to be discovered of a phenomena is always etched beneath the

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[66] Ibid, xv.
[67] Asbjørn Grønstad "Slow Cinema and the Ethics of Duration" in *Slow Cinema*, p.279.

surface, so to speak, and in which it is only from abstraction of what is re[present]ed that an understanding of it may be "*truly*" achieved. As Gumbrecht illustrates, there is an implicit bias in our language toward a value of depth, where surface effects are "superficial";[68] this is a designation which no one or thing inclines toward being. On the other hand "presence," to Gumbrecht, refers to the impact that "present" objects, the world of perception or "the things of the world," can have on human bodies.[69] Gumbrecht does not argue for a disavowal of meaning culture so much as a renewed emphasis on the meaning or "truth" to be found in the presence of things of the world, our contact with them, and to the way in which they present themselves to us. To him, it is not so much that presence effects and meaning effects are to be considered in isolation, or for that matter be conflated, but that these phenomena oscillate in flux through lived-experience.[70] This is particularly the case as far as he sees presence effects as epiphanic "moments of intensity," which can be the bearers of meaningful experience (that cannot, however, be repeated exactly).[71] It is against the predominance, rather than the existence, of the meaning effects of what he calls "the hermeneutic field" that Gumbrecht stakes this space.[72]

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[68] Gumbrecht, p.21.
[69] Ibid, pp.xiii-xiv.
[70] Gumbrecht, Production of Presence, p.xv.
[71] Ibid, pp.98-99.
[72] Ibid, p.28.

Observation, and the Poetic Quality of the Real

The shift in human self-conception described by Gumbrecht constitutes a decisive cog in

the cosmic revolution that is thematised in the work of Tarr (and Krasznahorkai). That is,

the background to their work presents the loss of a vital human element that is grounded

in an integral *spiritual/essential* connection with the *material* world, a correspondence

which had appeared as a natural condition in pre-modern culture. The director calls it

"dignity," and positions it as the central value of his work. The fading trace of this more

"dignified" attunement is the spectre that animates the melancholic disposition of Tarr's

gaze, the observation of a material environment by which is reflected the pervasive

spiritual-existential deprivation in which its inhabitants are mired. By way of a

comparison carried over from the last chapter, if Pasolini's early "reverential style"

sacralised the tragic fates of sub-proletarian "sinners"- made-"saints," Tarr's "cosmic

perspective" encounters a similar milieu with a more universal aspect, seeking to realise

an impression of the "dignity" of its figures in the face of a fatal hopelessness. As with

Pasolini's subversion - or inversion - of Catholic culture, it is with reference to this central

concept of Renaissance Humanism that Tarr resists that teleology of modernity set in

motion by Humanism's central ideas, those which gesture toward the vocational

perfection, elevation, or completion, even, of (metaphysical) "man." As suggested above,

it is from this point that the idea of agency in effecting change in the sphere of fate

emerges, a transcendence of divine destiny and creaturely life at one and the same time.

In other words, the idea of the exceptional "dignity of man" that was central to Humanist

thought establishes the ground for individual subjectivism, furnishing unique privilege to

human perspective and placing it at the centre of the universe. Rather than part of

nature, one of its myriad forms, the human becomes its "interpreter"[73] and master. It is

significant, in this sense, that the director frames one of his clearest appeals to the

concept of "dignity" as a countermovement to such uncritical Humanism, suggesting

that, "if we are always forcing our stupid hegemony and our stupid dominance, then we

lose something which is part of our dignity."[74] This worldview underlies diverse aspects of

the Tarr-Krasznahorkai universe. It refers to a loss (or transience) of order and meaning,

and in terms of a more primary communication of, or communion with, the world of

perception. The notion of *loss* (and particularly where it pertains to *order*) becomes

particularly significant in terms of the figurations of melancholic perspective that

structure our entrance to, and poetic experience of, this uncanny world. The scission

between natural being and historical consciousness implicated by this perspective is

given its clearest form through the dual protagonists of Krasznahorkai's *The Melancholy

of Resistance* - the central section of which was "adapted" by Tarr as *Werckmeister

Harmonies*. In the film, we closely follow the "idiot"[75] Janos, observing his inability to

reconcile between an astrologically inclined vision of cosmic magnitude (by which the

human pales in significance), and the conditions of his terrestrial being within the

corruptions and machinations of the human world. Less prominent, though still

significant, is the Sisyphean efforts of Janos's confidante, Mr. Eszter, to re-vitalise a

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[73] Often attributed to Francis Bacon, but already referred to by Pico della Mirandola in his "Oration on the Dignity of Man" as an existing discourse centuries earlier. See Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, trans. Charles Glenn Wallis (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), p.3.
[74] Tarr, interview by Levine and Meckler (2012).
[75] Which originally, in Ancient Greek, meant "private person", and was linked to the vision of melancholic mania; a vision of the world not shared by others. See Földényi, *Melancholy*, p.189.

"natural," Pythagorean tuning (which ultimately destroys the coherence of modern musical achievements). Their obsessions with celestial splendour and universal musical harmony - conceptually and historically related in a way that is marginalised in the modern age - structure both texts at a thematic level. The mysterious omnipotence of the giant stuffed whale deposited in their town centre seems to echo within this figuration of a loss of, or losing-touch-with, such orders of meaningfulness.

The title of the film speaks to this conception, but in an ambiguous way. It refers to the Baroque composer and theorist – Andreas Werckmeister – who developed the "well temperament," famously associated with J.S. Bach. This tuning (and other similar musical temperaments) sought to moderate the issue of those dissonances which naturally reside within the "pure intervals" of the Pythagorean octave. The Pythagorean system was grounded in a mathematical ideal of ratio, of the proper intervals between harmonic tones (in regards to the length of string which produces them). The relationship between these tones was thought to emulate the "harmony of the spheres": a cosmic balance and its resonance, the tenor of which affects the constitution of earthly life; it is from this theory that the idea of disposition and of temperament initially emerges. Musical temperament, on the other hand, is a pragmatic solution which compromises the nuances (and imperfections) of musical tone, which are tweaked into a homogeneous congruence. Instruments could then be pitched in such a way as to equalise and adequate those natural dissonances, flattening them out, so that a player could transition between keys and scales without ever falling perceptibly "out of tune"; where, before, musicians and composers adapted themselves to "nature," to the constraints inherent in

"pure" tone. In the film, Mr. Eszter describes this convenience as an "illusion," during a sequence where he dictates the basis of his "research" into a microphone. The camera circulates around his person as he delivers this lengthy speech, at once centred by the gravity of the speaker while exhibiting a free-indirect consciousness that opens the frame beyond: inspecting the notes in his hand, or pausing while pulling focus to the background, where Janos sits, transfixed by talk of an errant cosmic harmony. It shows the tendency in Tarr to mediate the "inside" and "outside," where we do not interpolate into the Eszter's perspective but instead rotate around its centre, so that his presence is joined - within a single form of movement - to the presence of the world surrounding him. The shot begins with Eszter's face framed in close-up, from which we zoom in further still, beginning to orbit the scholar's body as he pontificates on an "indisputable deception,"

> …music and its harmony and echo, its unsurpassable enchantment is entirely based on a false foundation…Here we have to acknowledge the fact that there were ages more fortunate than ours, those of Pythagoras and Aristoxenes, when our forefathers were satisfied with the fact that their purely tuned instruments were played in only some tones, because they were not troubled by doubts, for they knew that heavenly harmonies were the province of the gods. Later, all this was not enough. Unhinged arrogance wished to take possession of all the harmonies of the gods. And it was done in its own way. Technicians were charged with the solution, a Praetorius, a Salinas, and finally an Andreas Werckmeister…

The path outlined by Mr. Eszter is, by this stage of the argument, a familiar one. It traces a "fall" into abstraction, into mediating structures that seek to order and rationalise the irregular – taking (and projecting) possession, rather than becoming attuned to the

aberrant in nature. It is equivalent, in this sense, to the above quote from *The Turin Horse* which speaks of a process of "touching, debasing, acquiring." That the title, *Werckmeister Harmonies,* refers to Werckmeister's abstraction in the plural is significant for this reason. It intimates a multiplicity of systems (or tunings, attunements: *Stimmungen*) which seek to impose a kind of order. This is clearly implicated in novel and film alike, where the outsider figures, Mr. Eszter and Janos, are caught in the manoeuvers of a larger struggle taking place between Mrs. Eszter and "the Prince": agents of (law and) order and of nihilistic destruction (or disorder), respectively, and both of them wielding authority through violence. But if each of these figures can be said to "represent" a form of order, a *kosmos*, then each is equally implied – by reference to Werckmeister – to rest on the presupposition of false premises. Indeed, it is only Mr. Eszter and "the Prince" who are able to recognise this artifice, and both of them are defeated by Mrs. Eszter. The one calls for total destruction as a way of completing the principle of decay – "in ruins, everything becomes whole" - while the other seeks a return to a disposition wherein imperfection, inaccessibility and gratuity were considered the natural condition of human being.
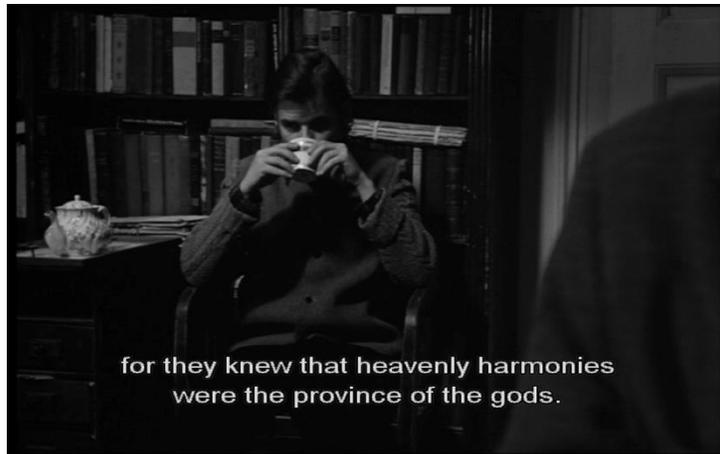
Figure 9.1

Figure 9.2
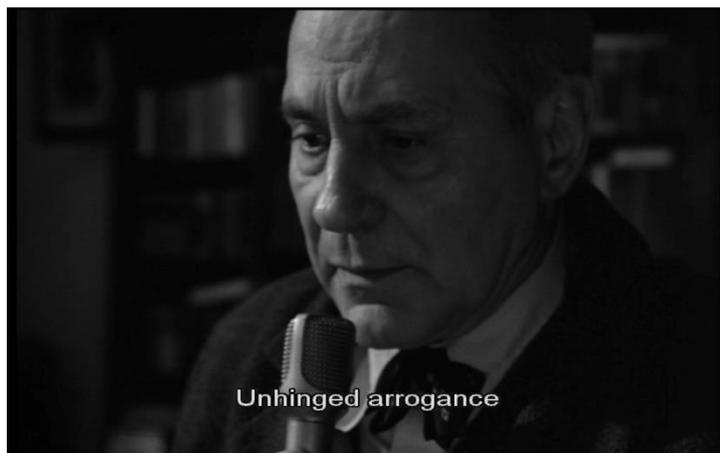
Figure 9.3
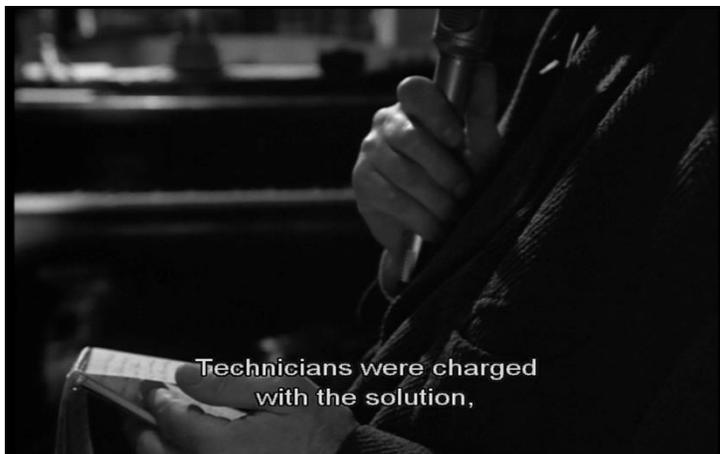
Figure 9.4
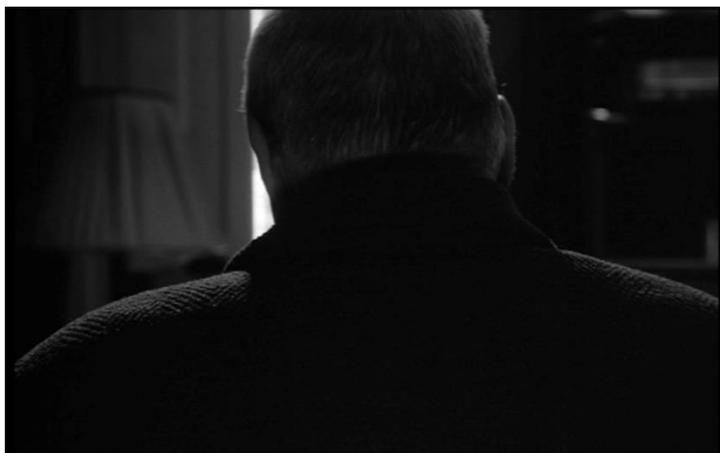
Figure 9.5

Figure 9.6
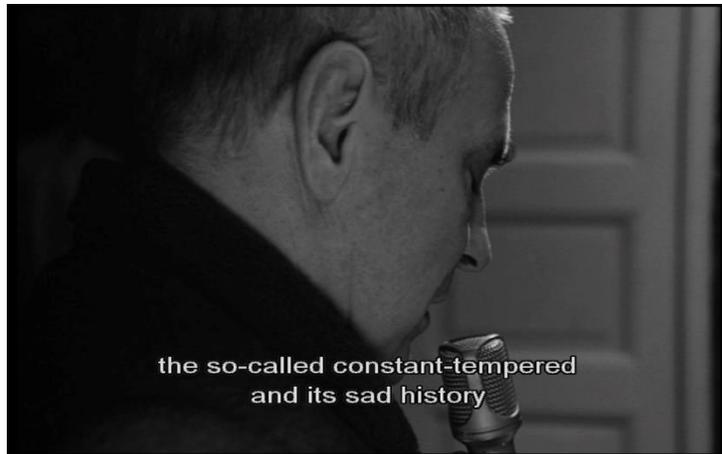
Figure 9.7
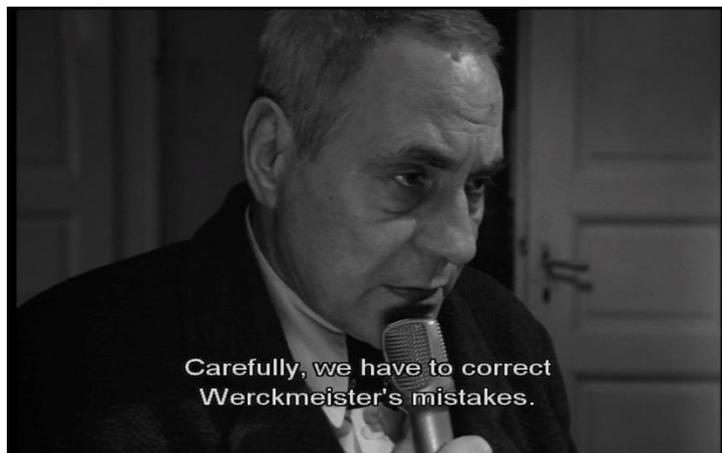
Figure 9.8

Figure 9.9

In *Werckmeister Harmonies*, Janos and Mr. Eszter are legibly connected to the historically

diverse representations that have accrued to the idea of melancholy, and particularly

where it relates to the theory of temperaments. That is, these figures relate to a

cosmological worldview in which medical, scientific and spiritual theories alike were

based upon a concept of harmony (the Ancient Greek *armonia*) and balance, understood

in musical terms – from which the idea of *Stimmung* descends. Of these

"temperaments," which have either been diminished or transformed through the

modern era, melancholia remains a privileged example for reason of the diversity of its

representations, which relate to both positive and negative connotations. As Benjamin

shows in his study of the Baroque, the figure of melancholy can be read allegorically, as

an expression of a historical relation. In other words, how a historical period regards the

melancholic temperament can be read as a condition of that period's conception of

worldhood. It is significant in this sense that Földényi chimes with concepts from Bazin

and Gumbrecht in suggesting that (the) "modern [interpretation of] melancholia," among

whose foremost symptoms is a recognition of - and inability to reconcile with - the

instability of order, "spread at the same time that experimentation with perspective

did."[76] The kinds of expression of the world available in pre-modern image-making, for

example, in manuscripts and tapestry, tended to represent figural types within a plane of

existence, rather than with reference to the receding depth of a singular point of vision

(that might be replaced by any other). Földényi suggests that,

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[76] Földényi, *Melancholy*, p.124.

