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On the Margin of *Satantango*. Some Remarks on Slow Cinema

It is difficult to imagine a better film than Bela Tarr's "Satantango" to conclude this volume. This film, released in 1994, that is, at the treshold of cinematic postclassicism, epitomizes all tendencies that we regard as crucial to postclassical cinema and which therefore laid out the foundation to the structure of this volume. With its running time of over 7 hours, it is obviously a famous and proud representative of both slow and long cinema. But other principal categories used here also apply. Most evidently, it shares many traits with puzzle films. It is also a good example of impurity, that is hybridity, although of a more old-fashioned kind than the one which we describe here. Surprisingly, it also shares some characteristics with fast film, if by "fast" we understand films of action, which, I believe, is justified. So, "Satantango" definitely deserves the title of a multifaceted overarching cinematic king [masterpiece].

Affinities with puzzle films are perhaps the most evident. First of all, "Satantango" tinkers with time, and tinkering with time is perhaps the most distinct feature of puzzle films and, more generally, of cinema of the last 30 years. (Buckland, 2009, p.3, 6; Berg 2006). It has a circular structure, in which

subsequent episodes constantly loop back to the point of departure, and, as a result, some scenes appear twice, or even three times, presented from various angles. Time is a topic of conversations between the characters (e.g. between Irimias and Petrina at the Police station) and of reflections spinned by the narrator. Next, "Satantango" is also a network narrative of sorts (for some researchers network narratives are a sub-genre of puzzle films – Koschany, 2017), especially in its first part. We follow at least 5 protagonists or groups of protagonists (Futaki and the Schmidts; Irimias and Petrina; the doctor; Estike; Halics, the barman and Kerekes in the pub), who seem to live independent lives and whose paths criss-cross unexpectedly at some points. Gradually it turns out that actions take place within a common milieu and time scheme and the story world is populated by people bound by blood, love, desire or a common place of work, which fulfils the characteristics of this sub-genre provided by David Bordwell (2008, p. 201, 203). Incidentally, Bordwell also mentions a package of network narrative devices "that later filmmakers would retool: repeated scenes, titles that split the film into chapters, and a covert rendering of time that makes the audience gasp when they see the stories mesh" (2008, p. 197). This description matches "Satantango" perfectly, but it actually refers to another film also released in 1994: Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp-fiction*, which is often regarded as a turning point from which the postclassical cinema started (Berg, 2006).[1] "Satantango" has also one more trait which – albeit not discussed in this volume – usually is associated with puzzle films, namely – unreliable narration. In its classical form, clearly visible in such classics of this form as *Stage Fright* (dir Alfred Hitchcock, 1950), *The Usual Suspects* (1995, dir. Bryan Singer), *The Game* (1997, dir. David Fincher), *The Sixth Sense* (1999, dir. M. Nigh Shymalan), *Fight Club* (1999, dir. David Fincher), *Memento* (2000, dir. Christopher Nolan), *A Beautiful Mind* (2001, dir. Ron Howard), *Donnie Darko* (2001, dir. Richard Kelly), *The Others* (2001, dir Alejandro Amenábar), *El Maquinista* (2004, dir. Brad Anderson), what we reckon to be real turns out to be either a fraud or the product of a sick imagination, and "the viewer is misled because the subjective status of the presented events is not revealed. It is only the final plot twist that reveals that what was taken to be reality is the result of not even the "subjectification" but the "subjectivity" of presentation from the perspective of a character" (Ostaszewski, 2021,). This is exactly what happens inTarr's film: what we reckoned to be objective reality – however un-

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[1] By the way, it is interesting how many devices which are commonly associated with post-classical cinema had their roots in Central and Eastern Europe: slow cinema and Tarkovsky (according to Paul Schrader slow cinema started with this Russian director); forking path narratives and Kieślowski's *Blind Chance*; stories told backward and *Happy End* (1967) by Oldrich Lipsky; hybridity of animation and live action in Karel Zeman films from the 50s and 60s).

typically told – in the end turns out to be a literary creation of one character, the doctor. At the same time the burden of this morbid reality didn't disappear, so "Satantango" achieves perhaps the most valuable form of unreliable narration: an effect of uncertainty and ambiguity, where we can't be sure, what is "real" and what has been imagined. "Satantango" is also an impure film, in the form that Andre Bazin had in mind when he wrote his famous essay on impure cinema, i.e. the form of adaptation of literature. This film, an adaptation of a novel under the same title written by Laszlo Krasznahorkai, is indebted in its literary source probably more than usual. Relations between the director and the writer are really profound – all Tarr's films after "Damnation", that is, after the film in which Tarr established his own, unique and recognizable style – have been based on Krasznahorkai's novels. It is very unusual, I don't know any other case like that. "Satantango" the film is a very faithful adaptation of the novel. It faithfully depicts all characters, it retains almost all events and their order and it uses some bits of dialogue. Moreover, it copies the novel structure, with a division into chapters, titled identically in the novel and the film. Almost every chapter in the film is concluded with a fragment of the novel, spoken by an off-screen narrator. And, obviously, the messages or general meanings overlap. So, "Satantango" is a perfect example of hybridity, in which two media combine and work together to produce a work of art.