> As painting in perspective evolved, the standards of collective experience started to disappear...there is no *common* intellect, no *common* judgement of the world, and therefore no commonly shared world can exist. The world breaks up into worlds...[77]

This is, perhaps, another way to position the title, *Werckmeister Harmonies,* and its being rendered in the plural. With reference to this new device of aesthetic representation, categories of common human experience become fragmented into the experience of individual *subjects*, each with their own perspective – their own interpretations and observations of the world. This is a decisive stage in that transition from *Erfahrung* to *Erlebnis,* from ethos to pathos, discussed in the first chapter – an occlusion of the commonplace by novel subjective experience. Gumbrecht suggests - via Foucault - that the modern conception of ex-centric world observation leads in this way to an eventual "crisis of representation" and a new "second order observer" that emerges in the 19th century.[78] This new subject of experience was "condemned – rather than privileged – to observe himself in the act of observation..."[79] Already in the previous chapters, we have encountered figures that imply this (or our own) "second order" of observation – our watching (of the watching) of Karrer in *Damnation*, and the Doctor in *Satantango*. It is with reference to the proliferation of these figures throughout the Tarr universe that we can refer, as in the previous chapter, to a discursive, rather than a purely proximal mode of being-with – one which formalises (in *depth*) a cosmic, melancholic way of seeing. While Bazin views perspective as an "original sin" of Western aesthetics, and Földényi

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[77] Ibid., pp.125-135.
[78] Gumbrecht, p.38.
[79] Ibid, p.39.

posits its role in democratising the worldview of melancholia (a recognition of existential

solitude and the transience of meaning), Gumbrecht sees the "self-reflexive loop"

initiated by perspectivalism for another potential. It allows, Gumbrecht says, for, "the

question of a possible compatibility between a world-appropriation by concepts

(…"experience") and a world-observation through the senses (…"perception")."[80] Indeed,

Gumbrecht refers to "presence effects" as taking place through lived-experience

(*erlebnis*), which he positions in the fissure between (direct) perception and (grasped)

knowledge.[81] This idea gives fuller expression to the experiential quality of Tarr's cinema

as a bi-directional translation between *pathos* and *ethos*: a mediation between the

happening of an immanent lived-experience unfolding in (and as) time, and the state of

being revealed within this experience, the total affective milieu which structures a mode

of "dwelling." The experience of melancholic perception – a perspective that shows up

the instability of worldhood, of meaning – may in this sense be both cause and cure for a

renewed mode of relation to the presence of the world, and one which can, potentially,

offer new shape to a future humanism. This, perhaps, is what Krasznahorkai refers to as

Tarr's, "certain luminosity, those flashes of light that show another way."[82]

Where Tarr insists that the "very definite and simple scenes" captured by his

cinematic *objectif* refer to nothing allegorical or otherwise symbolic, but only to the

"concrete" material presences realised within them, he does so with reference to what

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[80] Idem.
[81] Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence*, p.100.
[82] Krasznahorkai, interview by Hopkins.

he calls "the quality of life."[83] This "quality of life," for Tarr, is "essential" to human being. Certainly, the way in which this cinema seeks to *realise* and *materialise* an impression of atmosphere, tonality, texture and temporality, appears responsive to the essential qualities of presence – more so than for any direct indexicality. The camera seeks to mediate the polarities opened up in the modern (or melancholic) mentality: between "subject" and "object," "psyche" and "materiality," as well the "concrete" and its "essence." The director himself speaks of exploring "the tension between human being and world." The recognition of this gap between the individual and the "objective" (collective, or material) world - an incompletion significantly implicated by the melancholic mindset - conditions the formal quality of Tarr's cinema. This is reflected in the formal foregrounding of perceptual attunement in the course of the director's long takes, which is then doubled and redoubled by characters while being connoted through our own viewing position. In this way, it resonates closely with Deleuze's classification of free indirect subjectivity as a category of "perception-image," or image-of-perception. All of Tarr's second period films are - to variable degrees – formed in the observation of the perception of characters who are themselves observer-figures, watchers and seers, around whose vision situations are drawn and structured.[84] There is therefore something of a confrontation between the world-views (ex-centric/in-tegral) described by Gumbrecht being played out, but not reconciled, between the camera and the bodies it films. Tarr himself has spoken of his camera being "inside and outside at the same

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[83] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).
[84] It must be said that many of these figures are drawn more or less directly from Krasznahorkai – whose universe is filled with such archetypes, which are transferred to Tarr's cinema.

time."[85] This is a statement the director makes in terms of *The Man from London*, and in

which he speaks to the mode of our being "constantly by [protagonist] Maloin's side; we

see the world through his eyes."[86] This resonates with the structure of both *Stimmung*

and, particularly, the poetic vision of free indirect subjectivity. More than this, it is made

in connection with an archetypal observer-figure. The surveillance tower from which

Maloin overlooks the harbour is a locus that serves as a figuration of the self-reflexive

loop of Tarr's melancholic perspective, by implication of the camera's autonomous

perception of the solitary observation of its protagonists. This locus is our entrance to the

film-world, and it is from here that the dynamic common to all of Tarr's films – where a

hope or belief is very slowly revealed to be fatal illusion – is first encountered. The

director says that he was drawn to this story – the only scenario among his second-period

oeuvre not originating with Krasznahorkai – "because it deals with the eternal and the

everyday at the same time – with the cosmic and the realistic...the totality of man and

nature."[87] The author of the source text, Georges Simenon, was an unconventional

detective novelist, in whose works characters and their milieu take precedence over plot.

The milieu invariably speaks to the natural banality of crime and corruption, and the

actual "detection" of the crime – which is rarely seen – is secondary to representing its

happening within a world in which such acts appear fated to happen. As Simenon puts it,

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[85] Béla Tarr, "Temptation Harbour," p.55.
[86] Idem.
[87] Idem.

Like the great naturalists, I would like to focus on certain human mechanisms. Not on grand

passions. Not on questions of ethics or morality. Only to study the minor machinery which may

appear secondary.[88]

So far, so Tarr (or, for that matter, Krasznahorkai). And yet, on the level of those narrative

events taken from the original detective novel, the cosmic themes suggested by Tarr are

barely legible in the way that they appear through Krasznahorkai. While the director's key

themes (and narrative dynamic) of belief, illusion and fate are certainly evident, it is the

director's treatment of events surrounding the relevant crimes, their prolongation,

enstrangement, and elision, which projects this narrative world toward the "cosmic

perspective" that characterises Tarr's "image of the world." It is worth recalling here that

we are introduced to the second-period Tarr by entering into the position of our

protagonist in *Damnation*, slowly receding from the depths of perspective and towards

the realisation of his presence as an observer. To this end, it becomes clear that, where

the representation of outsider-figures is essential to the program of Tarr's cinema from

its outset to completion, the character of these outsiders and their particular modes of

being take on a new aspect in the second-period, with reference to boredom, to waiting

and watching the world.

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[88] Quoted in John Gray, "The stark moral world of Georges Simenon," Feb. 16, 2016,
www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2016/02/stark-moral-world-georges-simenon

Figure 2

Personal Presence

Tarr's world-observers reflect a melancholic cast of existential solitude. The director says

that, along with the "question of dignity" and "the tension between the human being and

the world," the other major theme of his films is "the loneliness and solitude of human

beings."[89] As discussed, our introduction into the *Stimmung* of *Damnation* is through the

above image of Karrer at his window, a figure we later follow through a number of

situations of (pathetic, rain-soaked) espionage that serve to disclose his situation, or

existential situatedness, within a material environment. This environment becomes

realised, as both concrete reality and existential atmosphere, in the spectator's

experience of such encounters: in being interpolated into his watching of the world, we

enter the atmosphere and duration which conditions his state of being. This is likewise

for the Doctor in *Satantango*; we might add Irimias in the same film to a list of observer-

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[89] Tarr, interview by Robert Chilcott (2007), p.10.

figures, a prophet-informant who disperses the farm collective under the guise of a reconnaissance mission, of "observation," and paints himself as a "partisan of human dignity" in so doing. And while not strictly an "observer" in the same sense as the others, our chief protagonist in *Werckmeister Harmonies* is an idiot savant with a cosmically inclined vision, a way of seeing that transcends terrestrial being. In the director's final film, *The Turin Horse*, the watching of the world with which *Damnation* introduces us into the formal disposition of the second-period Tarr is re-figured through the coachman Ohlsdorfer and his daughter. Repeatedly (with repetition especially apparent in this film's world), at different times and from alternating perspectives, each are shown sitting silently at the window, staring out into their shared horizon - a bare hill, on which stands a single tree; they take turns, without communication, to inhabit this perspective. In contrasting these equivalent shots, the increasing intricacy of Tarr's camera movements and their length in time over the course of the director's career - which Kovács demonstrates – becomes apparent. At the same time, this comparison signals the development of Tarr's second-period cinema around the staple trope of *vision, observation, perception* and, by their implication, a vicarious *attunement.* Again, Tarr draws his use of the filmic "objectif" toward both of *Stimmung* and the free indirect where he posits, in this direction, that, "The camera is an observer that captures the atmosphere of a moment and reacts to life. I don't want to give the audience a message, I want to show viewers my image of the world."[90] But where in *Damnation* the camera's

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[90] Béla Tarr, interview by Konstanty Kuzma, https://eefb.org/archive/february/bela-tarr-on-the-turin-horse-2/ (Accessed November 3, 2017).

retreat is stemmed on becoming positioned behind the human figure, the first among

Tarr's second-order observers, in *Turin Horse* it recedes now further, quite literally

examining the mode of being which inhabits this ever-darkening dwelling. It responds to

the repetition of routines and habits over the course of the six days leading up to a final

exit of all light, revealing more of a "quality of life" that is diminished with each

increment. Where "the world has gone to ruin," the only recourse for this last family, this

last man and woman, is to continually observe the world outside from within the

increasingly oppressive, contracting boundaries of their existence. Against this apparently

ex-centric world-watching, in Tarr's cinema there is a sense in which the mobile camera

works to open up an intrinsic integrity, to revolve around the centres of these ways of

seeing in order to take them in and seek their involution. Another shot, later in the film,

suggests this process of inversion in a distinct sense. After their failed flight to venture

beyond the horizon seen through the window, and after unpacking their cart in front of

it, the woman returns inside the house and resumes her position at their aperture onto

the world. Now viewed from the outside, we slowly approach the window through a

gathering storm of dust, to focus in on her dead-eyed, grief-stricken face. We never find

out what lies beyond the horizon, except for what is said (earlier) in the Krasznahorkian

monologue, and from what is written upon this singular, particular visage. We are drawn

into the world-watching of characters, their waiting and observing, or their singular vision

of the world, while at the same time having opened up for us the ground of its possibility

– "life" as a material "quality," the stuff of everydayness.

Tarr frames the apprehension of the "quality of life" in his films in terms of the

kind of indexical realism that was crudely applied to Bazin. To Tarr, this is because cinema

is a "concrete" and "primitive" language – that repeated distinction he makes especially

against philosophical proposition and literary expression, and explicitly in relation to

Krasznahorkai. As the director puts it:

> Filmmaking is a very 'concrete' job, because you have a camera, and the camera has an objective
>
> [lens]. The objective is, of course, objective. It records reality – always. The real job of the
>
> filmmaker, it's very simple; you have reality and everything is very concrete. The table is a table,
>
> the ashtray is an ashtray, the window is a window. It's about how you combine these realities; this
>
> is the only way you can elevate the movie above a concrete reality.[91]

To paraphrase the extension to this view, and one that the director states elsewhere: the

man Tarr calls "our writer" could apparently compose reams of description about the

same table, but for the filmic artist there is only the concrete instance of its material form

with which to work.[92] Krasznahorkai himself reaffirms this impression, taking it a further

step toward Tarr's own praxis in suggesting,

> In the movies, you can only photograph concrete things, and concrete things have a story. If you
>
> make a film about this table, this table has a story; you cannot do any different things, and we
>
> wanted, with Béla, to find a new form.[93]

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[91] Béla Tarr, "The Big Wave," excerpt of interview by Derek Thomson, www.someslashthings.com/online-magazine/bela-tarr-in-somethings-magazine-chapter004.html

[92] Stated a number of times and in a number of forms, but perhaps best in Tarr, interview by Ballard (2004).

[93] Krasznahorkai, interview by Hopkins.

Viewing the statements by director and writer as complementary (and their using the

same analogy, which Tarr does elsewhere also, suggests correspondence), there is no

apparent difference between Tarr's "realities" and Krasznahorkai's "stories." Elsewhere,

Tarr has referred to such phenomena as purveyors of "metacommunications," with

recourse to the same table: "other things are happening. We don't know, for instance,

what is happening under the table, but there are interesting, important and serious

things happening."[94] Speaking about *The Man From London*, Tarr repeats the idea that

what is important is not what's on the table, but what is under it.[95] It is perhaps

significant that, in this formulation, Tarr paraphrases another great, misunderstood

theorist of cinematic realism: Siegfried Kracauer, who was a noted contemporary of

Adorno and Benjamin. With reference to the original notes for Kracauer's *Theory of Film*

– the so-called "Marseilles Notebooks," written while awaiting transport out of war-torn

Europe (alongside the ill-fated Benjamin) - Miriam Hansen writes that,

> Film "enacts the historical turn to materiality," Kracauer asserts throughout the Marseilles
>
> notebooks, because like hardly any other art form it has the ability to confront "intention with
>
> being," with existence, facticity, and contingency. The direction of this confrontation is downward
>
> ("film looks *under* the table"…), with the effect of deflating myths and ideals, conventions and
>
> hierarchies that have lost their material basis, if they ever had one, in social reality…[96]

There are echoes of Benjamin in Kracauer's film theory, as Hansen points out – little

surprise, perhaps, given their friendship of more than 15 years, and their almost daily

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[94] Tarr, interview by Ballard (2004).

[95] Tarr, interview by Chilcott (2007), pp.10-11.

[96] Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Introduction" to Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Physical Redemption of Reality* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), p.xvii.

visits in this period, between Benjamin's arrival in Marseille and his attempted escape

and suicide.[97] This is evident in the above line concerning the confrontation of

"intention" with "being" (the latter of which could suitably be substituted for Benjamin's

"truth"). Hansen further points out that Kracauer makes explicit reference to the work on

Trauerspiel, with regards to shock, allegory, and melancholy.[98] Indeed, the melancholic

perspective of Tarr-Krasnzahorkai is possibly closer in spirit to Kracauer than Bazin,

inclining more toward the "redemption of physical reality" that is proffered in the

former's decidedly materialist outlook of cinema's realist potential. Echoing Lukács' idea

of "second nature," Kracauer suggests, in the epilogue to *Theory of Film,* that, "physical

reality is revealed out of a desire to pierce the fabric of conventions."[99] In that text,

Kracauer's socio-historical critique parallels that of many of his contemporaries, framing

a disenchantment with the ideological outcomes of Enlightenment rationality, and with

the ubiquity of a scientific-technological worldview that colours language and experience.

In a similar sense to Heidegger's notion of technological "enframing," Kracauer asserts

that, "Whether we know it or not, our way of thinking and our whole attitude toward

reality are conditioned by the principles from which science proceeds."[100] These

principles are seen as abstractions from the meaningful encounter with physical reality,

materiality. "The remedy for the kind of abstractness which befalls minds under the

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[97] Miriam Hansen, ""With Skin and Hair": Kracauer's Theory of Film, Marseille 1940," in *Critical Inquiry* 19 (Spring, 1993), p.444.
[98] Idem.
[99] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p.308.
[100] Ibid. p.292.

impact of science is experience," Kracauer suggests: "the experience of things in their

concreteness."[101]

Tarr himself sees the "concrete" and "primitive" art of cinema as one that seeks

to respond to this existential address of the phenomenal world – its material presence -

prior to its inscription (and, so, abstraction) in language, *logos*. Film, he seems to suggest,

is a language that does not abstract from material presence, but which can animate the

essential qualities which give meaning to the experience of the world. What he calls "the

genre of cinema," and which can be taken to refer to his own work above all else,[102]

would then, and contrary to the logic of narrative convention, present a means by which

we ourselves might co-respond with these material intensities and the affective tonality

produced by their disclosure. It is significant that where the writer and director concur

that the separation between literature and cinema inheres most meaningfully in the

concrete materiality of filmic representations, it is, paradoxically, on this same point that

their respective practices most significantly re-converge. Speaking to art more generally

than his literature in particular, Krasznahorkai again comes close to Tarr:

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[101] Ibid. 296.
[102] Tarr has stated regularly that he doesn't really watch other people's films with any frequency at all. Tarr, by Daly and Le Cain (2001).

> …I hate symbolism. Because this is also the case instead of something, instead of presence. This is artificial: a true face on the screen, on the cinema, a true weeping face or happy face on the cinema, on the screen, on the stage, is much more variable than every wonderful role on the screen, on the stage, for me. Because it's an artificial way to make art. This is so far from my idea about art, about literature, about movies…[103]

Returning this notion to the genesis of this discussion, the writer goes on directly to state:

> I try to find a way between reality and fiction, between the weight of existence and fiction. The right proportion is the main problem in art today, I think, between fiction and reality. Perhaps this is an unsolvable problem, but I try to solve it, in my case, in literature.[104]

Where not strictly equivalent, there is a real sense in which this proportioning of the fictive and the real is, in the visual field of cinema, akin to that dialectical fusion of reality and artifice, or the concrete and the essential, to which Bazin often referred. It is significant that Krasznahorkai links this to the idea of presence, to a rejection of symbolic meaning, and with reference to the importance of the physical existence, experience, and bearing of a performer (in theatre) as constituting their significance in a role. He calls this – in a form that echoes the director - "the weight of the person…the weight of their lives."[105] Not only do we find a route linking the interiority and exteriority of a corporeal presence, an almost "Medieval" indivisibility of matter/spirt, of body/mind, but in such a way that it refers directly to Tarr's practice. It is through an intimate being-with of bodies

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[103] Krasznahorkai, interview by Cardenas (2013).
[104] Idem.
[105] Idem.

and faces, in the course of their being-in and reacting to situations of existential

hopelessness, that Tarr is best able to evince something of a psychological portraiture. A

key example is seen in the wordless amble taken by our "heroes," Janos and Eszter, in

Werckmeister Harmonies. The camera tracks beside the pair in profile, slowly zooming in

over the course of the shot's duration, examining their strain against the wind and the

expressions that pass over their faces. In the background, at a close remove, the facades

of houses and shops - graffittied, battered, or boarded-up - pass by as a gritty texture

that is abstracted and made fluid by movement. There is another superb shot of a walk

later in the same film, the unleashing of "the Prince's" mob, which is perhaps the inverse

image of the one in question. There, the camera slowly flows over the sea of faces,

descending upon and scanning across rows of grave countenance that march silently

onward in an uncanny, undulating mass. As is the case in many scenes in Tarr, the camera

concerns itself with the corporeal bearing of persons, the gravitas of their faces, and their

being within an environment, rather than with the rational causality of their actions.

These human presences – their physical-material qualities, or corporeal being – are

encountered within a duration which materialises their existential condition, or state of

being. They are subjected to a free indirect examination of bearing and behaviour,

through which is condensed the affectivity of an environment and the possibilities that

structure it. This tendency is comparable, on the one hand, with Robert Bresson's

Figure 3.1

Figure 11.2

Figure 11.3

Figure 4.1

Figure 12.2

Figure 12.3

position on (or against) "acting," where he chooses to film not "actors," but what he calls "models": "the use of working models, taken from life."[106] Bresson explains this method using two points of contrast with direct bearing on Tarr. The first concerns, "BEING (models) instead of SEEMING (actors)," the second contrasting, "HUMAN MODELS: Movement from the exterior to the interior,"[107] against, "(Actors: movement from the interior to the exterior.)"[108]

On the other hand, Kovács reveals that, for Tarr, the intention towards these characters (and those that "model" them) is regarded by the director as, "the expression of love."[109] Kovács doubts that this notion of "love" is that by which we ordinarily understand the term, and takes it to instead constitute an ethics, "a political conviction, a subjective and emotional translation of a social responsibility for the outcast, the helpless and the poor which is so strong it becomes a personal engagement."[110] Where this certainly goes some way to describing Tarr's ethos, the idea of "love" can be explicated in another direction, with reference to Bazin's view on the relationship between actor and director in Italian Neorealism. Discussing Vittoria de Sica's films, Bazin regards their "source" as "his tenderness, his love…De Sica's inexhaustible affection for his characters."[111] George Kouvaros builds on Bazin's understanding of this "affection"

[106] Robert Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography* trans. Jonathon Griffin, (New York: Urizen Books), p.1.
[107] Idem
[108] Ibid. p.2.
[109] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.167.
[110] Idem.
[111] Andre Bazin, "De Sica: Metteur en Scene" in *What is Cinema? Vol.2*, p.69. Cited in George Kouvaros, "'We Do Not Die Twice': Realism and Cinema," in *The SAGE Handbook of Film Studies*, eds. James Donald & Michael Renov (Los Angeles; London: SAGE, 2008), p.385.

between director and actor, through which acting becomes, "the physical manifestation of being" or "the presentation of states of being."[112] Kouvaros suggests that,

> the imperative for the actor to be rather than to express an emotion places an emphasis on external manifestations of comportment, faciality and ways of walking that suggest an existence prior to the commencement of filming.[113]

In Tarr's cinema, comportment, faciality and walking become vital presences and means of expressing a "state of being." For this reason, life experience is an all-important factor in Tarr's casting. Tarr suggests that he looks for presence and personality most of all, which he links to the concept of dignity that is central to his work. The director suggests that,

> it may easily happen that a really professional actor will fail with us just like that. Because here you can't play but you have to be present and that presence, so to speak, is very different from acting.[114]

It is in this way that one can "show the internal human dignity."[115] Tarr connects, "the personal being-present of the actors and actresses," to the expression of "metacommunications."[116] The director stresses at multiple points that he does not work with actors, but people, personalities (whether "professional" or not), who can "be"

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[112] Kouvaros, "We Do Not Die Twice," p.385.

[113] Ibid. p.386.

[114] Béla Tarr, interview by Julia Ranki, January 4, 2005, http://filmunio.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1876%3Ainterview-with-bela-tarr&catid=76%3Anews-2005&Itemid=81&lang=en. (Accessed January 30, 2018).

[115] Béla Tarr, "A Human Statement," interview by Adam Nayman in Cinema Scope no.34 (Spring 2008), p.28.

[116] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).

rather than "act."[117] It is for this reason that he does not draw a distinction between professional and non-professional actors. Star attractions like Tilda Swinton and Hanna Schygulla are given no more privilege by Tarr's camera than their unknown counterparts. The director's tendency to repeatedly deploy the trusted presence and personalities of lesser lights is testament to this claim – of which there is no better example than Erika Bók, the cat-torturing child-suicide of *Satantango* with such a disquietingly magnetic presence, who returns in *The Man from London* and *The Turin Horse*; it is the same thousand yard-stare that confronts us in Estike's death march and in the shot, described above, where Ohlsdorfer's daughter stares out the window after a failed escape. Tarr says that he only conceived of making *Werckmeister Harmonies* after having encountered a "real-life" Janos, in the figure of German musician Lars Rudolph.[118] In his cinema, there is a predominance of expressions of gestural movement and faciality, as signs of a psychological dimension that is rarely vocalised so much as embodied or *objectified*, even, and the focus of which is drawn into equivalence with the location in which their situation unfolds (through lived-time). As Jonathon Romney points out in relation to *Damnation*, "it's not just story – it's about place and it's about people's faces."[119] To which, following Tarr's own repeated view, we might add that it is about music, nature, and most of all time – in their essential co-presence, their belonging together and bringing each other into a more profound definition of the world, or of a state of being.

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[117] Idem.
[118] Tarr, by Daly and Le Cain (2001).
[119] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).

Realising Worldhood

In returning to Gumbrecht's "production of presence," then, his reading of Heidegger

allows us to draw together the idea of presence with that of poetic disposition.

Specifically, and in a way that returns us to Bazin's "true" realism, the model of "truth"

that informs Heidegger's "aesthetics" – that of the Ancient Greeks, *Aletheia* or

"unconcealment" – is poietic or productive, rather than factical or indexical; ontological,

rather than ontic.[120] It is active, a mode of revelation or *realisation*, rather than a matter

of certitude. In this, "un-concealment" is viewed as an event or *happening*, a double

movement of veiling and illuminating,[121] in which something like the "concrete" and

"essential" become co-constitutively substantiated. In the "artwork" essay, Heidegger

draws on the work of art as a privileged site for this event of *Aletheia*, unconcealment –

"the clearing and concealing of what is"[122] - which takes on the form of an essential,

indivisible "strife" (*streit*) between "world" and "earth."[123] As has already been intimated

in its relation to *Stimmung*, "world" in Heidegger refers to the "open space" (or

"clearing") of human *being*, the historical contexture of understanding into which *Dasein*

is thrown (*geworfen*). "World" forms our opening to a sensible horizon of meaning and

possibility, with relation to which things take on their particular significance – hence, the

primary sense in which Heidegger finds human being, the ek-sistence of *Dasein*, to

essentially constitute a "being-in-the-world"; "we always already move about in an

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[120] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," p.50.
[121] Ibid, p.47.
[122] Ibid, p.70.
[123] Ibid. pp.47-48.

understanding of being,"[124] that is, with reference to *world*. Seen in this way, "world"

expresses something approaching (but not strictly equivalent to) historical "culture." This

is a common observation that gains its clearest definition through the dialectic of the

artwork essay, by virtue of which its counterpart, "earth," takes on the appearance of a

more universal "nature."[125] Heidegger refers to "earth" explicitly as the "ground" on

which "world" is founded, but which "juts through" revealingly within the disclosure of

Aletheia.[126] Primordial "earth" grounds the Open of "world" (our opening to existence),

but fundamentally exceeds the historically conditioned scope of this enlightenment via

categories of human (perception and) conception. Projecting this dialectical event of

truth onto that of Bazin's "true realism," we might view "earth" as corresponding to the

"essential," where what shows up as and in "world" would be the "concrete." Such a

schema, invoking a coterminous relation between culture and nature, the concrete and

essential – despite, or perhaps because of, its metaphysical overtones – is implicit in

Gumbrecht's reading of Heidegger, but in a way that accords it a more central role in the

"question of [the meaning of] Being" (*Seinsfrage*) by which Heidegger situates his

philosophical project. As Gumbrecht asserts,

> Being is that which is both unconcealed and hidden in the happening of truth. Due to this position
>
> in the happening of truth, Heidegger leaves no doubt, Being, as it is being unconcealed, for
>
> example, in a work of art, is not something spiritual or something conceptual. Being is not a

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[124] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.25. Macquarrie and Robinson translate as "we always conduct our activities in an understanding of Being." This gives a similar impression, but several commentators have used the above translation as a more fitting statement. See Christina Lafont, *Heidegger, Death, and World-Disclosure*, trans. Graham Harman (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.253.
[125] For instance: Richard Polt, Heidegger: An Introduction (London: UCL Press, 1999), p.137.
[126] Heidegger, "Origin of the Work of Art," p.47.

meaning. Being belongs to the dimension of things…If Being has the character of a thing, this means that it has substance and that, therefore (and unlike anything purely spiritual) it occupies space.[127]

Which is to say, in Gumbrecht's reading, Being has a substantial presence – it is "earth" in an almost, but not, literal manner. Heidegger himself is sure to distinguish "earth" from a "mass of matter…or…merely astronomical idea of a planet"[128] – its presence is not only physical (but much less metaphysical) – it is not matter to be formed by or as human equipment. "Being" thus stands for an objective world (or world of objects) which essentially exceeds the horizon of our understanding or historical mode of being – it is "the being of beings," the world prior to its encounter with "world": preceding its integration within a semantic network or concrete cultural-historical situation/interpretation.[129] And yet, as Heidegger makes clear, it is only human *Dasein* - whose existence is characterised by its proximity to world - that has a special proximity to Being, who can open up to this evasive presence, who is its guardian or (elsewhere) its "shepherd"[130] – who can "preserve" its truth in works of great art.

To Heidegger, the "true" work of art is poietic in essence. In the time of the Ancients, and of *Aletheia*, all art was considered from within its technical aspect as a form of poiesis – of "bringing-forth-into-being," or "production into presence."[131] Poiesis is

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[127] Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence*, pp. 67-68.
[128] Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art," p.41.
[129] Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence*, p.70.
[130] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" in *Basic Writings,* ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), p.221
[131] Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," p.57.

that form of production that brings being into presence (from out of nothing).[132] The

artwork makes present, substantial, an event of ontological "truth," which discloses the

co-incidence of "earth" and "world" that structures the space of *Dasein*'s dwelling – the

clearing of a common-place, and projection of a mode of being particular to it; what we

have referred to in the first chapter as *ethos*. In the artwork, the "world," the Open, is

"set to work" in such a way that "Being" can become present in/as its material – each of

a concrete world and its essential grounding in earth lift the other into the fullness of

their natures, allowing them to be encountered *as such*.[133] As constitutive of this model,

and as against prosaic language – which has a propositional or communicative function -

poetry calls attention to itself as a presence, one that resists assumption under the

categories of instrumental knowledge or use. The poetic word is thus disruptive,

functioning in the sphere of language like a broken tool does in the sphere of equipment.

Matthew Abbot says of such experiences that they invoke,

> ...the mute 'thereness' of things, in which they show up in their 'thatness' as opposed to their
>
> 'whatness'. The very *being here before me* of things jumps out in this experience, and shows itself
>
> as something with no inherent regard for or connection to human Dasein...[134]

Such disruption from our immersion in world (being-in-the-world) allows us to see things

not as what they are (which is always conditioned by relation to the context of prior

interpretation into which we are thrown), but purely in the terms that they are, *as such*

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[132] Idem.

[133] Ibid, p.54.

[134] Matthew Abbott, *The Figure of This World: Agamben and the Question of Political Ontology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p.45.

(existing independently of our valuation). Likewise, what is most fundamental about the happening of truth in the work of art is that, in its essential strife between concealing and revealing, our ordinary interpretation of the world is interrupted, placed in question – made strange, even, or uncanny. As Heidegger says, "It is due to art's poetic nature that, in the midst of what is, art breaks open an open place, in whose openness everything is other than usual."[135] This is an observation shared by the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky, who posits against contemporary poetry's "thinking in images" the notion of "ostranenie" – enstrangement or de-familiarisation – by which the uncanny experience of poetic language (language in its material dimension) becomes the model for understanding art as the formal technique of "enstrangement."[136] This term defines a certain modality by which the material content of an artwork is presented to perception as novel, strange or uncanny. It is a mode emphatically opposed to imagistic symbolism, which, Shklovsky suggests, operates on the level of a familiarity with a logic of second order meaning internal to a culturally attenuated frame of understanding, rather than one which is formally *produced* (which is to say, brought into *presence*) through aesthetic device.[137] Art, Shklovsky asserts, consists at once as such formal device and as the quality of perception enabled by it, through which the sensation of "things" becomes intensified: "The goal of art is to create the sensation of seeing, and not merely recognizing, things."[138] It is through this dichotomy of (renovated) "vision" and (the presupposition of)

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[135] Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," p.70.
[136] Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Device" in ed. & trans. Alexandra Berlina, *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader* (New York: Bloomsbury academic, 2016), p.73.
[137] Ibid, p.80
[138] Idem.

"recognition" that Shklovsky locates the significance of "enstrangement," in which perception is "its own end in art and must be prolonged."[139] It is a means of resistance to everyday perception and to the (unthinking) automisation entailed by it, in which the concurrency of cultural-historical aesthetic forms accumulates into coded structures, conventions of affect and of meaning which overlay direct experience. We might draw further comparison, in this sense, with the uncanny essence of *Stimmung*, its central *unheimlichkeit* and tendency toward displacement, in the sense by which the German *unheimlich* connotes the feeling of "not being at home." *Stimmungen* disclose our existential tonality, our sense of being "thrown" into a historical context of understanding and exposed to a mode of being that is, by its nature, culturally constructed. *Enstrangement* might, in this way, be seen as such a mode of displacement, the disposition particular to art – especially insofar as it would not constitute a *Stimmung* in itself, so much as the means of attuning our perception to a certain way of encountering the material presence of the world; which is to say, to a primordial source of meaningfulness that cannot be subsumed within propositions that seek to define its meaning, or whose essence can only be encountered through concrete presence.

We can turn directly to Tarr to give form to the way in which a poetic experience of the world might illuminate this "limit of the human," in an encounter with "the materiality of existence." Indeed, we can say that the ostensive "symbolism" and "allegory" of his cinema can be read as presences that serve to rupture the fabric of our

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[139] Idem.

ordinary comprehension, to draw and to frustrate our reading of them. Tarr's foreboding

monochrome can be viewed in such a light, as can the oppressive materiality of the time

of watching and waiting that structures our experience of these films. More instructive,

perhaps, are the "seers" around whose private visions our own become structured,

around whom we orbit, and through whom we can glimpse another way of seeing, and of

being – "flashes of light that show another way." I refer most of all to Janos in

Werckmeister Harmonies, who speaks most clearly to the sense in which human being is

an insignificant part of a greater creation (perhaps, even, a failure within it) which

undermines the harmony of the cosmos. This is a cosmic vision he sets in motion, makes

present, in the sublime opening scene of the film – both as the play of bodies he

conducts, and in its initiating the *Stimmung* of, or our attunement to, the world of the

film; at its climax - the "eclipse" of the sun, where all becomes stilled – a melancholic

theme on piano and strings, rising and falling in a minor key, swells up to complete a

sense of mysterious wonder. Janos' is a distinct perception that forms his own horizon of

what is possible and meaningful, both emerging from within "world" and projecting far

beyond it, to the exclusion of its contemporary concerns. For this, he is an "idiot" – a

private person, one with their own perceptual world. The entrance of a giant stuffed

whale into his provincial hometown - hauled, along with a deformed "Prince," in the back

of a hulking lorry to the market square, and bringing with it a violent and nihilistic mass

movement - is viewed by our protagonist with a similarly profound sense of wonder. As

he says to the musician Eszter,

> Uncle Gyuri, let's go towards the market square and then you can see for yourself the giant whale, as long as twenty metres and you can see into its throat, and it really stinks. All a man can do is look upon it and see how great the Lord's creative impulse and power, and how omnipotence is reflected in that animal. That's what has to be looked at, must be seen, Uncle Gyuri.

A few scenes before, we accompany Janos first through the crowds amassed around the "circus" and then follow him in to see its apparent attraction, this stinking Leviathan. As we proceed through the darkened chamber housing the giant, and in response to our intimate being-with Janos as he takes in its presence, the same musical theme plays as we proceed with him. On his disembarking from the truck, we remain inside as Janos crosses the square and is intercepted with a question about what he has just seen, the response to which ("this mysterious creature….from the far-off oceans") invokes Tarr's own - and most "symbolic" -view of the film,

> The whole fucking film is about three main characters. All three of them have some kind of a relation to eternity. Valuska [Janos] has a connection to cosmos, Ezster…to clean voices and the whale is coming from a far ocean.[140]

Which is to say, if they are said to represent or indeed to "symbolise" anything, it is the unrepresentable itself, that which exceeds human comprehension exactly because it lies beyond a historical consciousness, beyond historical time; that is, beyond human being as we experience it. And, as Janos asserts, "that's what must be seen." The whale, rather than standing in for something other, might instead be seen as a disruption in the fabric of experience – a fabric that is, by film's end, torn asunder. The same could be said for

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[140] Tarr, interview by Kudlac (2016).

the frail, naked elderly man – bordering the corpselike and angelic at once - whose

revelation stems the tide of mute violence that descends upon the town's hospital at the

climax of the mob's advance.[141] Both can be taken as poietic objects whose simple

presence gives form to what George Steiner, in speaking to this line of aesthetic

experience, calls, "the continuum between temporality and eternity, between matter and

spirit, between man and 'the other.'"[142] At the end of the film, Janos is rendered mute,

institutionalised, and is visited by his friend Eszter, who admits defeat in his quest for

natural harmony to his silent companion. On leaving, and in the film's closing sequence

shot, we follow Eszter as he takes Janos' earlier advice, finally encountering the whale,

the equally mute presence of this poietic object, now loosed from its destroyed

container, from the circus, the Prince, and his crowd of followers.

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[141] The director himself insists that the mob stops not in response to this image of human vulnerability, but instead with relation to the presence of a wall behind – although, in the context of the film and the presentation of this scene, it is difficult not to see this as another of his rhetorical devices.
[142] Cited in Gumbrecht, *The Production of Presence*, p. 59.

Figure 5.1

Figure 13.2

Figure 13.3

Figure 6.1

Figure 14.2

Figure 14.3

Figure 14.4

Figure 14.5

Bazin suggests that, "the impassive lens, stripping its object of all those ways of

seeing it, those piled up preconceptions, that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes

have covered it," is, "able to present it [the world] in all its virginal purity to my

attention."[143] In terms more specific to Tarr, and returning to Heidegger, Abbott posits

such perception, or experience, as *poetic*, and asserts that, "everyday being-in-the-world

[143] Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," p.15.

can itself be suspended by a poetic experience of the world/world as such, which is a kind of touching against the materiality of existence."[144] This "world as such" is the "world" as a phenomenon, as event, what Heidegger calls in *Being and Time* "the worldhood of the world."[145] It is significant, in this sense, that Gunning posits Bazin's "central theoretical claim about cinematic realism" to be found in what the earlier theorist calls, "an integral realism, a recreation of the world in its own image," and which Gunning relates to the distinction between a true- and pseudo-realism.[146] Gunning sees this image as an attempt "to overcome the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, and even between materialism and idealism" in a way that speaks to our current concerns.[147] As Gunning asserts, there is a sense in which "the world in its own image" in Bazin's (myth of) total cinema can be taken as equivalent to the phenomenological concept of "the worldhood of the world";[148] the imaging of the world as phenomenon, or *as such*. In the artwork, the site of unconcealment, the world is set to work – the "world worlds" – showing itself as the opened clearing of (and opening to) human understanding, as the means through which earthly phenomena become known as what they are, are made sensible and meaningful. At the same time, it gestures toward that which always-already precedes the interpretations that structure the way this openness opens, this being "earth," concealed or buried beneath the human world. It is significant, in this sense, that several of the examples provided by Shklovsky for the experience of *ostranenie*, and

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[144] Abbott, *The Figure of This World*, p.53
[145] Heidegger, *BT*, p.91.
[146] Tom Gunning, "The World in Its Own Image: The Myth of Total Cinema" in *Opening Bazin*, p.123.
[147] Idem.
[148] Ibid, p.125.

particularly those from Lev Tolstoy, are in the mode of free indirect discourse (or *erlebte Rede*). In particular – and in a mode that we will have recourse to refer to again in regards to the figure of the animal in Tarr - Tolstoy uses the perspective of a horse as a vehicle of his own social commentary, a mirror to the human world[149] (in a way that resonates, tellingly, with Kafka's figure of Red Peter, the learned ape of "Report for an Academy"). That Heidegger elsewhere distinguishes animals as being *weltarm,* or "poor in world,"[150] might indicate how such devices are of particular use in giving form to *Aletheia -* which discloses "world" *as such* – in that human being is seen from uncanny perspectives. In a form that itself touches against Pasolini's definition of im-signs as standing "at the limit of the human," Abbott calls poetic experience, "the emergence that lies on the boundary of the linguistic/equipmental world of Dasein."[151] These limit experiences allow one to glimpse the uncanny contingency of the human world, its gratuity, as it stands upon "earth," the non-objectified objective or the Being of beings. It is in this sense an attunement to the world that is at once, or alternately, melancholic and wonder-full (in the mode of *Thaumazein*, shock or wonder, which was discussed in the previous chapter). With our understanding of the way in which Aletheia - unconcealment - works to disclose the "being of beings," the grounding of "world" on "earth," we might view Bazin's appeal to "true realism" under a similar light. Where the "myth of total cinema," or of indexical realism, might centre on the *idee fixe* of an objective duplication of the world, this attempt to disclose the always fleeting and

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[149] Shklovsky, "Art as Device," p.82.
[150] Heidegger, *FCM*, p.186.
[151] Abbott, *The Figure of the World*, p.35.

retreating illumination of the mysteries of "the real" essentially meets with a resistance, of which Bazin was aware. This difficulty in achieving a "total cinema" is thus not only or primarily a technical matter – of achieving greater or "total" likeness – but instead part of the conditioning of our historical experience, our ways of seeing and mode of being. The worldhood of the world is the opening of "the Open," that which is elevated and brought near to us, alongside its "earthly" origins, in the unconcealment of art – or, in "the world in its own image." The great significance of art in this view is that it can make present the horizons of our understanding, as well as expand upon them, through the happening of unconcealment. As Bazin seems to suggest in his discourse on the medium, the cinema is a privileged mode of the realisation of the event of such truth. And as Tarr might add to this, it is a primitive language, very simple where adequately observed, for it can be seen even – or especially – by "idiots."

4. "Movements Speak": Rhythm and Gesture at the End of Time.

In the progression of my argument through the issues of mood, language and presence, as well as in the broader critical discourse surrounding Tarr, there are a number of key terms that appear naturally and recurrently. The sequence shot that underpins Tarr's style is intrinsically linked to movement and animation, and is frequently accorded a "choreographic" character. Its gravitation toward material presence is most often effected by relation to the movement (or repose) of human bodies, and with a reticence toward directive speech in favour of metacommunication, through which an inclination toward the corporeal and "gestural" emerges. And it is with regard to *Stimmung* and its totalising affective atmosphere that the suggestion of musical and tonal qualities of experience becomes a significant association, in which the corporeal and choreographic intersect. It is in this connection that the final chapter will take the concept of rhythm as its initial subject, in order to draw together the underlying ideas of music, movement and gesture.