Most astonishingly in the case of the film which is universally regarded as the embodiment of slow cinema, "Satangango" also shares some common points with fast cinema. If, as is commonly believed slow cinema is a cinema in which "nothing happens", then this description certainly can't be applied to "Satantango", for this film abounds in events, often extremely dramatic. Most deeds in this film are sinful, and it is well known that nothing fares as well as sins in the cinema of action. Satantango, a film about Satan dancing in the remote Hungarian desert, can be regarded as a cinematic display of the seven deadly sins. All of them – pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony and sloth – are illustrated appropriately in this film. In less elevated terms, we can easily find in this film such traits of traditional genre cinema as violence, promiscuity, betrayal, police infiltration, and a tear-jerking story of an abandoned child. So, if a fast film is a film full of sensational events, than "Satantango" fully deserves this name.

However, it is obviously only fast, hybrid and puzzle in a limited sense. Above of all it is a leading representative of slow cinema.

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I have seen "Satantango" twice. The first time was in the cinema – over 7 hours of screening time, with just one half-hour break in the middle. The film moved me deeply, but I equally felt physically exhausted and fatigued, with pain in my bottom and stiffness in my body. The second viewing was analitical, at home, from a three-disc DVD set bought in London. Once in a while I stopped, rewound, took notes, referred to Krasznahorkai's book, took breaks. It took me three days to watch the whole movie. Certainly, this second viewing was more viewer-friendly, more efficient in grasping many tiny details that had previously escaped my attention, and probably also more satisfying aesthetically, for thanks to the breaks I could avoid fatigue and the numbing of my body and psyche and watch the film with maximum acuteness. And yet, it is this first kind of watching which is proper to slow cinema. Bodily fatigue, numbness of the senses, dwindling cognitive capacity in the course of the screening, all this forms the core viewer's experience of slow cinema.

At the same time, this is certainly not what most people go to the movies for, so it is easy to agree with Paul Schrader when he asserts that slow cinema "works against the grain of cinema itself. It turns its back on what movies do best. It replaces action with stillness, empathy with distance." (2018, loc. 383). Schrader's view seems to be almost commonsensical. Many people are bewildered by slow cinema. Most cinema goers simply ignore it, and even those that find some pleasure in it, often try to discern, understand and explain their reactions. Paul Schrader belongs to them. He describes his way of perceiving a slow film (Bruno Dumond's *Humanity*) in the following words:"So what does the spectator do? Well, look at those clouds — the sun has moved, the shadows have changed. What's that sound? Is it a car coming? If so, on which road? The sound passes — no car, but now the goats have moved. Some have left the frame. Will they come back? Oh, look, the sun has reappeared — new cloud patterns. Some goats have returned. Is that a plane overhead? And still the man is only halfway across the screen. (This is an exaggerated example of the opening shot of Bruno Dumont's *Humanity* [1999], which watches a distant character cross the horizon in the upper quadrant of the screen for a minute and twenty seconds. What is happening here? A new movie is being created. A simultaneous movie. The spectator's movie. Bazin scholars describe this as "the democracy of the eye" — given opportunity, the eye will explore. The film-maker has forced the viewer to enjoy the narrative process, creating his or her own narrative. The two films overlap: the director's tableau and the spectator's meditations on that tableau." (loc. 420). This description of a viewer's activity resembles an old Boris Eichen-

baum's concept of internal speech. According to Eikhenbaum "perception and comprehension of a film are inseparably linked with the formation of an internal speech which links the separate shots together" (Eikhenbaum, p. 13) (although it is worth mentioning, that in his concept the principal aim of silent monologue spun by the viewer is to support the editing by making sense of separate shots combined together). Whether or not we spin such a verbal monologue when watching a film is another issue. What is essential in Schrader's account is the nature of his internal speech. It is very closely attached to what is going on on the screen. It gives names to the objects and events, asks questions about particular actions and tries to answer them. Perhaps it is a personal matter, but this account certainly does not overlap with my way of watching a film, for I never produce verbal descriptions for what I see on the screen, regardless of the kind of film I am watching. But watching a slow film has its specificity. I would call it a two-channel perception. On the one hand, I see what is on the screen. I don't have to name it verbally, I simply see it and I know what I am watching. At one point, when I already know and understand what is out there, and what is out there remains on the screen, much longer than is necessary to recognize objects and actions, my thoughts begin to wander, and some shreds of thoughts traverse a field of my consciousness. Slow cinema is commonly regarded as a kind of meditative enterprise, and watching a slow film reminds me of my experience in meditation. When I tried to learn to meditate (unfortunately, with rather limited success), one of the instructions I was given was to "empty my mind". I tried to empty my mind, to think of nothing, obviously in vain, for it is well known that the best way to think all the time about a blue elephant is to forbid oneself to think about it. So, I tried to empty my mind, not to think, and, as a result, various usually disconnected thoughts constantly floated through my mind. Exactly the same happens when I watch a slow film: I watch what is going on, and at the same time, many disconnected thoughts, reflections, impressions, float through my mind. Sometimes one of them becomes more prominent and occupies my mind a bit longer, but usually they dissolve, disappear, giving way to other thoughts, some stretches of non-thinking, or to the moments when something happens on the screen and absorbs my attention. What is essential, though, and what makes my account so different from Schrader's, is that this mental activity, although triggered by film images and sound, is only vaguely connected to them, is in essence about **something different** than the objects and actions on the screen.

Another researcher who tried to answer the question of what attracts people to something so boring as slow films is Andras Balint Kovacs in his book on Bela Tarr. Kovacs didn't provide such a phenomenological description of his reactions as Schrader, but presented some theses concerning them.

According to Kovács, "The most basic effect of a long-take shot is the imitation of the continuity of the human gaze, especially when it is associated with a moving camera, which it mostly is. (…) In consequence, all kinds of long takes create in the viewer some feeling of participating in the space viewed. The participatory effect is enhanced by the movement of the camera during a long take, as it provides the sensation of moving about in the space, the spectator discovering the space together with the camera; and it can be attenuated by static camerawork, which gives the spectator the impression that he or she is staring at a scene, looking at it from an outside point of view, rather than being involved in it. (…) Either way, **the long take is always more anthropomorphic than short takes and discontinuous changes of angle.** [emphasis: MP]". (Kovács, 2013, p. 50). Kovács admits that the matter is controversial and quotes two opposing views. The film critic Scott Foundas "feels that with the long takes in *Satantango* Tarr 'is really sort of immersing you in this world… It really is like you're living in these spaces.' David Bordwell on the contrary emphasises the distancing effect of the same long takes: 'I don't really see myself as complicit. I do see that it is about dignity, but it is almost an observation from a rather detached standpoint." (50).

I must say that I have serious doubts concerning Kovacs' stance. First of all, I doubt if a human gaze is continuous. There are many elements of discontinuity on a purely physical level: we blink, sleep, shut our eyes. What is more important, the mechanism of human attention makes our gaze discontinuous: we lose interest in one thing and we move our attention to another one, which is similar rather to the process of editing than to an unedited long take. This was noticed, interestingly, very early, no later than in 1916, by Hugo Munsterberg, in his book on cinema. Moreover, the whole of Kovács's reasoning resembles Andre Bazin's claim that "Composition in depth means that the spectators' relationship with the image is closer to what they have with reality. It is then true to say that quite independently of the actual content of the image its structure is more realistic." (Bazin,). Apart from depth of field, Bazin also advocated for long takes, for, as John Gibbs and Douglas Pye rightly state, for him "staging in depth and extended duration are intertwined" (Gibbs, Pye, 2017, p. 2). The form of argumentation is identical: a long take resembles the way we perceive reality, and therefore in its structure (that is, independently of content) is more realistic. The same idea lies behind the contradictory reactions of Foundas and Bordwell. For one of them long take immerses the viewer in a film world, for the second one it rather alienates, but both critics base their assessement on a purported similarity of a long take to a person's ordinary perception of reality. Yet, I seriously doubt if long takes really resemble human perception. Staring at a static shot for a long

time, in which the camera doesn't move and "nothing happens", is a big challenge for most people, and demands special training in meditation. A human being is wired to constantly process information and stimuli, so a situation in which one receives neither information nor stimuli is unbearable and resembles well-known psychological experiments in sensory deprivation, in which people deprived of all stimuli quickly resigned despite good renumeration. So, mimicking a limitation of stimuli on the screen does not make the perception of the film more akin to "regular" human perception. On the contrary – this kind of perception is so very far from regular human perception that it is justified to call it inhuman.