It is a common sense that rhythm *moves us,* that it forms a movement that impresses upon bodies and consciousness, setting them in motion. This is evident in music and in our dance to it, and has a corresponding currency in the plastic arts. It also remains the case for rhythms that are not essentially poietic in kind, or human in origin. The rhythms of life, of nature, of modernity or industry, or of whatever else pertains to the term, are perceived by us as rhythms exactly for the reason that the motion they give

form to is meaningful or expressive, whether directly or analogically. Indeed, it seems

apparent that these phenomena and our experience of them provide models for our

aesthetic conception of rhythm. This is perhaps best shown in that etymological account,

now discredited, which took the idea of rhythm to originate in the perpetual cycle of

breaking waves, the (ebb and) "flow" of which figures a discrete pattern of repetition

with/in a fluid continuity.[1] Even where disputed, a gleam of insight flashes in this wave-

image: that we do not speak of rhythm without considering, at some level, what its

pattern of movement gives form to; what its figure displays, reflects, accentuates or

animates. To this end, the status of rhythm in Tarr's cinema is of special significance,

where these films seek to realise an experience of – and attunement to – the expressive

qualities of presence, the "metacommunications" of movement, materiality and time.

These are joined together in a vital formalism that loosens the binds of narrative

economy and motions instead in the direction of phenomenal associations. This

suspension of "story" (and, in extension, history and ideology) gestures toward a state of

being, or an existential situation. Its distancing effects a displacement of those filmic

conventions which ordinarily accentuate the dramatic exigency of narration, through

montage, onto an almost exclusive use of long-takes. This is a displacement, moreover,

that implies a certain dis-position, and our dislocation into a time, space and perception

that is not our own; and, more than this, into a "cosmic perspective." Tarr calls the

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[1] This is the starting point for Emile Benveniste's analysis of the concept of rhythm – one that begins from a similar point of principle of the current argument, but which ultimately follows a different etymological path. See Emile Benveniste, "The Notion of "Rhythm" in its Linguistic Expression" in *Problems in General Linguistics* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971), p.281.

construction of this perspective a "circular dance," and speaks of a "rhythm" through which space, place, and movement are joined together –and revealed, together - within the duration of mobile sequence shots. Editing ("mobile editing") is subsumed into the choreography by which the dynamic integrity of a shot is realised, a mediation of relative movements presided over by co-director Ágnes Hranitzky. This "dance" is set to music in real-time, and is a method which grounds the realisation of - and correspondence between - these presences, while further strengthening the impression of a balletic incorporation of time and space. All of this suggests a complex staging of situation, the disclosure of event and atmosphere in a mediation of the relative motions of bodies and of the camera within an environment, to music.

Indeed, the idea of a "circular dance" is a specific precedent for the notion of choreography, and one which refers directly to rhythm in its original form, as *rhythmos.* In its first recorded usage, *rhythmos* refers to an ethical principle, to a bind that "holds men."[2] More generally speaking, it implies a dynamic structure, the perceptible form taken by a mobile element – the figure of a movement, or the disposition of those elements that characterise it. It is with regard to a combination of *rhythmos* and *harmonia* – orders of movement and of sound - that the "round-dance" of *choreia* is formed, and by this same token that *rhythmos* comes to be regarded as the "measure of dance," its metre.[3] This is reflected in a common contemporary interpretation of rhythm

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[2] Archilochus is widely cited as the earliest known use of the term, with slightly varying translations; a discussion of the translation and interpretation of the text can be found in Vincent Barletta, "Rhythm as Form" in *Dibur Literary Journal* 2 (Spring 2016), pp.49-50.

[3] J.J. Pollitt, *The Ancient View of Greek Art: Criticism, History, and Terminology* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), p.224-225.

as "measured flow," a concept that harmonises ostensibly opposing principles, of "order"

in consideration of "flux." But the idea of a "measured flow" also speaks to a tension at

the heart of rhythm, a tension with a specifically temporal character. For where the

instrumental measure of rhythmic regularity originates the formal display of clock-time,

and, so, our chronometric time concept, rhythm can also be regarded as an affective

presence which resists this time: at once a displacement *of* and *in* regulated temporality.

Agamben, in particular, speaks to an element of rhythmic presence that "throws" us into

a more original dimension of time, which opens a more original form of measure – that of

our "dwelling," in "what binds men."[4] Indeed, he associates the "measure" of rhythm

with *logos*, ratio and articulation, rather than with reference to *metron*.[5] This is not *logos*

as language or logic, however, but as that principle of "gathering-together" to which later

derivations respond.[6] It is in this sense that rhythm is to be regarded as the disposition of

a work's elements, the being or *animus* of a work. In a way that speaks to the notion of

metacommunication, *rhythmos* thus connotes a certain legibility of that which is

conveyed by movement and material form.

The idea of rhythm as animated disposition follows from an alternate etymology

to that which refers to the root *rheo-*, "flow." A more luminous path has been traced by

the German philologist Eugen Petersen, starting from the prefix *ern-*, "draw."[7] Seen in

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[4] Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, pp.98-100.
[5] Ibid. p.98.
[6] I follow here the translation offered in Heidegger's analysis of the word in Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried & Richard Polt (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), p.131.
[7] I have been unable to find a translation of Petersen's influential article, and refer to the outline of it in: Pollitt, *The Ancient View of Greek Art,* pp.222-223; Pollitt cites the article as follows: Eugen Petersen,

this way, *rhythmos* gestures instead toward the notion of a "drawn form," a form that binds and articulates. It can be situated within the productive polysemy of the word "drawing," which denotes both of carriage (transporting) and impression (drafting).[8] The common notion conveyed by these terms is that of "bearing," as in the form or comportment which manifests "character." By this reference, the development of articulated *rhythmos* into the measured flow of rhythm runs parallel to that of *ethos.* In each case, "dwelling" and "drawing" become incorporated into a notion of perceptible manner or legible form. Intriguingly, it is with reference to a breakdown in the sphere of bodily conduct – the integrity of corporeal bearing – that Agamben positions a novel theory of cinema. He does so with regard to gesture, read as the dynamic element of the image that breaks the bind of the still;[9] and which, more than this, draws it away from "narrative power," toward being encountered *as such*.[10] Where Agamben has an experimental montage cinema chiefly in mind, he opens a ground for thinking about Tarr's poetic experience of metacommunications in terms of gesture. This is particularly the case in that gesture, in Agamben's view, is to be regarded as a communication of communicability – of language as a medium – which does not transcend into word or concept. It is language encountered as a "pure means" (without ends), as an "incurable

"Rhythmus," *Abhandlungen der Kön. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Phil.-Hist. Klasse*, N.F. 16 (1917): 1-104.

[8] Pollitt, *The Ancient View of Greek Art*, p.223.

[9] Giogio Agamben, "Notes on Gesture" in *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics* trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p.56.

[10] Giorgio Agamben, "Difference and Repetition: On Guy Debord's Films" trans. Brian Holme in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents* ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The MIT Press, 2002), pp.317.

speech defect."[11] The Benjaminian notion of pure means holds a central place in Agamben's ethics, where it refers to the mediality of human being, its lack of a historical or transcendental endpoint – of any "vocation" to be fulfilled. In this, it gestures toward a notion that Tarr suggests is part of a lost human dignity, a displacement that emerges through a corruption in or by our use of language. That this is the site to which gesture responds is another point of connection with the understanding of being in Tarr's films, which will be explicated with specific reference to the figurations of dwelling in *The Turin Horse,* and of animal "life" throughout Tarr's oeuvre. It is in this direction that we might identify a new "rhythm" that can hold men, within a logic that extends beyond the categories of "life" and "man" as we ordinarily understand them.

Flow and Bind: Rhythm as Disposition.

The idea of animation is central to the important role accorded to rhythm in the phenomenological aesthetics of Mikel Dufrenne. He suggests that the rhythm of an artwork is "a disposition of the elements which articulate and order its movement – a movement by which the work is temporalized...and becomes an animated being."[12] Rhythm is a "spatialization of time and a temporalization of space,"[13] a movement into which space and time are enfolded, in which they become formed into a figure of

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[11] Ibid. p.60.
[12] Mikel Duffrene, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience,* trans. Edward S. Casey, eds. Albert A. Anderson, Willis Domingo and Leon Jacobson (Evanston: Northwest University Press, 1973), p.308.
[13] Ibid. p.247.

duration. Regarded in this way, rhythm is at once the (perceived or implied) movement that animates the work and the experience of duration opened up by it. With reference to Dufrenne's definition, we can say that rhythm is that in which the *being* of the work, its essential dynamic, energy or *animus,* is - to paraphrase Heidegger - "set to work," or (with Gadamer, for instance) into play. As it comes to cinema, where an impression of time is fundamental to any tangible articulation of world (let alone being-in-the-world), rhythm is most readily identified in the way that temporality is implied through images and their combination into narrative structure. In other words, it is associated with dramaturgy and the *pacing* of events, the movement effected in a dynamic interchange between shot and plot through editing. Yvette Biro observes, however, that more diverse aspects of presence are transformed and temporalised according to rhythmic configuration. Biro suggests that, "although the order of a recognisable pattern presupposes regularity, this consists of contrasting elements…," in which,

> …the physical movements of a film's actors, together with alternation of light and shadow, the vitality of the camera, and, moreover, the elements of sound and silence, the accents and the beats, all express content and emotion, and these devices stand in a complex, dialectical relationship with each other. The sole ground of any richness is the tension within the ensemble of these dynamic factors.[14]

Viewed in these terms, rhythm's operating principle would not be cyclical *regularity* but instead confluent *difference*, in the forming of a system or *dispositif* with a *Gestalt*

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[14] Yvette Biro, *Turbulence and Flow in Film: The Rhythmic Design,* trans. Paul Salamon (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), p.232.

character, wherein the form *in toto* impresses something other than its constituent parts in sum. This impression can take place just as well at the level of single images as it does in the flow effected between them by montage; or both as "form" and by virtue of its "contents." More than this, and more pertinent to my discussion of Tarr, cinema can achieve novel rhythmic modalities through the mobility of the camera. Movement is embodied by and disclosed through the passage of its gaze, is imparted upon matter and revealed by this animation. At each stage, rhythm is the dynamic ensemble of a productive tension, the meaningful commerce between the movements, materialities or (con)textures of relative phenomena as they are joined into a sensible form. Rhythm can in this sense be regarded as the spatio-temporal architectonics of cinema's realisation of "worldness." For cinema and for art in general, rhythm is the distribution of movement (and corresponding non-movement, repose), both perceived and implied, through which a work's *being* is articulated and staged. It is the animated structure of material presence, what Andrew Benjamin calls *mattering,* to describe the way that artworks work to *make materiality matter* (to us);[15] or in other words, how the form of its activity is structured and accentuated, made present. Indeed, as Benjamin makes clear, in much the same way as Gumbrecht in the previous chapter, this presence speaks to, "a founding inseparability of the work of matter, on the one hand, and meaning as its aftereffect, on the other. Those hands are always already joined."[16] Significantly, this binding of meaning

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[15] Andrew Benjamin, "Matter and Movement's Presence: Notes on Heidegger, Francesco Mosca, and Bernini" in *Research in Phenomenology* 42 (2012), pp.345-349.
[16] Ibid. p.348.

to the experience of material presence – and, more than this, only and always as an

aftereffect of this encounter – reflects an original conception of rhythm.

In reading *rhythmos* as stemming from *ern-*, "draw," a new emphasis is placed on

the suffix   *-thmos* as signifying an active "doing," rather than the more passive

"happening" implied by "flow."[17] *Rhythmos* can be seen, in this sense, as "drawn form" –

as that form which draws phenomena together into a dynamic figure of animation. J.J.

Pollitt suggests that this Greek "drawing" signifies the same double meaning found in

many languages, including contemporary English, in which "to draw" can denote either a

pulling (of a mass) or a drafting (of pictorial line).[18] Where both invoke motion, the

former implies movement as its essential function (transport, carriage), whereas the

latter's movement serves to delineate a form - an impression, image, or figure.[19] This

etymological polysemy of "drawing" sustains a significant relation between the

movement implied by "carriage" and the manifest "character" conveyed through this

movement, embodied by it; "convey" is itself an evident expression of this connection

between "transport" and "impression" with regard to a manner of bearing, as are the

way people "carry themselves," their "comportment."[20] Pollitt suggests an alignment

between the idea of *rhythmos,* in terms of bearing or disposition, and the Greek term

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[17] Pollitt, *The Ancient View of Greek Art*, p.223.
[18] Idem.
[19] The Standard English etymology of pictorial "drawing" is derived from the more general case of physical exertion, and cites the "dragging" of a point across a surface as the root of pictorial "drawing." See "draw, v.," OED Online, January 2018 (Oxford University Press), www.oed.com/view/Entry/57534?rskey=UPc7jm&result=1&isAdvanced=false (Accessed January 29, 2018).
[20] It is more distinct still in the German verb *tragen*, which shares a common derivation with the English "draw", via "drag," and which denotes at once the acts of "wearing," "bearing," and "carrying."

charakter, which originally referred to inscription - a mark or imprint – but had already been extended during ancient times to denote "a defining quality."[21] In each case there occurs a familiar doubling that connects incorporated character to personal characteristic, which stems from the notion of a significant forming or arrangement – a *disposition* of distinctive marks or accents. A step further in this direction opens up the perspective that *rhythmos*, as characteristic form or figure, corresponds to the extension of *ethos* from "dwelling" toward "mode of being." Indeed, the first known inscription of Greek *rhythmos* appears at what Vincent Barletta calls an, "intersection of poetry and ethics," in a call to moderation, or measure.[22] The poet Archilocus, in character as a victorious soldier, compels himself to, "come to know the rhythm that holds men."[23] This idea of rhythm's hold, as binding force, is one that remains in currency for some time thereafter.[24] Rhythm regarded in this sense is that which holds or joins, an articulated "form" or "modality" (of movement) made-manifest. But the original, "ethical" status of *rhythmos* is itself transformed, displaced and tethered to its opposite (*a-rithmos*, number), in a transition to the sphere of aesthetics. Plato applies *rhythmos* to describe the *metron* of *choreia*, or "measure of dance."[25] The order of steps (and, more particularly, the dancer's pause upon planted foot) generates the scheme of a numerical

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[21] Pollitt, *The Ancient View of Greek Art*, p.223.

[22] Vincent Barletta. "Rhythm as Form," p.50.

[23] Ibid. p.49.

[24] Several commentators make particular mention of its usage in Aeschylus' Prometheus, in which the eponymous figure - chained to a rock, so that an eagle may daily devour his ever-regenerating liver – refers to a "rhythm" in which he is "bound"; for this reason, Heidegger, following Thrasybulos Georgiades, emphasises a notion of rhythm – of being "rhythmed" – that configures an unusual semantic space, signalling between *Gepräge* and *Fesseln*, "character" and "fetters." See Martin Heidegger & Eugen Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar 1966/67* trans. Charles H. Seibert (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1979), p.55.

[25] Benveniste, "The Notion of "Rhythm" in its Linguistic Expression," pp.286-287.

notation, its meter. With this position, rhythm becomes the meter that forms musical

structure according to dance steps, tying them numerically. With this "new" sense,

rhythm comes to be regarded as the *timing* of movement: its formal *schema* becomes a

measure through which temporality is made manifest. As Sylviane Agacinski observes,

> Any rhythm can provide a unit of time (for example, the pulse). Any regular movement can be
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> used to construct a unit of movement and time. These units remain approximate as long as
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> instruments could not guarantee the perfect regularity that, today, adds to the illusion of pure
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> time.[26]

Seen in this way, the "pure time" of our contemporary chronology is approximate with

that regular definition of rhythm as a "measured flow." The irreversible stream of

homogeneous instants made-present by the clock are a sensible "measure" of the "flow"

of phenomenality, the form through which flux can be apprehended.

Rhythmic movement, as a perceptible pattern of repetition (and our anticipation

of it), embodies a unit of measurement by which the course of time is displayed. But

while rhythm can be regarded as that which originates our measure of time and, so, our

contemporary chrono-metric time-concept, it is at the same time fundamentally resistant

to the homogeneity of "clock-time." This tension between rhythm and (clock) time is

recognised also by Daniel Yacavone, who suggests that the latter, "never varies,

bespeaking of a mechanism in contrast to what is organic and living."[27] Indeed, and re-

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[26] Sylviane Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia* trans. Jody Gladding (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp.44-45.

[27] Daniel Yacavone, *Film Worlds: A Philosophical Aesthetics of Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p.207.

echoing concepts from my first chapter, notable debates on technological modernity in the early 20th century had centred on notions of rhythm, with Karl Bücher's study *Work and Rhythm* – on the relation between industrial labour and the body – particularly influential.[28] Jean-Claude Schmitt suggests that, for Bücher, "industrial civilisation and mechanisation jerk humans out of their bodily rhythms," and maintained that, "the rhythms of collective work and dance are the genesis of poetry, song, music and even language."[29] This vein of thought closely parallels the dialectic of boredom in Walter Benjamin, and his description of the communal, habitual rhythms that are a condition for constructive boredom in "The Storyteller" – a connection toward which Schmitt gestures.[30] For Bücher, the problem most affecting modern working conditions lay primarily with tempo – where, as Michael Cowan puts it, "the rhythms of industry had left those of the body behind." A similar notion was registered in the first chapter, where repetition as a quality of experience (*schock-erlebnis/pathos* contra *erfahrung/ethos*) was seen to be affected by the pace of recurrence.

Another influential work on the subject of rhythm, Ludwig Klages' essay *Nature of Rhythm* (1923), also uses the body as its model for a consideration of the difference between rhythm and repetition. Klages posits an organic consistency (without uniformity) that characterises natural rhythm, or *Rhythmus*, against the continuity effected in the fixed pulse, or *Takt*, of the mechanic; the latter, a measure that he associates with "the

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[28] Michael Cowan, "The Heart Machine: "Rhythm" and Body in Weimar Film and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*" in *Modernism/modernity* 14, no.2 (2007), p.228.
[29] Jean-Claude Schmitt, "A History of Rhythms in the Middle Ages" in *The Medieval History Journal* 15 no. 1 (2012), p.11.
[30] Ibid. p.9.

ordering and segmenting activity of the intellect."[31] As Cowan shows, these discussions of

rhythm – which centred around the effect of technology on the body, of the mechanic on

the organic - very quickly entered concurrent theoretical debates around the cinema.[32]

For cinema's articulated animation of duration, it could justifiably lay claim to status

among the temporal arts, along with (intrinsically rhythmic) music and dance. The idea of

a corporeal rhythm underlying techno-rationalised order was taken up by theorists and

filmmakers who aspired to the utopian vision of film as a universal language. Advocates

of abstract film, in particular, regarded the construction of "optical rhythms" as means to

"appeal directly to the emotions, bypassing rational intellection, as it were, by eliminating

the conscious content of plot."[33] But the definite nature of cinema's rhythms remained

(and remains) a point of contention, and especially given the diminished role of avant-

garde formalism in contemporary film culture. Rhythm in narrative film does not, or not

only, serve to bypass rational intellection, but to give form to an expression of world.