The situation is not much better when the camera moves, but for a different reason. This time it is not the deprivation of stimuli which makes them inhuman, but the nature of movement. Famous long takes from popular films, which follow intense and very often improbable actions (like the 4-minute long opening shot from "Spectre") are evidently beyond the range of human experience, because nobody is able first to discern a man in the crowd from a high vantage point, then to descend and follow a couple of people through a hotel lobby, an elevator and a corridor to a room when the romantic action starts, then to follow the man who unexpectedly leaves his partner, exits the room through the window, goes along a narrow cornice (seen again from above) and jumps on the roof of an adjacent building. Paul Schrader rightly stated that these "fancy out-the-door-down-the-street long takes (…are little different than conventional film coverage", even though they run long in screen time (loc. 208), but the same concerns much less dramatic camerawork from slow movies. For example, Tarr films are famous for long scenes when we see people walking. The camera sometimes moves in front of them, as if going backwards, sometimes moves behind them, sometimes moves on one side, on a parallel track, and sometimes combines these movements. Most of them are actually unimaginable for the normal person, so they cannot be regarded as an imitation of human perception. Nobody is able to go backwards for a long time looking at the people who are following them. Likewise, nobody is able to go sideways for many metres, accompanying people who are going forward. Even the movement which at first glance seems to be relatively easy to achieve, that is, following behind an object, in practice is rare, for we only rarely follow a person or group of people for many minutes, the way that the camera follows Irimias and Petrina several times pacing empty roads in long strides. The same can even be said about shots which at first glance do not contain anything which is not easily attainable by regular human perception. Let's look at a scene that is over 4 minutes long from the first part of "Satantango", in which Futaki and Schmidt divide money. It is filmed in one shot, and this shot is part of a much longer shot, that is over nine minutes long, and

includes 4 scenes (1. Futaki and Schmidt talk about money and decide to divide it; 2. Mrs Schmidt leaves the room to talk with a neighbour who knocked on the door; 3. Mrs Schmidt comes back and shares the news with Schmidt and Futaki: Irimias and Petrina are coming; 4. Mrs Schmidt leaves for the pub, Futaki sits down and stares.) The camera makes slow, elaborate movements, basically combining tracking, panning and zooming. Sometimes it follows the action, sometimes it doesn't. It starts from a sidelong close-up of Futaki, with a small part of Schmidt's face in the frame. Then the camera slowly tracks towards Futaki (Schmidt's face disappears), goes around Futaki's head (we see a big ear), than pans from behind, so that we can see the back of Futaki's head, Schmidt in front of him and his wife behind him. Then the camera goes back, so that we can see Schmidt's big profile. They start to divide the money, so the camera tracks and zooms in on the money divided into two even heaps, next it leaves the money (which is still being divided) and basically repeats the first move, going slowly behind Futaki's head and panning so that Schmidt's appears again. Although this scene contains neither "impossible" points of view nor movements which couldn't be done by a human being, it is extremely difficult to imagine anyone who would behave in this way, wandering very slowly from one man to another and then back, peering into the ear of one interlocutor, moving closer to the money and then repeating the route that he pursued before. It does not look like regular human behaviour.

As an aside: an issue of "naturalness" of camerawork, that is a conviction that the camerawork imitates human perception, was tackled by David Bordwell in his article "Convention, Construction, and Cinematic Vision" (2008). Bordwell limited his analysis to only one device – a shot/reverse shot. He rejected a natural position, according to which the device "offers a kind of equivalent for ordinary vision" (58). This position is untenable, because the shot/reverse shot is "in several respects quite unfaithful to perceptual experience", has "no analogous experience in real life", for "no single individual could view a scene in this way in real life." Bordwell lists differences between real life perception of a conversation and its filmic depiction by means of a standard formula of shot/reverse shot, and this list resembles in character what I have done above. Bordwell also rejects an oppositional stance, according to which a shot/reverse shot is purely conventional, and chooses "a middle way between two positions" (60). This middle way is based on contingent universals, "practices and propensities that arise in and through human activities. (…) Neither wholly "natural" nor wholly "cultural", these sorts of contingent universals are good candidates for being at least partly responsible for "naturalness" of artistic conventions" (61). In other words, contingent universals – that is certain elements of real life situations – are picked up and used as a base

for an artistic device. In the case of shot / reverse shot situations these contingent universals are frontal, face to face positions of interlocutors, eyeline matches and turn taking. "In a metaphorical sense, the prototype of a shot/reverse shot is constructed out of such contingent universals: It is a refined elaboration of them, a piece of artifice serving cultural and aesthetic purposes" (69).

I certainly sympathise with Bordwell when he rejects the Pudovkinian concept of an "invisible observer" ("We shouldn't think of this camera position as providing the view of an observer, either realistic or ideal. (…) It is not necessary to posit the device as creating an invisible observer. (68)". I have some reservations concerning the partial anthropomorphization of a filmic device in the form of "contingent universals", but above all I seriously doubt if they can be easily applied to long takes in slow cinema. A shot / reverse shot is after all based on the very common situation of a conversation between two people. I don't see such a firm base in the case of long takes in slow cinema. In other words, I can't elicit "contingent universals" which would "naturalise" or "anthropomorphise" them. Kovacs would probably find these contingent universals in the continuity of a human gaze and in the act of "discovering the space", but for me both these arguments are doubtful for, as I have mentioned before, it seems quite obvious to me that the human gaze is discontinuous and fragmentary, and that camera movement in slow films does not resemble the ordinary way humans move and discover the space. Therefore I find the concept of dehumanisation much more accurate regarding slow films. And it is tempting to refer here to Ortega y Gassset's classical essay on dehumanisation, as for this Spanish thinker dehumanisation is proper to the high art, whereas anthropomorphization is characteristic to popular art. And although it is inappropriate nowadays to juxtapose high and popular art, it is hard to deny that slow cinema is the antithesis of the popular one.

So, neither of the two quoted accounts about the viewer of slow cinema seems convincing to me. Schrader's account, according to which the viewer names objects and actions that he or she sees on the screen by means of internal speech does not overlap with my experience when watching a slow film, for my internal speech does not follow what I see, but wanders freely, escaping from what I currently see on the screen rather than clinging to it. Kovacs's account seems plainly wrong to me , for I find the concept of anthropomorphic camera strongly far-fetched in general, and particularly with regard to long takes and slow cinema. I am not sure if slow films can be regarded as anthropomorphic, but if they can, it is not because of the camera placement but because of a quite different phenomenon which is common to both slow films and human beings: the rhythm.

Humans are rhythmic creatures, and slow films (and Satantango in particular) are full of repetitive devices which make the rhythm tangible: footsteps, blowing wind, dripping water, bells ringing, diegetic and extradiegetic music, human speech, everyday routines, and many more. As Marta Stańczyk rightly notes, this rhythm "is not subjugated to outside factors (editing measurements), but interior ones" (Stańczyk, 2021, p ??). That rhythm pulsates between the screen and the viewer's body, "is the way to discover signs of embodiment in a text" (??). At the same time, suspension of perception, achieved through its dehumanisation, "reveals the dynamics which link humans with the immanent matter all around them" (??). If a slow film works, it is because it corresponds to the viewer's internal rhythms, and it works only for those who can feel that correspondence.

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It is not very elegant to quote oneself, but I hope that this time it is justifiable. In 1985 I published an article on the evolution of the length of film take (Przylipiak, 1985) in which I questioned the view (rooted in Bazinian legacy) that the usage of long takes enhances realism. In this article I wrote: "Prolonging the duration of perception over a span necessary to gain basic orientation, motivated by an urge to achieve realism, authenticity, full depiction of reality, brings about an unexpected effect: we start to feel an oddity and strangeness about well-known objects. The phenomenon of photogenia, described so many times, returns, but this time not as a characteristic of photography, but as an unexpected result of the prolonged duration of the shot. (…) A shot length has undergone an unexpected evolution. At first it was dependent on the dramatic potential of events. Next a shot was freed from this dependency under the banner of authenticity, realism and a faithful registration of reality, only to achieve a point in which a prolonged duration has become a means of expression of extreme forms of cinema of creation. (…) In recent years a shot duration has become a means of expression which has fully revealed potentialities of film art, which hitherto were known only in embryonic form: emancipation of the rhythm; sculpting in space; sculpting in time." (24, 25, 26).

Today I would confirm what I wrote in that article, but with the provision that it is not the shot length that has undergone an evolution, but rather its conceptualisation. Anyway, prolonging shot length does not produce a reality effect; on the contrary, it produces a peculiar kind of verfremdung effect, the impression that people, objects and places are strange. It is because prolonging shot length is at odds with the natural mechanisms of attention proper to human beings. Also, a use of the Bazinian authority to support the idea that prolonging shot length

enhances reality effect is misleading. Bazin did advocate for an inseparable tandem of long takes and deep focus, but not simply because it enhances surface realism, but because thanks to it, as Jacques Aumont rightly stated, "we have the sense of being placed before the enigma of reality" (Aumont, 2014, p. 28, 29; Gibbs, Pye, p. 3). Bazin's thinking was tinted by something which Hannah Arendt called a Platonian bite, with what is characteristic of it – the division of reality into a mere visible surface and invisible depth, where value is due only to the latter. It is clearly visible in his wordings. Murnau through a long take/deep focus tandem "strives to bring out the deeper structure of reality, to reveal pre-existent relationships"; for Flaherty "the duration of the hunt becomes the very substance and object of the image". In Stroheim's work "reality admits its meaning like a suspect"; Renoir is "revealing the hidden meaning of human beings and their environment". And, crème de la crème, among the three "propositions" which summarize his classical paper on the evolution of film language, the third one is "metaphysical", which extends beyond physical, tangible reality. True, for Bazin all elements of the puzzle fitted nicely to each other. A long take/deep focus tandem enabled reality effect which in turn paved the way to metaphysics. He didn't realize that long takes produce not so much reality effect as rather verfremdung effect, presumably because at that time long takes were relatively short after all and they hadn't revealed their full potential yet.