More than this, a central ambiguity inheres in the distinction between the periodical

durations of *Rhythmus* and the segmented seriality of mechanically repeated movement

– of *Takt* – which remains difficult to define exactly.[34] Both remain *measurable quantities*

that can, with the correct instruments, become regulated or rationalised, as per the

above quote from Agacinski. It is in their affective significance that the difference is *felt*

between rhythms: where serial repetition expresses only its regularity, the flux of rhythm

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[31] Cowan, "The Heart Machine," p.231.
[32] Ibid. p.234.
[33] Ibid. p.226.
[34] Ibid. p.231.

admits anomaly and coheres heterogeneous elements into a meaningful form of experience. Agamben accords a comparable ambivalence to the temporal quality of rhythm, which, "grants men both the ecstatic dwelling in a more original dimension and the fall into the flight of measurable time."[35]

Seen in this way, as the other side of the phenomenon described by Agacinski, rhythm is the principle both of an instrumental measure of temporality, and of the suspension of its "measured flow." There is thus a tension at the heart of our experience of rhythm as a temporal phenomenon. It is that which makes time manifest as a form of movement, in a configuration of relative movements, the regularity of which presents a quantity for temporal measure. But it is, at the same time, an affective presence which resists the fugitive time that clocks measure and display, which opens a more original experience of significant duration, an encounter through which time as we ordinarily conceive it tends to disappear. This is an observation that is central to Agamben's elevation of rhythm to the status of art's essential structure, its fundamental architectonics.[36] Agamben gestures toward an "original" experience of art in the sense used by Heidegger - where art is itself the *origination* of disclosive truth, the being "set to work" of the "strife" between "earth" and "world." Agamben's model for this experience is exemplified by the temporality of musical rhythm. It is,

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[35] Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, p.100.
[36] Ibid. p.101.

> …something that escapes the incessant flight of instants and appears almost as the presence of an atemporal dimension in time…as though we were suddenly thrown into a more original time.[37]

The original experience of art is this experience of a break from the linear stream of measurable time, from its ordinary progressive "flow," an encounter Agamben characterises as our being "thrown" (into an assumption of presence, of the "present space" of a "present truth").[38] This recalls Heidegger's *geworfenheit*, our "thrownness" into "world," the exposure to a historical context that is not our own. It is for the reason of our being essentially "not-at-home" in "world" that the structure of experience denoted by *Stimmung* was drawn, in the first chapter, toward a notion of disposition as a mode of productive displacement. In this direction, Agacinski makes a perceptive suggestion about the cinema with reference to the Benjaminian figure of the *flaneur*. Like the strolling idler of 19th century Paris who "embraces the time of things" in contemplative observation, who experiences "other" times, with cinema the viewer, "yields to a rhythm of a movement that is not their own," "loses time," and can (in leaving the world of the film) become "suspended between two times."[39] Such an experience is, as per a notion used elsewhere in Agacinski's study of time in modernity, a mode of displacement.[40] It is the experience of a perception that is not (or not only) our own, a rupture with the continuity of our "subjectivity" that dispositions one in an affective proximity to the space-time of an-other person and/or world. This notion of a

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[37] Ibid. p.99.
[38] Idem.
[39] Agacinski, *Time Passing*, p.56.
[40] Ibid. p.18.

coercive rhythm returns us to a consideration posited in the first chapter – that such

films as want to make a claim on us as participants dispose us to their particular mode of

disclosing "world," which we mediate as a relation to our own experience. This alterity of

rhythm and its ability to displace us is referred to by Emmanuel Levinas, where he states

that, "in rhythm there is no longer a oneself, but rather a sort of passage from oneself to

anonymity."[41] Levinas views rhythm as a mode of self-forgetting "participation" in a

continuity which carries one away from oneself and into "anonymous" pleasure, an

otherness that we are drawn into or borne away by, rather than one which we encounter

(as "face" or "other").[42] According to his ethics of responsibility, the supposedly

harmonising affect of rhythm and our participation in it assert a hold over us in a negative

sense. But Levinas also, like Agamben, propounds a "negative aesthetics," and equates

rhythm with the being or functioning of art works as such.[43] Moreover, Levinas likewise

views the essential significance of art experience in its rupture from continuity (but

explicitly by way of fragmentation and dissonance).[44] The idea of *Stimmung* – viewed as

the medium of our exposure to otherness, to "thrownness" – mediates between these

two positions. As Agamben relates, *Stimmung* is the product of a dissonance and a

scission at the same time as it is a means of consonance and harmony.[45] When rhythm is

considered not simply as "flow" but as a dynamic form of experience – a disposition

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[41] Emmanuel Levinas, "Reality and Its Shadow" in *The Levinas Reader* ed. Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p.133.
[42] Gary Peters, "The rhythm of alterity: Levinas and aesthetics" in *Radical Philosophy* 82 (March/April, 1997), p.15
[43] Ibid. p.14.
[44] Idem.
[45] Giorgio Agamben, "Voice and Vocation," p.95.

which displaces us - it represents not a passive distance from otherness, but an active

encounter with the "happening" and "mattering" of material presence.

Music, Movement and Measure.

The contemporary association of rhythm with temporality responds to the use of regular

movement as a measure of time. As Biro reminds us, however, rhythmic form is a relative

distribution of elements that, while producing a sense of temporality by the dynamic of

its form, is fundamentally unaffected by modification in tempo.[46] That is, tempo is

subordinate to the structural integrity of rhythm, the *ratio* of its disposition. This idea of

ratio is maintained, but in another form, in Agamben's discussion of rhythm as the

"original structure of the work of art." In *The Man Without Content*, he suggests that,

> …precisely because rhythm is that which causes the work of art to be what it is, it is also Measure
>
> and *logos* (*ratio*) in the Greek sense of that which gives every thing its proper station in presence.
>
> Rhythm attains this essential dimension, and is Measure in this original meaning…[47]

Rhythm is original *Measure*, Agamben says, a measure which precedes number, and

which thus speaks to a qualitative delimitation rather than its quantum.[48] Agamben, like

Heidegger - to whom he is evidently responding – wants to consider a role for art that

exceeds aesthetics, that can open and orient human being-with, that can "take the

original measure of [human] dwelling on earth."[49] This is measure in the sense by which it

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[46] Biro, *Turbulence and Flow*, p.232.
[47] Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, p.98.
[48] Idem.
[49] Ibid. p.101.

applies to *ethos*, as proportion, moderation and limit - the bounds of "dwelling," the bind

of common-place or "world" - rather than with regards to rule or instrumental rationality.

This "dwelling" is not (or not only) a spatial category or definite area, but what "holds

men" (together). It is not *ratio* as calculation but instead in the sense of *logos*, which

Agamben equates with the being of the work: the region it opens to experience. We

associate *logos* with language and with logic, but the exact definition and translation of

the term is not straightforward. As was established in the introduction, etymologically it

implies a setting out and gathering together, a "gatheredness" which thus implies

productive multiplicity, or conducive difference. In this, it is much like that *binding-*

together of "world" and "earth" that is, at the same time, their *setting-apart*: what

Heidegger calls "strife." Indeed, Heidegger reads from Heraclitus an equation between

logos and *polemos*, the Greek "conflict," which serves as a model for "strife" in the

artwork essay.[50] For this reason, Heidegger suggests that *logos* means originally that

which gathers-together.[51] Moreover, he positions it as a central principle of presence, a

correlate to *physis* in the early Greek philosophy – that is, nature in its widest sense as

that which grows of itself and rises forth into presence.[52] Later derivations of *logos* thus

appear to respond to this sense of an articulation that allows a significant form (of

multiplicity or complexity) to manifest, or become present. This relation between *logos*

and *rhythmos*, *logic* and *rhythm*, is indirectly referenced by Tarr in responding to a

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[50] Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p.65.
[51] Ibid. p.131.
[52] Ibid. p.64.

question about the expressive significance of his films' camera movements – the way they "speak." The director suggests that such movements are "natural," responding to,

> …a logic in a certain kind of space…a face of the location that we'd like to show, and…a natural
>
> desire of or movement of the situation itself, the way the actors move in that particular
>
> situation…it's just a matter of giving a rhythm to the whole thing…[53]

Earlier in the same interview, he refers to this rhythm as a "circular dance," a movement which binds together (and makes-manifest) the logic of space, the countenance of location, and the staging of event.[54] Tarr proceeds to expand upon the dynamics of nearness and distance by which the camera in these films "speak" through their movement, the mediation of presence through which shot-sequences are given rhythmic character.[55] In them, camera, actor and environment are drawn into a play between movement and stillness, presence and absence, light and shadow, vision and its obstruction. In place of a dramatic editing that would generate a schema of story through composite-continuity, the autonomy of the camera's free-indirect consciousness engenders an embodied motion that discloses space and distends temporality, drawing materiality into animate duration. As we have already seen, this mobility is conditioned by a resistance to the logic of action or causality, which gestures in the direction of another logic. It is a *logos* which articulates our encounter with the "face" of a situation, a disposition of elements which ground the revelation of a state of being. Communicating

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[53] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).
[54] Idem.
[55] Idem.

in this way, the camera opens our awareness of environment and draws various aspects

of the milieu, of presence, into a mutual articulation.

The "active" drawing of rhythm allows phenomena to "happen" together – it is

their gathering-together, their being set to work or play. This chimes with Tarr's "circular

dance," which is positioned by the director with reference to the reductive narrative

schema of *Damnation*. It is, he says, a distancing from "human" story that motions

toward metacommunication, where, "the wall, the rain, the dogs have their own

stories,"[56] which are brought "close to you."[57] We have already observed that Tarr

considers weather, landscape, and time, along with noise and music, to play significant

roles within his particular mode of storytelling – what the director calls, "a complex or

total movie which isn't only the story."[58] This "totality" takes its form as a pervasive

environment or milieu, the character of which is articulated by an assemblage of affective

phenomena, their being grounded by and reflected in one another. This partly recalls

Heidegger's artwork essay - the polemic "strife" between "earth" and "world" - but even

more so the notion of the "fourfold" (of earth, sky, divinities and mortals) that supplants

it as the model of truth's *happening* in the philosopher's later work. In it, a structural

polarity is maintained, but given a new form and momentum, a rhythmic movement that

assuages the implication of violence in *polemos* or "strife." Indeed, Heidegger suggests

that "world," the open space of our understanding of being, is gathered into presence as

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[56] Idem.
[57] Tarr, interview by Selavy (2012).
[58] Tarr, by Daly and Le Cain (2001).

a composition of this fourfold schema.[59] With regard to the fourfold and our dwelling in it, things are brought into a relation of "nearness" which "does not consist in shortness of distance,"[60] and which is contrasted to the "distanceless" effected by the "enframing" of technological modernity.[61] This recalls Tarr's repeated insistence upon his cinema's intended motion and affect, to "show something that is close to you," to "understand and get closer to the real things."[62] While there is little space here to account for the shifts in Heidegger's later thinking through its increasingly poetic "turn," it is significant that the notion of the fourfold subsumes the earlier "strife" into a cosmic co-implication which is referred to as a "mirror-play" or "round dance."[63] Certainly, the idea of a dance that figures something like an essential correspondence between materiality and spirituality, temporality and eternity - as a form of "play" that makes the "world" present to our experience – touches upon issues of the current argument. In Tarr, this "circular dance" implies a departure from the exigency of story in the direction of the animated-being of a world, its rhythmic disclosure of presence and "nearness." In practical terms – those which are stressed most of all by Tarr – the role of Ágnes Hranitzky is accorded a central significance in this form of "dance." She is co-director and editor for each of the films in question,[64] combining between these roles the profilmic event with its

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[59] Martin Heidegger, "The Thing" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, pp.177-178.

[60] Ibid. p.164.

[61] Heidegger makes only passing reference to the idea of "framing" in "The Thing," but gestures in the direction of the concept of "enframing" in its opening section (p.163). "Enframing" (*Gestell*) refers to the modern technological worldview, in which all things are seen to be viewed as potential resources. For Heidegger's discussion of the concept, see "The Question Concerning Technology," pp.3-35.

[62] Tarr, interview by Selavy (2012).

[63] Heidegger, "The Thing," p.178.

[64] The latter title was coined after Krasznahorkai's entrance into the circle, where before she was listed as a "co-author". This is a matter of semantics, perhaps, but one with a certain significance given the writer's "authorial" presence, as conceptual pretext with limited practical contribution.

postproduction – and, more than this, drawing them together. As Kovács describes this process,

> Each shot consists of an entire narrative sequence and represents a temporal unit that is fixed at
> the time of the shooting…Much of the process of editing is dissolved into the process of planning
> the time sequences of the story, and the rhythm of the film is also fixed in the shooting stage.[65]

Hranitzky observes the relative movements of camera and actor within the space of a scene, directing their pacing according to an innate understanding of the form or "feel" of the projective work; as Tarr suggests, "If you feel the whole rhythm of the movie, then you know…if you know what you want, you always feel the whole movie…"[66] Thus Hranitzky mediates between the three stages of production, and through roles which directly condition the "rhythmic design" of the film. In this regard, she appears as a – if not *the* – most significant quarter to the fourfold of key contributors which structures the Béla Tarr project, along with Krasznahorkai and the musician Mihály Víg.

To this end, it is all the more significant that a central method for establishing rhythm in Tarr's films – the playing of musical score in real-time - was, according to Gábor Medvigy,[67] an innovation of Hranitzky's. This use of music gestures beyond dance and, by extension, toward *choreia* – the root of both chorus and choreography – as the condition of a pro-filmic event that stages a mediation of movements. The practice of playing the soundtrack aloud during the filming of scenes is used, according to Tarr, to "get the

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[65] Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.17.
[66] Tarr, interview by Daly and Le Cain (2001).
[67] The cinematographer for *Damnation*, *Satantango*, and the majority of *Werckmeister*. Cited in Kovács, *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*, p.19.

rhythm right in terms of camera movements."[68] The director speaks of how, "Like a main

character, the music's always present."[69] Indeed, Mihály Víg's scores are themselves vital

to the preconception of these films in rhythmic terms, appearing as something of a

bridge between idea and its realisation as event. It is significant, in this sense, that Víg

suggests that music is, "the most important force for finding common ground."[70] This is a

compelling statement, in thinking about attunement and *ethos*, situatedness and tonality.

Tarr has suggested that his impression of location and of the music for these films

precedes their being scripted, following the logic of landscape and music as primary

actors and, so, pre-conditions of the work.[71] Víg is given some impression of the film –

according to the novel and/or screenplay – and composes themes in response.[72] As for

the use of Víg's themes, they present not only a form of movement by which the camera

takes its measure of the environment, but an atmosphere and a rhythm to which actors

are attuned, to which they, too, respond in their motions. Music becomes the "common

ground" for a mediation of the space and time which these people inhabit, drawing their

milieu into an affective environment. It is fitting, in this sense, that Víg's musical motifs

are so often based upon arpeggios and other cyclical refrains that invoke a "round

dance." We can refer here to a paradigm that Deleuze and Guattari formulate in *A

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[68] Tarr, interview by Andrew (2007), p.19.
[69] Tarr, interview by Daly and Le Cain (2001).
[70] Mihály Víg, "The Music of Béla Tarr," interview by Ludmila Cvikova, trans. Panni Pinter, Feb. 7, 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=BREYFIPyiAs&t=2143s
[71] Víg is afforded a significant degree of freedom to work independently on musical themes prior to production, basing these on a reading of the relevant novel and/or screenplay, and discussion about, "the film [Tarr] has in mind, but not a lot, not in detail." Béla Tarr, Fred Kelemen & Mihaly Víg, "Filmmaking as a collective project," interview by Michael Guarneri, December 2, 2014, http://bombmagazine.org/articles/bela-tarr-fred-kelemen-mihaly-vig/
[72] Idem.

Thousand Plateaus, called the *ritournelle*.[73] It is translated into English as (musical)

"Refrain," but stems from "return," and refers indirectly to a form of (round) dance. In

this context, "refrain" refers to the way that a physical space or existential "territory" is

generated and demarcated by song, or *drawn* into being by other poietic activity (with

Paul Klee provided as an example in this respect).[74] The refrain outlines an order or

pattern – perhaps a "world," even - that represents a bulwark against "chaos."[75] Deleuze

and Guattari suggest that the refrain "always carries earth with it; it has land...as its

concomitant."[76] They describe this notion of "refrain" with relation to the shared

semantic ground of *nome* and *nomos*, referring to music and law - a rule of melody and a

customary bind, respectively – and by extension toward *ethos*, as "Abode" (or

dwelling).[77] There is little room here to delve deeper into the dense terrain of Deleuze

and Guattari's *Thousand Plateaus*, but only to pursue the sense by which this notion of

refrain refers "to any kind of rhythmic pattern that stakes out a territory," as Ronald

Bogue succinctly puts it.[78] Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari situate this *ritournelle* with

relation to *Rhythms* which join together, and pass between, elemental *Milieus* (regarded

as "blocks" of "space-time").[79] Seen in this way, refrain's delineation of a space or

territory (or, for that matter, an *ethos*) can be viewed in terms of (original) "measure."

Deleuze and Guattari's reference to "Greek modes" and "ancient cosmogonies" gestures

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[73] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p.312.
[74] Idem.
[75] Idem.
[76] Idem.
[77] Idem.
[78] Roland Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Arts*, (New York: London; Routledge, 2003), p.17.
[79] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.313.

in this direction, as does their distinction between "critical" rhythm contra "dogmatic"

meter.[80] As it comes to Tarr, both the "flow" of the camera's movement (its "passage")

and the way that this draws (or "joins") the milieu into animation, into a "dance," is

figured with reference to musical refrain. Where in most cinema the score accompanies

or responds to narrative movement as tonal "background," Víg's themes co-determine

the form of Tarr's mediation between absence and presence, concealment and

revelation, in the course of integral camera movement. With reference to the central

musical refrain - a rhythmic figure - the path of bodies and camera alike are bound

together as a round-dance.

Quite apart from the choreography through which this production of milieu is

staged, Tarr's analogical invocation of dance is reflected in the significant presence of

dance within this oeuvre.[81] It is most evident (and most evidently circular) in the

communal dance that takes place toward the end of *Damnation*, and in the grotesque

carnival of *Satantango*'s pub scenes (a more restrained version of which occurs in *The

Man from London*). All of these are set to accordion-based tunes played in diegesis,

which are structured by the noticeably cyclical repetition of a motif. But dance is

implicated through figures of movement that are not "dance" per se, and which are

formed to a rhythm that is not diegetically present. I am thinking here most particularly

of the establishing scene in *Werckmeister Harmonies*, referred to in the previous chapter.