But, I think, this verfremdung effect is neither the goal nor the termination point of slow films. On the contrary – it is only a portal through which we can see an object or an image anew, in a new light, or – perhaps – we can see through it. Bazin in the abovementioned quotes lists "deeper structure of reality", "the very substance and object of the image", "hidden meaning of human beings and their environment". In this article from 1985 I also analysed three long takes from three films: "Face to Face" by Ingmar Bergman, "Hungarian Rhapsody" by Miklos Jancso and "Stalker" by Andrej Tarkovsky. In each of them I found a propensity to reveal some higher order which shows through images of people, objects and events. And I found it evident that this is a long take which is not functional with regard to narrative necessities (that is – which does not follow the action), that enables the viewer to see through images, to discover some essence of reality which lies behind or beneath the surface. I mentioned three kinds of such "behind or beneath": subconsciousness (Bergman), still rules which petrify reality (Jancso), and some sort of religious entity (Bergman, Tarkovsky). I would like to focus on this last option now, for a connection between long takes and religious feelings has been noted many times. Many film directors who are regarded as representatives of transcendental cinema, that is the cinema which evokes some sort of religious ex-

perience, have used prolonged takes coupled with limited action. It is enough to mention Bresson, Ozu, Bergman, Tarkowski, Kieślowski, Dumond. One reason for that can be a structural affinity between long takes and some forms of religious activity. Monotonous, rhythmic passages devoid of information, which rely on multiple repetition of the same content, are characteristic both to slow cinema and some forms of worship, like Buddhist mantra or Catholic hours. It means that this is a way to induce a religious experience.

Another explanation for the religious potential of slow films can be drawn from Gilles Deleuze, or, strictly speaking, from Henri Bergson, appropriated to film theory by Gilles Deleuze. The division of cinema into two forms, that of movement-image and of time-image is known all too well, but what is perhaps not so well known and definitely underestimated is that this division reflects a division between two extreme forms of human neural activity described by Bergson in his "Memory and Matter". At one end all living organisms, including humans, simply react to stimuli from the external world. Bergson compares the human psyche to a telephone switchboard: its only function is to switch a stimulus over to a reaction [to make a connection between a stimulus and a reaction]. The human psyche, like a switchboard, adds nothing out of itself, it only connects stimuli and reactions, it is overwhelmed by practical tasks imposed by conditions of living. At the other extreme the human psyche seems to be completely disconnected from the requirements of practical life, and is dominated by free-wandering memories devoid of practical purposes. This is the world of dreamers. Between these extreme points there are some intermediate points in which actions and memories merge in various proportions, but they are beyond our scope. One end, that of the "switchboard" metaphor, corresponds to movement-image cinema. Its basic mechanism is a sensor-motor connection (a term, by the way, which is borrowed straight from Berson), that is, a connection between a received stimulus and an action. The other end, disconnected from the requirements of practical life, corresponds to Deleuzian time-image cinema, based on a pure optical and audio situation, a cinematic equivalent of Bergsonian free-wandering memories. This one-to-one correspondence of Bersonian and Deleuzian thinking is striking. But Deleuze cuts the Bergsonian argument short, depriving it of a spiritual dimension, which is central (crucial) to Bergson. For Deleuze, liberation of images from the necessity of action, a passage from the sensorimotor process to pure optical or sound situations, brings about an intellectual potential of cinema. For Bergson, a passage from perception to memory, that is, a liberation from the necessities of life and from a stimulus-reaction switchboard leads towards spirituality: "[A]s long as we confine ourselves to sensation and to pure perception, we can hardly be said to be dealing with the spirit. (…) But to touch

the reality of spirit we must place ourselves at the point where an individual consciousness (…) escapes the law of necessity (…) When we pass from pure perception to memory, we definitely abandon matter for spirit." (Bergson, 1911, p. 95). So, if our equations – of Bergsonian "pure perception", that is a perception which triggers the stimulus-reaction mechanism, with Deleuzian movement – image cinema, and of Bergsonian pure memory, liberated from a switchboard logic, with Deleuzian time-image cinema – if these equations hold, it is reasonable to assert, on the basis of Bergson's authority, that time-image cinema paves the way to spirituality. And no form of cinema fits the Deleuzian description of time-image cinema better than slow cinema. In that way a combination of Bersonian and Deleuzian arguments corroborates the remarks noted above about an affinity between slow cinema and spirituality.

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It is surprising that such a consummate critic and researcher as Andras Balint Kovacs in his insightful book on Bela Tarr practically passes over religion and spirituality in silence. It is surprising, because Tarr films after "Damnation" abound in religious themes and motives. Religious connotations are obvious in the very titles, such as "Damnation" or "Satantango"; "Turin's horse" tells the story of the end of the world, with numerous references to the Revelation of St John the Divine; also Friedrich Nietsche, mentioned at the beginning of the film, is entangled in religious discourse. "Satantango" is also full of religious references. Some of them lie on the surface, conveyed by names, characters, events. Apart from the film's title, to this group belongs the name of one of the principal characters, treacherous Irimias, which refers to Jeremiah, the prophet, accused by his people of treason and stoned to death. Religiosity is the most evident trait of another character, Mrs. Halics, who likes to quote the Bible and assesses other people through the biblical prism. As far as the events are concerned, the story of Estike, a poor, rejected and abused child, who decides to commit suicide has the strongest religious connotations. Her story, full of traumas and humiliation, can bring to mind the story of Jesus Christ, and is presented as such by Irimias in his speech delivered in front of the pub. Moreover, Estike herself, after having decided to commit suicide, uses Christian imagery, thinks of heaven and angels. True, Tarr alleviates some religious motives which are very strong in Krasznahorkai's novel. Most evidently this applies to the scene in Weinkheim Palace, where Irimias, Petrina and Sanyi, early in the morning, exhausted after a night-long walk, see the body of Estike (who they put into a coffin the day before), lying calmly in a forest clearing, and then soaring upwards and disappearing into the clouds. Afterwards a discussion full of religious connotations ensues in the

novel, and the chapter is concluded with the prayer "Our Father" murmured by Petrina. In the film Estike's body is not there at all, just fog and Irimias kneeling in awe; no discussion abounds in religious connotations, and no prayer at the end. So, Tarr, generally faithful to the novel, alleviated its religious dimensions by skipping some (but not all) of the most evidently religious parts. On the other hand, however, he strengthened the religious dimension of this story, not in terms of the content, that is characters, events and words, but in terms of the form, though formal elements that are often regarded as ones which can evoke transcendental states in the viewer.

According to Amedee Ayfre, a French theologian and cinema lover, perhaps the biggest authority in the field of religious cinema (Marczak, 2000, p. 26), an evocation of religious (transcendental?) states in the viewer requires a combination of two contradictory factors. On the one hand, a film must be faithful to reality. As Mariola Marczak puts it, interpreting Ayfre's concept, "Faithfulness to reality is necessary, if we want to show something which lies beyond its borders. We can see only traces, and traces require a material, physical base – a reality" (26). On the other hand, reality "must be somehow deformed, stylised, if we want to make visible those of its aspects which transgress humanity, if we want to emphasise transcendence (…). Stylisation forces reality to excavate a "wonder" from its depth without losing anything from the burden of a real world" (26). This is exactly what happens in "Satantango". Its world is real to the point of naturalism, with its filth, mud and decay. The way it is depicted, an inhuman style of presentation, allows to see traces, to "see through" instead of "looking at". Ayfre distinguishes two modes which evoke a religious experience, namely, "style of transcendence" and "style of incarnation". Satantango definitely belongs to the latter. In Marczak's words, "its essence is in showing human existence in a radical way. (…) Some forms of human experience are especially predisposed to make people realise the dimensions of reality they try to forget about. Life and death, good and evil, sex and blood belong to this experience"(29). Incarnation style can also be implemented by showing a lack, absence, void and by using ellipses. In Tarr's film we can easily find all these things, and the way ellipses are used merits special attention. Obviously, a recognition of this religious potential is possible only on the condition of special "tuning in" by the viewer, and what enables it is certainly a correspondence between the film's rhythm and an internal rhythm of the viewer. "Satantango" also overlaps with Paul Schrader's depiction of transcendental style. A crucial feature of this style is a rejection of attractions, such as sensational and spectacular events, expressivity or psychological acting. Schrader calls them "screens", for they act as barriers which separate the viewer from the essence of reality. Riveting the attention of the audience to the

surface of reality, they don't allow to see the supernatural character. "By delaying edits, not moving the camera, forswearing music cues, not employing coverage, and heightening the mundane, transcendental style creates a sense of unease the viewer must resolve." (Schrader, 2018, loc. 119). As Mariola Marczak puts it in her interpretation of Schrader's text, the rejection of the "screens" transfers the viewer's attention from superficial events to an internal drama. Emotional engagement in the events must be blocked, because it distracts the viewer and pulls her away from the main subject of the film – that is, the drama of the spirit (Marczak, 2000, p. 36). This is exactly what happens in "Satantango" and many other slow films. Although, as already mentioned, this film abounds in many dramatic and even drastic events, the inhuman form of presentation, a dehumanisation in an Ortega y Gasset sense, blocks standard mechanisms of empathy/identification and opens the gate to transcendental states of mind.