There, Janos sets drunken bodies into a play of orbits, a choreography staged in diegesis,

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[80] Ibid. pp.312-313.
[81] Dance is, however, a presence that precedes the films that are our current area of concern – in the early Tarr films, and as late as the final scene of Almanac of Fall, there are a number of representations of dance.

which is disclosed in a corresponding "dance" of complex cinematographic manoeuvres. As the scene begins, the camera is fixed in close-up on flames flickering through the grate of a heater. A hand enters the frame, opens the grate, and throws a beer mug full of water upon the fire, before restoring the grille. The camera rotates to open the frame, scanning past the hand and the mug, and slowly draws back and across as the figure possessing them proceeds forward into the space of a rundown bar. The basic décor of the setting and the scattering of slumped (and legless) forms that populate it are then revealed to us, as the bartender calls for a general exit. A figure at the far end of the room asks for a moment longer, to "let Valuska show us." He shuffles his way forward, towards the camera, which slowly advances to meet and frame his face in a close-up; the man beckons Valuska (Janos), who enters from behind and is led back into the common space, which is cleared in preparation. Positioning his unsteady petitioner as the sun, at the centre of the room, Janos enlists two other men to render the orbits of the earth and moon in their rotations around the solar body. He then proceeds to enact, "an explanation that simple folks like us can also understand about immortality," asking the men assembled to "step with me into the boundlessness, where constancy, quietude and peace, infinite emptiness reign." The camera hones in on his face as he speaks these words, but remains mobile throughout this sequence – drawing back and forward, and being drawn into the rotations of the "cosmic" bodies that Janos sets into orbit. This play of orbits is suspended, however, as Janos demonstrates a "total eclipse." The camera returns to a central position, approaching the wide-eyed earnestness of the "idiot" as he describes the air turning cold, the darkening of the sky, the howling of dogs, the panic of

Figure 7.1

Figure 15.2

Figure 15.3
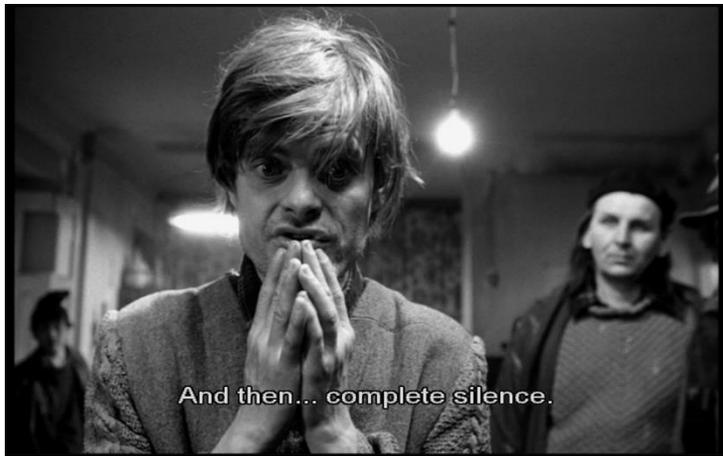
Figure 15.4

Figure 15.5

Figure 15.6

Figure 15.7

Figure 15.8

Figure 15.9

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animals, an "awful, incomprehensible dusk…and then…complete silence." After these

words, Valuska's musical theme begins to play – a simple, melancholic tune on piano that

rises and falls in circular repetition - while the camera draws back to its fullest depth,

behind a light fitting that casts angelic fluorescent light upon the stilled scene. But, as

Janos then offers after a moment's reflection, "its not over"; and as he narrates the

breaking bind of this eclipse, the camera alights to take its place among the orbit of

silently shuffling bodies, a *ritournelle* that now incorporates the remaining bystanders

into an unruly cosmos, around which the camera rotates. It comes to rests at the far end

of the bar as the universe disperses at the behest of the bartender, who stands at the

door opposite. We track forward as Janos approaches, remarking as he leaves, "but Mr.

Hagelmeyer, it is still not over." In the following shot, the string section that accompanies

the staccato piano of the "Valuska" theme enters as the camera tracks ahead and away

from Janos, venturing alone down a black road segmented by bands of street-light, his

huddled form slowly receding into distance and darkness.

　　　　Werckmeister Harmonies' opening scene effects our being-with, and being-

drawn-into an attunement to, the "idiot's" "cosmic perspective." It conveys the refrain

that describes the space of Janos' dwelling, the perspective of wonder and terror that

conditions his being-in-the-world. It is with regard to this sense of awe that Rancière

suggests Janos is "not only a dreamer," but, "the character that dares take the measure

of the extraordinary, be it the harmony of the planets, the eye of the dead whale or the

unleashing of the mob."[82] The play that he orchestrates in the opening scene manifests and animates his universal vision, bringing it to a material presence. The camera circulates with, and amongst, the materialised motions of these "heavenly bodies." It draws their stumbling forms into its passage, binding their relative movements together. In this sense, it is an emblem for the way that the camera operates in Tarr: to take a deliberated measure of situations, and give meaningful form to a milieu and mode of existence in so doing. The way that Janos brings his vision to manifest presence while setting it into motion closely reflects Rancière's description of "what Béla Tarr does himself":

> …he takes characters abandoned by history, living in an aftertime of mean and grotesque stories, and he gives them back their capacity and their dignity by a certain way of making them turn and of turning with them…[83]

The embodied gaze of Tarr's sequence shots seeks out the texture, character, and significance of a milieu, by relation to a mediation of bodies and of the space between them, environing and conditioning them; as well as in the record of bodies during their mediation (or habitation) of space. For Biro, in Tarr "everything moves in a closed time and space…oppressive and grim hopelessness permeates the movement of humans and the camera alike and define the play of light and shadow." This space and time are opened to us, made present as a substantial existential material, with reference to the bodies that dwell within them. The bearing of bodies is a central focus of the camera's

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[82] Rancière, "Béla Tarr: The Poetics and Politics of Fiction," p.260.
[83] Ibid. p.259.

excursions, opening our access to environment. More than this, as Biro recognises, these movements set into motion a play of light and shadow, of vision and its obstruction. Rancière, too, reflects on this play as a consequence of the sequence shot, its incorporating a total environment into a continuum; this, against the logic of cause and effect, of shot and reverse, which fragments space and time. For Rancière, the continuum of the sequence shot forms a "rhythm for making the rounds of all the elements composing the scenery of a place… In this manner it establishes an infinity of miniscule variations between movement and immobility." It is as a relation of the relative movements (or non-movements) of bodies, and of the camera's mediation of them, that we encounter the texture of their material environment. Regarded in this way, corporeality is among the vital sites (or *media*) for those metacommunications that characterise Tarr's retreat from "story" and toward material presence. This is recognised by the coat-check lady from the Titanik Bar during *Damnation*'s dancehall scene, when she suggests that "movements speak." Indeed, it is in response to a question referencing this line that Tarr offers the above belief in the logic of space, the revelation of a location's countenance, and the potentiality of movement. As the director suggests, these are drawn together (and disclosed) as a matter of a rhythm, as the round-dance that animates the meaningful presence of a world.

"The Apocalypse has already commenced": The Turin Horse

With the final film in this oeuvre, the gravitation toward material presence becomes

axiomatic, as does the choreographic staging of movement, music and perspective

through which this presence is disclosed. The large majority of *The Turin Horse* takes

place in observation of the quotidian routines of a destitute father and daughter as they

face an ostensible end of days. It unfolds as an extensive consideration of "dwelling" in a

quite literal sense, taking place almost entirely within a domestic space (and its

immediate surrounds), the only departure from which is both abortive and obscured

from our view behind the hill which figures the receding horizon of their world. The film

presents an attunement to a form of life in the face of its imminent dissolution, a mode

of being revealed in greater depth and detail over the course of six days of de-creation.

Routine undertakings - such as drawing water, boiling and eating a potato, sitting at the

window - are encountered each day from new perspectives, within gradually extending

courses of movement that serve to expand our familiarity with this (mode of) dwelling.

Among Tarr's films, *The Turin Horse* is by far the most reductive in terms of narrative

content, the most repetitious, with a minimal cast of characters, among whom minimal

words are shared. It is the only one among these films that the director does not believe

to be a comedy, the only instance not set in the 20th century, and the only one in which

its conclusion is final; unlike the six steps of Satantango, or those of the *ritournelle*, there

is here no "return." *The Turin Horse* also has the longest average shot length, fewest

edits, and a uniquely reductive soundtrack among these films, consisting of a single

musical theme. It is titled "Horse," and displays structural features that are common to

Víg's scores. These are often formed as or around arpeggios – that is, as chords "broken" into a succession of notes. In other words, they are structured by a sequence of steps that schematise the underlying structure of tonal harmony, in a rhythmically recurring pattern that does not extend toward the linear progression of melody, nor the consonance of a full chord. Where such chords appear, they are almost invariably dissected by an arpeggiated accompaniment which gestures back and forth in rounds; where there is melody, it tends to be rambling and repetitive, as in the (Satan's) "tango" that Víg plays upon a synthesised keyboard. "Horse" itself unfurls in repeating, intersecting cycles, as a play between contrasting tempos that come together to trace a singular figure. It is wrought upon crudely hewn double-bass steps that form lumbering root notes, its meter, a loping alternation of bow-drawn beats between which the six steps of an arpeggio on cello and organ ebb and flow. Rising over it at half-speed, a lament on rasping strings likewise proceeds as three tonal steps (with the last doubled) and their return, twice forward and then twice back. Further layers of temporal contrast are gradually introduced, with lilting flurries of high-strings and loops on the organ that redouble the sense of an uneasily balanced momentum. The motion of the piece evinces an awkward gait that is urgent and laboured; it is a slow plodding onward borne by an agonised flux of minor dynamics, a chaotic struggle taking a perceptible form into which we are drawn. This vital aural presence animates the film's world as well as the *choreia* through which it is disclosed. The rambling momentum of "Horse" is introduced in tandem with the movement that is its thematic inspiration – that of the eponymous beast of burden and its one-armed driver; they ford through an environment typical to

Figure 8.1

Figure 16.2

Figure 16.3

Figure 16.4

Figure 16.5

Figure 16.6

Tarr, a desolate landscape encountered within a pervasive climactic resistance, in this case a buffeting windstorm. The dynamic opposition sustained by this image of tempest is joined, and joined together, by a third element - the freeform tracking shot which forms and transforms this flux of movement into image. The camera rotates back and forth, from portrait to profile, and at an oscillating proximity that responds to the movement and texture of this struggling procession. The presence of this carriage is at points heavily particularised, tactile and near to hand, while at others revealed from distance as a whole, an assemblage of moving parts. This independent coursing of the camera discloses the evident strain of the convoy, and the sinews stretching beneath the matted hide of the weather-beaten horse. It figures a contraposition of corporeal gait to the momentum produced by it in the regular turning of the cartwheel, the bending of ropes and jolting of the wagon that joins horse-power to this revolution, and which joins beast to man. And, against all this, it gives form to the force of the wind that blows clouds of dust and debris against them, obscuring our vision and theirs, sending mane, hair and clothing adrift in violent arabesques. It is only as the shot comes toward its conclusion, and the pace of the procession slows down, that we are introduced to diegetic sound. The howl of this apocalyptic gale and the creak of the wooden cart gradually enter the sound track. In this establishing sequence, a world is drawn into animate being by a straining, grinding refrain, which articulates the form and figure of a certain quality of experience, if not existence.

Figure 16.7

Figure 16.8

Figure 16.9

Figure 16.10

Figure 16.11

Figure 16.12

Prior to this introduction to the Turin horse and its musical theme, the film begins with a monologue over a black screen: a gravelly male voice describes the infamous scenario of Friedrich Nietzsche's descent into madness. The text of the monologue was written by Krasznahorkai, originally as the introduction to a short essayistic reflection titled "At Latest in Turin."[84] To summarise the anecdote: Nietzsche encounters an uncompliant horse being mercilessly beaten by its driver in the street, whereupon – in a seemingly ironic contravention of the thinker's own life philosophy – he is overcome with a fit of compassion, the blow of which renders him senseless and mute for the remainder of his days. Rather than with Nietzsche, or with his famous last words – "*Mutter, ich bin Dumm*" – Krasznahorkai's script that introduces both essay and film concludes with the assertion that, "No one knows what happened to the horse."[85] The after-life of this fabular beast of burden inspired intermittent discussion between the writer and Tarr after he first heard Krasznahorkai read "At Latest in Turin" in 1985, eventuating almost two decades later in Krasznahorkai's preparation of the scenario for *The Turin Horse*. In the second paragraph of "At Latest in Turin," however, Krasznahorkai already questions the authenticity of the Nietzsche fable (and so, perhaps, that of the horse itself), but suggests that,

> the natural tendency at such times to believe strong narratives lends it a certain credence and casts a particularly intense light on the last acts of the spirit according to a dramatized model of the intellect.[86]

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[84] László Krasznahorki, "At Latest in Turin," p.24.
[85] Idem.
[86] Idem.

The writer pursues this thought, proceeding from the street scene and toward a consideration of the Nietzschean philosophy in its contradistinction from (ostensibly "Christian" values of) compassion, communion, and "the spirit of the moral law."[87] Of the latter, Krasznahorkai gleans the following lesson from Nietzsche's apparent demise: "I may live counter to the spirit [of moral law] but that does not release me from the mysterious and truly unnameable power that binds me firmly to it…it is the sad prerogative of freedom to negate freedom."[88] In these terms, the writer is speaking to much the same form of "bind" as did Archilocus in his invocation to "come to know the rhythm that holds men." Krasznahorkai gestures toward a certain *ethos*, "a sense of communion" that will be realised "in ten…or in thirty years' time", or, coming full circle, "at latest in Turin."[89] The film, by contrast to the essay, leaves Nietzsche mute and well alone after the monologue,[90] proceeding immediately to the "rhythm" of that establishing sequence described above. A "script" is available on Krasznahorkai's personal website, with the dedication: "created with Béla Tarr's thoughts and ideas, for his spiritual recovery."[91] More than just the product of their discussions, then, this scenario is influenced by Tarr's own practice and formed – figuratively, at least – in the director's

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[87] Ibid., p.25.
[88] Idem.
[89] Idem.
[90] Although a second monologue, delivered in diegesis and referred to in previous chapters, has distinctly Nietzschean overtones
[91] Krasznahorkai also lists multiple works of his own on which the script is based. Available (in Hungarian) at: www.krasznahorkai.hu/docs/A_torinoi_lo_forgatokonyv.pdf. Above translation by Szusza Selyem, "How Long and When," p.106.

image (as much as for it). In an illuminating intertextual analysis that positions *The Turin Horse* between Krasznahorkai and Tarr, Szusza Selyem suggests that the "script,"

> presents day-to-day living as concretely as possible…Krasznahorkai's famous long sentences, with their specific rhythm and repetitions, here, deprived of all poetry, gives us only the mere rhythm and repetition itself. If they are still beautiful, it is not because of the composition but because of the feeling that the repetitiveness of bare material existence is still beautiful…It is beautiful compared to the pervasive darkness.[92]

In other words, Krasznahorkai renders the scenario prosaic in preparation for its poetic substantiation into the affective materiality of concrete presence. The rhythmic pulse of his prose is joined to rhythms of everydayness, the deformation of which is the subject of our intimate observation. Indeed, rhythm is another significant way to think the difference between Krasznahorkai and Tarr. However much writer and director share in the length of respective "utterance" (whether sentence or shot), the rhythm produced through an accretion and assonance of words and sentences is of a different quality to that which is formed in the sequence of Tarr's "mobile editing." The scenario for *The Turin Horse* (and its realisation) signals in the direction of a central claim of Tarr's filmmaking, that of the metacommunication of phenomena and the vital significance of our attunement to it; an attunement accorded, here, a firm and final gravitas. It is a scenario written specifically for film, and for Tarr, in a way that seems to gesture toward that crucial point where this beauty of "the repetitiveness of bare material existence" outstrips the words that would seek to define or conceptualise it. Or, in other words, the

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[92] Selyem, "How Long and When," p.106.

point where this beauty is better described in the round-dance of bodies and things as they are joined together as an expressive form, animated and articulated as rhythmic disposition.

Figure 9.1

Figure 17.2

Figure 17.3

Figure 17.4

This disposition is invoked first of all in *The Turin Horse*'s initial sequence, in a play between manifest movement and musical motif. But it is where the music is withdrawn that this disposition is accorded a new character. Indeed, it is here that we are introduced to another rhythm that structures our experience of this world, and toward which we are attuned. This is the alternation of the soundtrack between musical theme and atmospheric noise, between this rolling dirge of strings and a droning constancy of howling wind, between "horse" and "storm." It is also one way by which a passive

engagement is displaced, where the exchange of information in dialogue is replaced –

almost entirely – by these vital aural presences which condition our encounter with

presence. Ordinarily in Tarr, our entrance to the film's world is one that attunes us to an

atmosphere, temporality, or disposition that is sustained in a general sense thereafter.

This is the case even where the scene is seemingly only tangential in its relation to

subsequent events, such as with *Satantango*'s cows, or Janos' cosmic choreography; both

of *Damnation* and *The Man From London,* on the other hand, clearly initiate our

situatedness in a milieu and mode of observation. The prologic sequence of *The Turin*

Horse establishes, and articulates, a form of movement apparently conveying the

animate being of the beast, the straining momentum of its carriage as an audio-visual

rhythm. And yet the particular bearing of this motion is not extended or sustained

beyond this image; or, at least, not as a manner of equivalent movement. This is partly

the case for reasons of narrative, revolving as it does around the suspension of natural

order, of which the horse's refusal to move or eat is a central issue. But this asymmetry

between initial sequence and subsequent events - between a threshold of attunement

and the "dwelling" that becomes the site and subject of our experience thereafter – is

not, or not only, a matter of narrative. It does not represent a juxtaposition, but a

correspondence that is figured in rhythmic terms, through music. The "First Day" begins

with a single shot of around five minutes which more clearly figures an entrance than

does the prologic sequence preceding it. We follow closely behind as the driver,

Ohlsdorfer, with greatcoat billowing out from his slumped shoulders, leads horse and

carriage by a short length of rope. They approach and then round a simple stone building

– a stable, adjoining a dwelling – whereupon a woman hurries from across the yard to join and, with the driver, proceeds to unharness the horse; to prepare its food; to bring the cart inside. They cross back over the yard to take in some laundry, passing beyond our point of perspective on their return, while the camera becomes stationary (but wind-shaken) in looking out into the distance of their barren, gale-blown horizon. No words are exchanged, and no music plays – we hear only the tactile sounds of their industry amid the howl of tempest. Throughout, the camera gravitates toward vital motion, trailing and intercepting the lines of their sensible movement among the chaos of windblown debris, but also pausing to observe these trails from temporary positions of repose. Crucially, it is only with the cut to their domestic space that the "Horse" theme resumes. There, the plod and pull of this lament no longer resonates with the momentum of the horse, but instead extends the pathos of its dynamic - of struggle and endurance - toward our encounter with an uncanny quotidian. The form of life that we observe is reduced almost entirely to movement and gesture, almost entirely without verbal exchange. Banal tasks become acts of resistance against the coming cataclysm, that are repeated with only minor variation – according to their possibility - across six daily instalments. These are articulated by the circulation of the camera's embodied gaze, and enveloped within a constant aural milieu that ebbs and flows between a rhythmic refrain and the unremitting tumult of the roaring gale.

The use of the "Horse" theme thus connotes a certain figural homology, a way of

producing correspondence between man and animal in the face of a disaster that is at

once environmental and, by its turn, existential. Its refrain guides a methodical revelation

of the substantial time and space of a dwelling, the rhythm of a milieu. Rather than with

reference to the loping gait that it appears, at first, to simulate, the roundel of "Horse"

accompanies the minor tasks that constitute the texture of a daily life that is cast in stark

relief against an "end of days." Man, woman and horse are drawn together in the

"common ground" of Víg's refrain, one that stakes the space of their common exposure

to a storm enveloping the world – a world that, the Nietzschean neighbour asserts, has

"gone to ruin." We might recall here Benjamin's allegory - read from Klee's *Angelus*

Novus - concerning the angel of history, whose wings are caught in the storm of progress.