Schrader also depicts two pillars of transcendental style: disparity and stasis. Disparity, "an actual or potential disunity between man and his environment," (loc. 120) "a growing crack in the dull surface of everyday reality" (loc. 120), reveals a paradox of spirituality embedded in matter. This effect can be achieved, among others, by doubling elements of everyday life. It is expressed not only by repeating the same or similar activities, situations, sounds, but also by the multiplication of presented reality. Here, too, Bela Tarr's films provide exemplary cases, such as the "Turin Horse", which is entirely based on the repetition of mundane, everyday activities. "Satantango" is not that extreme, but still abounds in repetitions of activities, gestures, verbal phrases, positions and movements of the camera. And, also, due to its network structure, the presented reality is multiplied, by means of repetitions of exactly the same scenes in subsequent episodes.

Stasis is "the end product of transcendental style", "a frozen view of life which does not resolve the disparity but transcends it" (loc 1367), an incredible unexplicable spiritual action in a cold environment, which entails "an acceptance of parallel reality – transcendence. (…) [T]he psyche, squeezed by untenable disparity, breaks free to another plane" (Schrader, loc. 119). Technically, stasis is "a frozen view", a static image, often – but not always – accompanied by elevated music, which follows a decisive moment, a culmination of disparity and a spiritual drama which ensues from it. "Satantango" abounds in shots of this kind, shots of frozen realities, which come at the end of each episode. And although we should remember Schrader's warning that "decisive actions and final stasis shots are not exclusive to transcendental style" (loc. 1414), that they actually appear in many films which utilize parts of the transcendental style, but are not concerned with the Transcendent (loc. 1423), I would take the risk to suggest that stasis in

this film comes at the final part of the chapter entitled "Spider Function II". This chapter follows the chapter entitled "Comes Unstitched", which shows the most tragic event in the whole film, Estike's story, which Kovacs rightly regards as the 'master story' of the first part of the film (Kovacs, 126). So, Estike's story would be – in Schrader's terms – "a decisive moment", and the aforementioned final part of "Spider Function II", where all characters, exhausted after long night of boozing and dancing, lie motionless on tables and benches, and only spiders do their job – fulfils the technical description of stasis. True, in Schrader's terms stasis is also a point of catharsis and ascendant movement to the Transcendent. There is not and cannot be a catharsis in *Satantango*, because this film embodies a variant which Amedee Ayfre calls the satanic sacrum, it reveals evil, so instead of ascending towards the Transcendent, we descend into hell. It is not without reason that spiders are so important in this part, as they symbolise a shadow and satanic powers, and they come from under the wooden floor. It is also meaningful that Mrs Schmidt in one moment kneels down and smells the floor and proclaims that she can smell the odour of the earth.

The transcendental potential of "Satantango" is also enhanced by other traits which were mentioned at the beginning of this paper and which tint this film with some flavours of film types characteristic of modern, postclassical cinema. Most evidently, it concerns its "networkish" structure. As David Bordwell rightly noted, "many network films thematically counterpose accident to destiny (…). Along with the aesthetic pleasure of seeing unconnected events fall into a pattern, many viewers may feel reassured that Chance is just God's way of seeming anonymous. A social psychologist has suggested that many people find the idea of "six degrees of separation" comforting, because it can be interpreted as a mysterious design, the sign of some spiritual order guiding our lives." (Bordwell, 2008, p. 213, 214). While it would be extremely difficult to call "Satantango" comforting, it is only because it expresses "satanic sacrum", and the very idea that it can guide our lives seems terrifying. Terrifying as it is, it is enhanced by the sinful character of most deeds in this film, which brings to mind fast films.

Certainly, not all slow films engender religious or transcendental feelings and experiences, but this genre has a special proclivity for that, which can be easily triggered when other factors cohere. This is the case of *Satantango*.

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Abstract

Athough *Satantango* by Bela Tarr is usually regarded as a perfect representative of slow cinema and certainly deserves this reputation, it is worth remembering that it shares some features with other currents of modern cinema. Its networkish structure and unreliable narration place it close to puzzle films; its close affinity with the Krasznahorkai novel, on which it is based, makes it a form of impure – that is – hybrid cinema; due to an accumulation of evil deeds, tragic and sensational events, it resembles films of action. But, first of all, it is a paramount example of slow cinema, and as such it enables one to grasp the essential features of this genre. According to certain views, often built on the foundation of Andre Bazin theory, slow cinema imitates natural human perception and therefore is inherently realistic. This is not true, though. Instead of a reality effect, slow cinema produces rather a verfremdung effect, which in turn enhances the big potential of slow cinema in inducing transcendental or religious states in a viewer's mind. *Satantango* explores this potential, drawing on the religious connotations of Krasznahorkai novel.

Key words: Satantango, slow cinema, discontinuity, anthropocentric gaze, verfremdung effect