Propelled into the future, but with his face turned toward the past, the angel perceives

history not as a "chain of events," but as "one single catastrophe which keeps piling

wreckage upon wreckage."[93] Benjamin links "the concept of historical progress" explicitly

to the notion of "progression through homogeneous, empty time";[94] that is, with the

uniform, linear time-concept, the continuum of historical progression. Against this,

Benjamin opposes the revolutionary potential of *Jetz-zeit*, or "now-time" - "time filled by

the presence of the now."[95] This is a moment pregnant with possibility, seized by it, in

which "time stands still and has come to a stop."[96] Agamben adopts this model, first

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[93] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations*, p.259.
[94] Ibid. p.263.
[95] Idem.
[96] Ibid. p.264.

under the name of *kairology*, and then as the concept, taken also from Benjamin, of

"messianic time." This is a messianism that must be distinguished from eschatology and

from millennial prophecy, such as would be projected toward a future upon which we

wait, but instead has its site in the present. Agamben suggests, for this reason, that the

messianic is the "revocation of every vocation,"[97] which will take place at the "end of

days, that is, every day."[98] This peculiar placement of the "end of days" within the

everyday, the quotidian, responds to the idea that, "the sole possibility we have to truly

grasp the present is to conceive of it as the end."[99] Kafka, too, suggests that, "the Day of

Judgement is the normal condition of history."[100] A similar idea is intimated by Adorno

with reference to "redemption," where he suggests that, "Perspectives must be

fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices,

as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light."[101]

Krasznahorkai himself echoes this line of thinking, suggesting that,

> In general for creatures living in nature and in humanised nature, life gains momentum only in
>
> times of crisis. There is no peace. Living under the conditions of war is natural. Instead of
>
> expecting apocalypse to come, we need to understand that we are already living in it. The
>
> apocalypse has already commenced.[102]

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[97] Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: a commentary on the letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p.23.
[98] Giorgio Agamben, "Judgement Day" in *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), p.27.
[99] Cited in Leland de la Durantaye, "Homo Profanus: Giorgio Agamben's Profane Philosophy," p.47.
[100] Quoted in Giorgio Agamben, "Critique of the Instant and the Continuum" in *Infancy and History,* p.112.
[101] Theodor Adorno, "Finale" in *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (London; New York: Verso, 2005), p.247.
[102] László Krasznahorkai, "An interview with László Krasznahorkai," interview by Janos Szego, trans. Eszter Krakko, https://www.asymptotejournal.com/interview/an-interview-laszlo-krasznahorkai/

Figure 10.1

Figure 18.2

Figure 18.3

It is an intriguing idea with respect to the enstranged worlds and "apocalyptic" quality of Tarr and Krasznahorkai, our displacement in their disposition, and more so where this end of days is consummated by their ultimate collaboration. The revelation of this final film's "apocalypse" is not oriented toward the future, dystopian or otherwise, in that there is nothing to be seen after it – in a literal sense. All light, all flame, is irreversibly extinguished on the fifth day; at the end of which, the voice with which the film begun describes a final "dead silence" that falls on the house, joining the final darkness that now pervades, and which marks the end of the storm. On the sixth and final day, the refrain of "Horse" returns and draws this world into a final image with final words to replace those of Nietzsche, with which the film begun. "Eat," says the father, while scratching at a raw potato in darkness, "we must eat." The daughter sits, unmoved and unmoving. Our view slowly fades for a final time as "Horse" rolls on and then, as slowly, fades out. We can paraphrase Krasznahorkai to suggest that *The Turin Horse* casts a particularly intense light on the last acts of the spirit according to a dramatised model of existence, cast in the messianic light of "the end."

Figure 11

Cinema, Gesture and a Messianic Rhythm

Tarr's emphasis on the practical choreography of corporeality leads us away from a conventional treatment of image and toward that which Agamben identifies as the more proper "element of cinema": gesture.[103] This claim is made within an apocryphal essay that proceeds from an intriguing point of argument. Agamben suggests that, "[B]y the end of the nineteenth century, the Western bourgeoisie had definitely lost its gestures";[104] it is perhaps significant to note that this context corresponds exactly to the historical moment in which *The Turin Horse* is set, as well as more broadly to the sociological interest in rhythm discussed above. The "loss" of gesture taking place at this time is exemplified, for Agamben, by a contemporary proliferation of disorders of the motor-nervous system – "a generalised catastrophe in the sphere of gestures" – a proliferation that can be read as a common response to the shocks of technological modernity.[105] Where for centuries the legible character or personal disposition of the body had been a commonplace ideal, the fracturing of bearing – first as disorder, then as the attempt to record and analyse this disorder scientifically – engendered new encounters with the corporeal. Indeed, and in a way that speaks to my reading of Pasolini and Gumbrecht, Agamben suggests that this disorder is one which drives Western society toward interiority and psychology, in the face of "life" (or, in this context, *ethos*) becoming "indecipherable."[106] One response to this crisis that is identified by Agamben is

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[103] Giogio Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," p.55.
[104] Ibid. p.49.
[105] Ibid. p.51.
[106] Ibid. p.53.

the proto-cinematic breakdown of the body into segments, such as can be seen in the

medical studies of the gait of de la Tourette's patients, but also in Muybridge's motion

studies.[107] Both re-compose a recorded event for an observation of the order of motion

in a way that directly anticipated the "movement-image" of the cinematograph. Building

on Deleuze, Agamben proceeds to suggest that gesture ("and not image") is at the centre

of cinema.[108] It is the dynamic potential of images, the figure of movement that is at once

effaced and preserved within the "still."[109] This is the "antinomic polarity" that animates

the image and its "mattering" (and, by turn, our investment in it).[110] The cinema,

however, "leads images back to the homeland of gesture", that is, back to animate being

– a "liberation" of the *animus* and *dynamis* contained within the "mythical rigidity" of

imago.[111] Agamben's antipathy toward the bind of the image can be viewed with

particular regard to Guy Debord's theory of the "spectacular society" of advanced

capitalist culture, in which the relation between humans – as well as between humans

and the world of things - is mediated by images; or replaced by representation, what

Debord calls "the spectacle." "All that was once directly lived," Debord proclaims, "has

become mere representation."[112] This spectacle is in many ways akin to the idea of

"second nature," an edifice of historical conventions that are experienced as mythic or

permanent. As was the case with the idea of natural-history, a "change of perspective" or

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[107] Ibid. pp.50-51.
[108] Ibid. p.55.
[109] Idem.
[110] Idem.
[111] Idem.
[112] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), p.12.

"shock of insight" is required in order to break its bind, to suspend the "rhythm" of the

"flow" of a world apprehended as image. It is for this reason that the suspension of the

status of the image in modernity – and, so, its corresponding stasis – is considered by

Agamben to be the cinema's most significant potential. Indeed, Agamben examines

Debord's cinematic practice as one that realises the gestural potential of the medium,

which takes the disruption of the bind of image as its central function.[113] In doing so

Agamben situates "gestural cinema" with relation to the avant-garde experimentation of

non-narrative films, in which montage is the central element. These enact repetition and

stoppage upon the image, techniques that Agamben takes to reveal the conditions of

montage and, so, of cinema and its representation.[114] The medium itself no longer

"disappears" into the expressive act of narration, but is shown as constructed and

contingent. Stoppage "pulls" the image "away from narrative power to exhibit it as

such";[115] or, in Debord's terms, to, disrupt the flow of the spectacle: to interrupt its

ostensive consistency and reveal its status as image, as representation. The special

significance of interruption in the context of gesture – which would seem, at first glance,

to be antithetical to a notion of corporeal vitality – can be viewed with reference to

Benjamin, whose idea of gesture's interruption is informed by Brecht and Kafka. With

Brecht and his "epic theatre," gesture is positioned with regard to the

Verfremdungseffekt, which seeks to interrupt the continuity of dramatic action in order

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[113] Giorgio Agamben, "Difference and Repetition," pp.313-319.
[114] Ibid., p .317.
[115] Idem.

to disrupt the audience's passive engagement with it.[116] As Benjamin writes, "discovery

(alienation) of conditions takes place through the interruption of happenings."[117] In that

this "distancing effect" was inspired by Shklovsky's "*ostranenie,*" it is significant that

Benjamin's other prominent example is also known to "make-strange." The uncanny

presence and indetermination of figures in Kafka, Benjamin suggests, "divests the human

gesture of its traditional supports and then has a subject for reflection without end."[118]

The resistance of these gestures to definite meaning or interpretation, as symbols

without codes, opens them up to an unending reflection.[119] Likewise, it is with regard to

an occlusion of "ends" (or teleological determination) that Agamben's concept of gesture

is formulated as a "pure means."[120]

Pure means is an important concept for Agamben. He takes the idea from

Benjamin and places at the centre of his ethics. It refers to the mediality of human being

as ethical potential: the unrealised freedom of our being "without ends" in a historical or

transcendental endpoint. This is an idea discussed in the first chapter, with reference to

boredom, ambivalence and awakening. In a short essay titled "Ethics," Agamben asserts

that,

> The fact that must constitute the point of departure for any discourse on ethics is that there is no
>
> essence, no historical or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny that humans must enact or

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[116] Benjamin, "What is Epic Theater?" in *Illuminations,* p.152.
[117] Idem.
[118] Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death" in *Illuminations*, p.122.
[119] It is significant to note that Krasznahorkai implies that he, too, thinks of Kafka without end.
Krasznahorkai, interview by Szirtes (2013).
[120] Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," p.60.

realise. This is the only reason why something like an ethics can exist, because it is clear that if

humans were or had to be this or that substance, this or that destiny, no ethical experience would

be possible – there would be only tasks to be done.[121]

It is in this sense that gesture becomes a model for politics and ethics, as well as for this

certain kind of cinema. To this end, it is significant that the idea of gesture emerges

through an etymology with parallels to that of rhythm, where both embody an "ethical"

character. Gesture denotes originally the notion of "bearing," via "carrying." It is by this

same token that Agamben suggests,

> What characterises gesture is that in it nothing is being produced or acted, but rather something is
>
> being endured and supported. The gesture, in other words, opens *ethos* as the more proper
>
> sphere of what is human.[122]

What is endured in gesture, held open by it, is being-in-language: language encountered

as a *medium,* as "means" without transcendence into the formal definition of word or

concept; a *logos* without a structuring logic.[123] In this view, gesture exhibits

communicability and its "mattering," but "says" nothing. "It is essentially always a

gesture of not being able to figure out something in language": an expression of "non-

sense," or a "gag" in the place of speech.[124] It is for this reason that Agamben draws a

parallel, via gesture, between cinema and philosophy, as means to encounter that which

is irreducible to definition by the word, and which "speak" to an "essential silence" (if not

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[121] Giorgio Agamben, "Ethics" in *The Coming Community* trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p.43.
[122] Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," p.57.
[123] Ibid. p.59.
[124] Idem.

the unsayable). As Benjamin Noys suggests, cinema and philosophy are in this view both

"practices that suspend our relation to communication all the better to reveal

communicability as such."[125] In this, a useful comparison can be made with poetry – or

poetic experience – by a relation that Agamben suggests elsewhere. As with the current

argument, he asserts that cinema is closer to poetry than prose, modifying Paul Valery's

definition of the poem as, "a prolonged hesitation between sound and meaning," and

locating the hesitation of "a certain kind of cinema" as one that intervenes between

"image and meaning."[126] Agamben is referring here to stoppage, as in the montage

experiments of Debord's "gestural cinema," but we can consider the central gesturality of

Tarr's cinema – which is, after all, a narrative cinema – to be shaped by its poetic

formalism: the "cosmic perspective" that suspends the linear time of "story." Where it

invokes the dynamics of repetition and stoppage, it does so at the level of narrative, and

not image; that is, it suspends narrative drive, and encounters the presence of

everydayness in its stead. This suspension is formed as, and in, a rhythmic movement,

the articulation of another kind of "bind." "Story" itself becomes a gesture suspended

within the figure of a circular time and shown to be the medium of second nature, of the

historical transmission of represented ideas. Indeed, it is for this reason that Tarr's

cinema is not "gestural" in Agamben's terms (where this seems to imply a break with

immersion in world), so much as it takes gesture to be among its thematic elements and

modes of metacommunication. In the first place, this refers to the intimate consideration

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[125] Benjamin Noys, "Gestural Cinema?: Giorgio Agamben on Film" in *Film-Philosophy* 8, no.22 (July, 2004) www.film-philosophy.com/vol8-2004/n22noys (Accessed January 30, 2018).
[126] Agamben, "Difference and Repetition," p.317.

of being and presence that is central to Tarr's practice, engendering its formal character as a free-indirect being-with. As with Muybridge and Tourette, the gestural disposition of gait and bearing is a vital subject in this cinema, observed in extended sequences that are often without specific arrival or evident narrative "purpose." This speaks in part toward the historical context by which Agamben situates his essay – in which, "an age that has lost its gestures is, for this reason, obsessed by them"[127] - and of which he takes the contemporary emergence of silent cinema to be exemplary; we can situate Bücher and Klages' discussions of rhythm within the same context. But, as Agamben goes on to state by the essay's end, the essential "silence" of cinema "has nothing to do with the presence or absence of a soundtrack," but instead with the exposure of gesturality.[128] In Tarr, such exposure is a primary method of unseating the conventional logic of story, by distending the time of our "being-with" and suspending the progression from image to meaning, from *pathos* to *ethos*, *Erlebnis* to *Erfahrung*.

Agamben's theory of gesture and Tarr's cinema both respond to questions of representation and transmission, both seeking the disruption of a bind that takes place as and in language. In this, they run parallel to the idea of "poetic experience" discussed in previous chapters. As with the poetic word that is the model for an experience of the "as such," gesture is a suspension of regular diction that exhibits what Agamben calls, "being-in-language itself as a gigantic memory loss, as an incurable speech defect."[129] The non-sense of the gestural points toward this apparent defect of speech, which is central to

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[127] Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," p.53.
[128] Ibid. p.59-60.
[129] Ibid. p.60.

human being - characteristic of it, even. It refers, in other words, to the ontogenetic

passage from the immediacy of natural voice (*phone*) and into that mediality of speech

(*logos*) in which the domain of man (*polis*) is secured.[130] This is a central subject of

Agamben's thinking. Language is, in this view, the site of an elemental rift that founds

human community - as *polis* and *ethos* - on the ground of a lack of an essential nature (a

voice or *vocation*). At the same time as allowing for the common-place of *ethos*, language

is the site of a politics whose occupation is to articulate a human "nature" and to define

the community and historical tasks proper to it; in this, it displays a similar bivalency to

that rhythm which is at once a fall into clock-time and a means of release from it. It is for

this reason that Agamben finds politics to be, at its origins, a biopolitics and a

metaphysics – to have the administration and qualification of human "life" as its

fundamental subject.[131] At its core, he finds a shifting logic of inclusion and exclusion,

acceptation and exception, which determines what is "sacred" and what "profane": what

gains entry to the domain of "man" as a qualified form of "life" (*bios*).[132] Indeed,

Agamben explicitly connects language to the powers of religion and law as exercises of

judgement.[133] This resonates tellingly with a familiar theme in Tarr, the corruption

inherent in human being that finds its place in and through language. For the director,

"story" is a principle agent of the transmission of a misguided historical authority which

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[130] Giorgio Agamben, "Experimentum Linguae" in *Infancy and History*, pp.8-11.
[131] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal,* trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004), p.80.
[132] The political "qualification" of "life" is a central subject of Agamben's thinking, the core of his "Homo Sacer" series. See Giorgio Agamben*, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller Roazen (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), p.66.
[133] de la Durantaye, "Homo Profanus: Giorgio Agamben's Profane Philosophy," p.40.

must be encountered from perspectives outside the binding logic of its representation. The pre-conceptual expression embodied in gesture operates in suggestively similar terms to that of metacommunication, to the "concrete medium" of Tarr's "primitive language."

This invocation of gesture is shown in a distinctive sense by the concluding sequence of *Damnation* – soon after the coat check lady has suggested to Karrer that "movements speak." Having left the dancehall and made a declamatory confession to the authorities, Karrer is walking through a landscape of mud and rubble when he comes upon a feral dog. Aggravated by this animal opposite - or, perhaps, entreated by an animal inside - a moment of apparent breakdown provokes our protagonists' taking to all fours in a snarling, barking confrontation between man and beast. This prolonged standoff traces a circle in the mud through which there arises an indeterminacy between their corporeal beings, man and animal, each creaturely existence bared and bearing down upon the other, broken only as Karrer looms up over his antagonist; the dog retreats in recognition of the power potential in its adversary. On regaining this composure, Karrer continues on into the shot's distance while the camera draws back, as he passes into the beyond of this wasteland, a liminal zone bordering the town, the *polis* of man. Tarr's description of this conclusion is one that speaks directly to Agamben, where he states that "he just goes into nature. He does not want to speak any more, because his life is over."[134]

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[134] Tarr, interview by Ballard (2004).

Figure 12.1

Figure 20.2

Figure 20.3

This figuration of an exit from language, into nature, is an exemplary gesture toward the

issue of "life" that holds a central value in Agamben's excavation of Western metaphysics

and/as biopolitics. To this end, our entrance to existential boredom in *Damnation*'s

establishing sequence – that which is broken in Karrer's return to nature - can itself be

directed toward the caesura between "language" and "voice," which is considered by

Agamben to be the site of our experience of *Stimmung*.[135] This follows a relation we have

already observed, where *Stimmung* resonates within a semantic ground shared with

voice (*Stimme*) and with tuning (hence "attunement"); Agamben also intimates its

connection to *Bestimmung*, a call of "destiny," or *vocation*.[136] To Agamben,

> Man has a *Stimmung*, he is passionate and anxious, because he…stands in the opening of being
>
> and of language without a voice, without a nature: he is thrown and abandoned in this opening,
>
> and from this abandon he must make his world, from language his own voice.[137]

Stimmung is thus positioned with reference to that same lack of voice and "nature" that

Agamben takes to be the site of human ethics; our lack of vocation is an invocational call

to ethical experience.[138] This "thrownness" into a contingent historical "world" is further

explicated in *The Open*, with reference to what Agamben calls "the anthropological

machine," the operation of biopolitical judgement which is, he says, "the motor for man's

becoming historical."[139] In this view, the domain of "man" as political institution is

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[135] Agamben, "Vocation and Voice," p.95.
[136] Idem.
[137] Idem.
[138] The notion of "in-vocation" occurs in "Vocation and Voice," p.95; but Agamben's clearest expressions of this idea are in the essay "Ethics," pp.43-44, and in "Experimentum Linguae," pp.10-11.
[139] Agamben, *The Open*, p.80.

constituted most specifically as an articulation of the difference between the human and the animal.[140] The "anthropological machine" names the complex of mechanisms (of power, in discourse) that produce and preserve the terms of this dichotomy, that maintains its *operation* as an historical *task*. Agamben mobilises the wider context of Heidegger's "Profound Boredom" in this direction. Heidegger's discourse on the fundamental attunement of *Langeweile* is grounded upon a distinction between the "poverty" of the animal world against the capabilities for "world-forming" available to historical humanity[141] (most significant of which is understanding, in language). In Heidegger's view, the animal's "world" ("poverty-in-world") is characterised by a direct relationship to a sphere of essential immediacy which delimits the animal's inability to interpret its own or other beings. It is suspended ("between itself and its environment")[142] in a life that is never revealed to it as such. Agamben suggests that the animal, in Heidegger's model, is thus captured, or captivated, in a mode of non-revelation that functions in a markedly similar fashion to that which characterises his analytic of boredom; that is, in an openness to closedness, or a total and immediate refusal of possibility.[143] Agamben extends this idea to assert that,

> Dasein is simply an animal that has learned to become bored; it has awakened *from* its own captivation *to* its own captivation. This awakening of the living being to its own being-captivated, this anxious and resolute opening to a not-open, is the human.[144]

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[140] Ibid. p.73.
[141] Heidegger, *FCM*, pp.186-273.
[142] Ibid. p.248.
[143] Agamben, *The Open*, p.65.
[144] Ibid. p.70.

In this sense, it is not only temporal- and historical-consciousness that are at issue in the attunement of boredom, but the original becoming-temporal and, so, -historical, of the human. It is only by deactivating our captivation in immediacy that something like "human" emerges out of the broader category of "simply living being" (*zoe*) and into "world," recognised as *bios*, as a "life" to be administered by the *polis*. But it is here as well that Agamben turns Heidegger's notion toward a new *ethos,* one that might render the anthropological machine inoperative in an awakening to our fundamental lack of a biological or historical destiny. Directed back toward Heidegger – and the polemic *ethos* of his artwork essay in particular - Agamben thus positions the animal "not-open" as that "concealed" centre which lies at the heart of unconcealment: the *lethe* of *aletheia*.[145]

Given that what is disclosed in unconcealment stands "at the limit of the human," as per the previous chapter, this reference to a concealed ground can be regarded with a new complexion. "Earth," the undisclosable Being of beings upon which human "world" is grounded, is identified as the animality of human being – that which is excised by the operation of the anthropological machine.[146] "The decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict," Agamben suggests, "is that between the animality and humanity of man."[147] In this view, the rhythm that binds the human – that which sets them apart while joining them together – has always been the attempt to articulate a nature proper to "man," to complete a displacement in historical time, to repair the fissure between language and voice: the unrecognised grounds of our separation from

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[145] Ibid. p.73.
[146] Idem.
[147] Ibid., p.80.

the animal, from (our) nature. Whether in terms of historical progress or divine

providence, the projects of humanity and their temporal projections can thus be viewed

in this light: they are oriented toward a utopian future in which the separation of the

human from "nature" is completed, or repaired. It is significant, in this sense, that *The

Turin Horse* – the final statement of Tarr's oeuvre – inverts the hierarchy of

determination that is produced by the anthropological machine. What is shown by this

inversion is the absolute dependency of human life upon an ecology of which we are

part, if not integral (but not as a position of command) – and, more than this, of an

existential deprivation that emerges in the failure to recognise our ground in this nature.

This film presents a judgement day that suspends all judgement, opening in the space of

human abandonment by an errant nature. The world of *The Turin Horse* is progressively

disclosed and joined together into a rhythm that is articulated in terms of its pending

arrhythmia. We are drawn into a choreography that brings certain qualities of human

being into greater relief against the fatal retreat of nature, in a final submission of order

to chaos, darkness, or nothingness. But as the director is keen to stress, even *The Turin

Horse*, "is not a real apocalypse, because an apocalypse for me is a big TV show, a big

attraction."[148] The idea of apocalypse, of definite ends or a transcendental realm beyond

them, is an image – a spectacle, even - which distorts our relation to the historical

present, and to the "life" within it. Tarr further suggests that, "We have just one life and,

day by day, life is getting shorter and shorter. It's incredible and unacceptable, of course,

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[148] Tarr, interview by Welsh (2011).

but it's coming…"[149] This is an idea that gestures toward individual, existential concerns, but which takes on a broader scope when Tarr speaks about this same film in terms of "our partners in life." Completing a quote that has already been referenced with regards to the central concept of "dignity," the director suggests,

> The animals, vegetation, and the people, together. If they do not fit together, if we are always forcing our stupid hegemony and our stupid dominance, then we lose something which is part of our dignity.[150]

Our grasping of the *nature* of human "life" - its gratuity and finitude - is thus projected beyond (or before) language and history, or whatever else might take on the appearance of "second nature." Indeed, it is with a return to the idea of natural-history in Benjamin that we might identify a new "rhythm that holds men," a renovated *ethos* based not on the eternal or futural but instead with regard to the "eternal transience" which forms the "now" of worldly existence. In his "Theologico-Political Fragment," Benjamin suggests that,

> … the rhythm of this eternally transient worldly existence, transient in its totality, in its spatial but also in its temporal totality, the rhythm of messianic nature, is happiness…[151]

In this view, the "happy life" that is the goal of politics may take its model from nature and from the "nihilism" of its eternal transience – a nihilism fully directed toward an encounter with the present.

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[149] Idem.
[150] Tarr, interview by Levine and Meckler (2012).
[151] Walter Benjamin, "Theologico-Political Fragment" in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), p.313.

Conclusion

There is a video clip on YouTube titled "KUHINJA: Béla Tarr Interview."[1] It is a segment from a local TV arts program (*Kuhinja*, or "kitchen"), showing a conversation conducted at a café during the occasion of the 12th Sarajevo Film Festival, 2006. The clip is of low visual quality, with subtitles that do not appear in alignment with the words spoken (in English), and with a soundtrack that also gradually loses synchronisation. It is a conversation sketchily edited into 8 minutes, with abrupt jumps between passages of speech that are sometimes presented without context, and which cut as abruptly to still images from Tarr's films. In spite of its rough quality and heavy editing, this clip is nevertheless an important document of Tarr's central ideas. The director speaks initially and familiarly of the "primitive language" of film. He speaks of his relation to the medium as a means to express a vision of the world, to show "what is around us." This is, he says, "emotional stuff." He briefly gestures toward the central significance of human emotions in this relation to the world, but turns on the same point to suggest that the brain is equally important, and that "the human body" is - by this combination of heart and brain - "a good construction." When his interlocutor frames this idea in terms of "living in this duality world in a way," Tarr rejects it out of hand, insisting "this is one together." We then cut to the director speaking about the unique perspective afforded by the heterogeneous cultural currents that have shaped his Hungarian homeland. He refers to its intermediate position between Eastern and Western Europe, and its Slavic, Balkan, and Ottoman-Turkish influences. The historical vicissitudes that brought these diverse powers to impress themselves upon the Hungarian people has

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[1] Béla Tarr, "KUHINJA: Bela Tarr Interview," www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZCQ0s2ZGew (Accessed January 30, 2018).

regularly been viewed as the source of a widely recognised melancholic character, of

which Tarr and Krasznahorkai are held to be contemporary exemplars.[2] Where Tarr is

not speaking about melancholy *per se*, he does gesture toward the semantics of

attunement when he offers: "that is why we could watch something maybe in a

different way." This impression is extended where he goes on to assert that "this is our

life. This is our kind of reality." It is revealing that the director extends this outsider

status ("similar but a little bit different") to Bosnia-Herzegovina, the country of his

interlocutor. That the director relocated to Sarajevo after *The Turin* Horse in order to

open a film school (that has recently been closed) is perhaps no coincidence. The

particular *Stimmung* of the city may have been familiar. The most emblematic Bosnian

music genre, for instance, is melancholic in name and nature: *sevdalinka*.

Etymologically, it is related to the "untranslatable" Portugese concept of melancholic

longing, *saudade*, forged from a common root in the Arabic word *sawda*, which refers

to "black bile" (itself a translation of the same concept from the Ancient Greek *melaina

chole*).[3] It is worth noting an anecdote offered in this connection by László Földényi,

who "wrote the book" on melancholy. The Romanian-born philosopher Emil Cioran,

who had grown up among Hungarians and knew the language, "asserted that there are

three melancholic nations in Europe: the Russians, the Portuguese and – the

Hungarians, of course."[4] Cioran himself was a notorious pessimist and a melancholic, for

whom Krasznahorkai offers admiration: "If I was very down, on the floor, it was enough

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[2] Nicky Loomis, "Happy with Tears: On Melancholy as a Hungarian Condition," July 20, 2016.
https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/happy-with-tears-on-melancholy-as-a-hungarian-condition/#!
(Accessed January 29, 2018).
[3] Amra Toska, "Traditional Music as the Sound of Space: Examples from Bosnia and Herzegovina," in
Muzkoloski Zbornik (Musicological Annual) 52, no.2 (2016), p.108.
[4] László F. Földényi, "Are Hungarians Melancholic?," June 8, 2016,
blogs.yalebooks.com/2016/06/08/Hungarians-melancholy/ (Accessed January 29, 2018).

to look at the titles by Cioran – 'The Temptation to Exist' – even the title is such a good

joke, and I'm very grateful to Cioran."[5] Tarr must share in this particular sense of

humour, given that he considers his films, bar the final installment, to be comedies.

As significant as this generative background context, however, is the content of

the interview to follow. The director refers to several lines of thought from his discourse

with which we are already acquainted. He speaks of dignity ("a nice word. And now it's

totally forgotten") and its corruption ("It's together with us...It was always...Just read

the Old Testament.") He also offers that his favourite story as the tales of Baron von

Munchhausen: a figure known as a famous falsifier, but whose lies, Tarr insists,

illuminate the truth. These tales are, he suggests, "not only a human story," and the

director says that he views his films in similar terms, as a "totality." Tarr extends this

idea in a way that invokes the cosmic perspective for which I argue, suggesting,

> ...we do not want to be judging what is more important, the nature or the human life or the
>
> society or, you know, because everything is together. And we have to watch everything together
>
> and we have to watch everything all the time, when is happening, and of course the way, how is
>
> happening [sic].

These are all important ideas in a consideration of Tarr, and especially through his

conscious repetition of them. It is in relation to such an environmental totality that the

idea of *Stimmung* acquires its special gravity, as an enveloping presence that comprises

an "indissoluble unit." It is with relation to a disregarded mode of "dignity," or in a

fixation upon the apparent corruption that inheres in the self-representation of

Western civilisation, that the melancholic character of this attunement can best be

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[5] Krasznahorkai, interview by Hopkins.

positioned. It is in contradistinction from this corrupted mode of representation that

the director seeks to make "stories" present, in the presence of non-anthropocentric,

pre-verbal "metacommunications." These emerge through encounter with uncanny

worlds that seek to represent a "truth" gained through artifice and displacement. But

this clip concludes with a novel statement that, as far as I know, appears nowhere else

in the director's discourse. In the final shot of the interview, severed from context or

response, Tarr claims, "I am very profane, you know? Do you understand this word,

profane? Surely."[6] What exactly is meant by this notion is, however, not immediately

clear. The profane stands as an antinomy to the sacred, in a dichotomy that has been

inherited from Roman religious law.[7] Religion had been discussed earlier in the

interview, as the subject of Tarr's self-distinction from Tarkovsky: "because I don't

believe the God. But I believe the people." Even with this pretext, however, it is difficult

to determine whether Tarr's assuredness over his interlocutor's understanding of the

"profane" is contextual or rhetorical, much less whether the director believes a

common understanding of a person's being "profane" would arise from a shared

cultural-historical consciousness, or a melancholic perspective of the world entailed by

it.

    In its most basic sense, the profane is simply that which is not sacred. As a verb,

"to profane" is equivalent with "to desacralise." What is sacred are those things that

have been set apart, judged fit for exclusive use by the gods, in an observance of rites

that articulate the separation between the sphere of the human and the sphere of the

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[6] The director is enunciating the word "profan," which is the Hungarian equivalent to English "profane";
the subtitles, in Bosnian, confirm this usage.
[7] Giorgio Agamben, "In Praise of Profanation" in *Profanations*, p.73.

divine.[8] As Agamben shows, sacralisation (and, by turn, profanation) is thus an

articulation of proprietary right and the rites of propriety at one and the same time. It

operates on the logic of inclusion and exclusion, of judgement, at an intersection

between law and religion. Agamben insists that the word religion itself does not derive

etymologically from *religare*, to bind (as in a rhythm connecting humans to divinities,

the temporal to the eternal), but from *relegere,* which refers instead to re-reading and,

by implication, to scrupulousness in observing the separation of the sacred and

profane.[9] He thus defines religion as, "that which removes things, places, animals, or

people from common use and transfers them to a separate sphere."[10] The opposite of

religion, then, is not disbelief, but negligence in the observation of this separation. To

profane, Agamben says, "means to open the possibility of a special form of negligence,

which ignores separation or, rather, puts it to a particular use."[11] More specifically, he

suggests that, "if "to consecrate" (*sacrare*) was the term that indicated the removal of

things from the sphere of human law, "to profane" meant, conversely, to return them

to the free use of men."[12] The thing returned to common use, Agamben goes on to

suggest, "is pure, profane, free of sacred *names*."[13]

The profane is a concept that resonates tellingly with the idea of messianism in

Benjamin and, by turn, with Agamben. The idea of a "profane illumination" that

Benjamin attributed to the Surrealists, for instance, sounds very much like the mode of

revelation offered by Tarr's cinema. Of this illumination, Benjamin writes,

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[8] Ibid. p.74.
[9] Ibid. p.75.
[10] Ibid. p.74.
[11] Idem.
[12] Ibid. p.73.
[13] My emphasis. Idem.

> No one before these visionaries and augurs perceived how destitution – not only social but architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects – can be suddenly transformed into revolutionary nihilism.[14]

Here again is the concept of nihilism with which the final chapter concluded, which Benjamin positions as the "method" by which we can "strive after" the rhythm of eternal transience. Nihilism is, he says, "the task of world politics." This form of nihilism is an *ethos*, or a rhythm, which is "profane" in its deepest nature. Indeed, Benjamin is speaking to "the order of the profane" and its construction "on the idea of happiness" when he suggests that this happiness is "the rhythm of Messianic nature."[15] In other words, the profane order is not to be formed with relation to a "sacred" realm, but by an acceptance of the transience of the world, its "eternal and total passing away." This is a conception of the profane that is taken up by Agamben in an essay titled "Notes on Politics," where it likewise takes on an ethico-political character. Speaking of the "happy life" - the point at which philosophy, ethics and politics intersect - Agamben pictures, "an absolutely profane "sufficient life" that has reached the perfection of its own power and of its own communicability – a life over which sovereignty and right no longer have any hold."[16] Elsewhere, he posits the idea that "profanation" is the essential method of establishing pure means, such as that which is displayed in gesture, or on which his idea of ethics is based. Agamben speaks of a praxis "emancipated from its relationship to an end," which has, "joyously forgotten its goal."[17] Among Agamben's most suggestive uses of the idea is found in the appendix to *The Coming Community*, where he

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[14] Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" in *Reflections*), pp.181-182.

[15] Benjamin, "Theologico-Political Fragment," pp.312-313.

[16] Giogio Agamben, "Notes on Politics" in *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics,* p.114.

[17] Agamben, "In Praise of Profanation," p.86.

formulates the idea of "the Irreparable": "that things are just as they are, in this or that mode, without remedy to their way of being…How you are, how the world is – this is the Irreparable."[18] In the following paragraph, Agamben relates the Irreparable to the profane, in connection with revelation. We might recall here that "apocalypse" is synonymous with "revelation" in its original usage. Agamben suggests:

> Revelation does not mean revelation of the sacredness of the world, but only revelation of its irreparably profane character…The possibility of salvation begins only at this point; it is the salvation of the profanity of the world, its being-thus.[19]

The profane character of the world is its "being-thus"; and, more than this, being irreparably, irremediably thus. This means: nothing more or less that what is, in substance as well as essence, by necessity and as contingency, such that these dichotomies become neutralised.[20] The possibility of the salvation of the profane character of the world – its eternal and total passing way – begins at this point. Agamben suggests in connection with the Irreparable that, "We can have hope only in what is without remedy."[21]

While conducting research for this project at the British Film Institute's Reuben Library, I came across an interview with Tarr in the journal *Vertigo* titled: "The More Desperate We Are, the More Hope There Is."[22] It is a quote from the director; I had in fact just heard Tarr make this statement in an interview that I had been transcribing

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[18] Giorgio Agamben, "Appendix: The Irreparable" in *The Coming Community*, p.102.
[19] Ibid. p.90.
[20] Ibid. p.89. Agamben prefaces this Appendix by suggesting it is a response to Heidegger and Wittgenstein, and with their attempts "to define an old problem of metaphysics: the relationship between essence and existence"; he later frames this relationship as that between necessity and contingency.
[21] Ibid. p.102.
[22] Tarr, interview by Chilcott (2007), p.10.

from audiotape. There, the director connects the idea to his realisation of "cosmic problems," from the standpoint of which,

> …there's nothing else to do but to make it total, and to create a complete desperation. And the more desperate we are, the more hope there is. It's quite simple.[23]

At the end of the conversation published in *Vertigo*, the interviewer – Robert Chilcott – raises this quote with Tarr, who responds by saying "That's the truth. I can't say any more than that."[24] As much as the original idea, this response is an evocative statement in relation to the filmmaker's ethos. It is later echoed in relation to Tarr's "early" retirement after *The Turin Horse*, which has continually been framed by the director in the same terms, as his having nothing more to say. This singular "truth" - of a hope that appears in light of abjection - can be seen, in this way, as the fundamental character of that profane illumination which Tarr's cosmic perspective casts upon the world and its irremediable "being-thus." As with Tarr himself, this "nothing more" could be an appropriate place to conclude the current discussion. And yet, as Janos contends at the conclusion of his planetary round dance in *Werckmeister Harmonies*, "it is still not over." Having finished recording notes from Chilcott's interview, I continued reading *Vertigo*, and came upon a Rainer-Maria Rilke poem that was unknown to me. To my memory, it was situated in the final pages of the same issue as the Tarr interview, and could thus be seen as a keen-eyed editorial allusion. My notes and their subsequent reconfirmation, however, show that I had continued reading into the following issue

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[23] Tarr, interview by Romney (2001).
[24] Tarr, interview by Chilcott (2007).

(these were bound together), and had found the Rilke poem there by chance.[25] In any

case – and disregarding whether the discovery is more significant for its fortuitousness -

this poem made a strong impression on my thinking. I have regularly returned to it, in

order to be sure that its vital resonance with images and ideas in Tarr has not been

misremembered. To borrow a figure from Benjamin, Rilke has found a place in the

constellation that forms my idea of this oeuvre.

In a way that speaks directly to a recurrent figure in Tarr's films, the title of

Rilke's poem is "The Man Watching." Its subject is an approaching storm, considered

from the perspective of an observer at a window. For this reason, it most closely brings

to mind the figures of Ohlsdorfer and his daughter, in *The Turin Horse*, who take turns

to witness the encroaching end of the present world from a similar position. But this

"man watching" speaks, to my mind, of that wider scope of attunement that has been

called here a cosmic perspective. In its most resonant passage, Rilke writes:

> The Storm, the shifter of shapes, drives on
>
> across the woods and across time,
>
> and the world looks as if it had no age;
>
> the landscape, like a line in the psalm book,
>
> is seriousness and weight and eternity.

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[25] My inattention is also confirmed by incomplete notation of the reference. Thankfully, *Vertigo* is available online. Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Man Watching," trans. Robert Bly in *Vertigo* 3, no.5 (Spring, 2007), www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/volume-3-issue-5-spring-2007/the-man-watching/

What we choose to fight is so tiny!

What fights with us is so great!

If only we let ourselves be dominated

as things do by some immense storm,

we would become strong too, and not need names.

When we win it's with the small things,

and the triumph itself makes us small.

What is extraordinary and eternal

does not want to be bent by us.[26]

Here, Rilke refers to human being and being-in-language, with relation to a certain recognition that is afforded by the decentralisation of man from the centre of his universe. Rilke follows on to say he is referring to "the Angel who appeared to the wrestlers of the Old Testament." That he speaks of wrestlers in the plural is intriguing. In the Old Testament, it was Jacob alone that wrestled with a single Angel, who is regularly interpreted as being an incarnation of God. Rilke's reference to the plural thus projects this struggle not onto a single event, but toward a stage in the development of

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[26] Idem.

human being in which it was shaped by "what is extraordinary and eternal." Of those

thus dominated by this cosmic measure, Rilke writes in conclusion:

Winning does not tempt that man.

This is how he grows: by being defeated, decisively,

by constantly greater beings.[27]

[27] Idem.

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