

AN IMAGE OF RECURRENT TIME NOTES ON CINEMATIC IMAGE AND THE GAZE IN BÉLA TARR'S SÁTÁNTANGÓ¹

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Abstract: The article deals with Béla Tarr's longest film *Sátántangó* and examines relations between image, time and ways of looking, comparing it to László Krasznahorkai's 1985 eponymous novel on which the film was based. It reveals connections between episodes and shots in *Sátántangó* that lead to a conception of time that passes extremely slowly. It is recurrent—leading toward similar, repetitive situations—but at the same represents an inability to change. The image in this film is often conceived as it is mediated and Tarr frequently uses compositions involving ways of looking *through* some kind of optical device or a window. The only way of accessing reality is to look at it when there is no real opportunity, will or ability to intervene and change it. In this sense the article shows the relationship between the image of the fictional world of *Sátántangó*, inhabited by passive and demoralized characters, and the world of the film spectator and his or her relation to film image as such.

Key words: image in cinema; image of time; the gaze; the look; the work of Béla Tarr; Hungarian cinema.

Cinema is a medium that communicates in time and space likewise theatre, dance and various kinds of happenings, performances or videogames. Thus, a cinematic image is, on one hand, set within a rather standard frame, similar to traditional painting. On the other hand, however, a cinematic image is non-static. It is developing over time—showing, displaying, reconstructing, staging or (in animated or some experimental films) even creating phenomena relating to movements, events and actions. Accordingly, there are many ways in which a cinematic image can address time and provide testimony of a particular era.

The new Romanian and Hungarian cinema of the past decade has presented us with interesting ways of dealing with time. Behind their slow-paced depictions of the banalities of daily life, there is a lurking sense of monstrous alienation and a loss of faith in progress. Long shots of banal action occurring in real time encourage a specific way of sensing, forcing the viewer to decode the story or meaning behind the actual visual or acoustic image.

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In this sense, Romanian and Hungarian cinema has portrayed the breakdown in traditional moral values, both in images of the recent past with films such as *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (2007), *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* (2005) or *Taxidermy* (2006) and in images of the present day with the Hungarian films *Hukkle* (2002), *Dealer* (2003) and *Delta* (2008) or in the Romanian films *Police, adj.* (2009) or *Aurora* (2010).

This selection of films should be extended to include the cinematic output of Béla Tarr, which, on one hand, represents the precursor to the minimalist tendencies in post-socialist cinema and yet remains the most radical among them. This article deals with Tarr's longest film *Sátántangó* and examines the underlying status of image in its relation to situations of looking (or rather, to the act of observing), comparing it to László Krasznahorkai's 1985 eponymous novel on which the film was based. I will attempt to show the way in which *Sátántangó* encourages us to reflect on the fundamental properties of the cinematic image: on its functioning as a "window through which to see the world" and its ability to reflect time.

Artificiality, authenticity and significance of image

Sátántangó is over seven hours long and radicalizes Tarr's specific style, which some critics first identified in his *Macbeth*,² a television film shot in only two shots, one of which is almost an hour long.

The long takes which are devoid of almost any action but often reveal images of landscape encourage us to see Tarr as a follower of Jancsó and, ultimately, Tarkovsky. Tarr's method, first introduced in *Damnation*, may indeed be reminiscent of these two masters of modern cinema, albeit from an entirely different ideological background. Beginning with revolutionary pathos, Jancsó finally adopts the scepticism and cynicism of the 1990s, and yet never seems to look forward a programmatic approach to the cyclical passage of time, which occurs and reoccurs, time and again, going back to the same single point zero—as we can see in the works of Tarr. Instead, the notion of history in Jancsó's films is constantly aimed at some further point in time, which is "at least" similar, if not necessarily better than the past. On the other hand, Tarr was often compared to Tarkovsky in terms of the spiritual dimension of his cinema. Tarr's films are, however, associated with recognising of demonic aspects of humanity and with a particular way of registering a world without a God. In Tarr's films there is no faith, unless we understand faith as merely unfulfilled necessity. There is none of Tarkovsky's spirituality with its references to traditions of Russian orthodoxy.

With its rather explicit title and multiple Biblical motifs, *Sátántangó* encourages us to see Tarr's entire oeuvre as a reflection on the death of God, which is central also to the eponymous novel. Tarr's collaboration with Krasznahorkai has resulted in a unique mutual inspiration and, coincidentally, it has produced a completely new visual and narrative filmic style. This style is the result of Tarr's own attempts to translate the Hungarian writer's specific literary style into the language of cinema. Embraced by Tarr ever since he produced *Damnation*, it is often referred to as an instance of artificiality in his universe (Kovács 2001, 2008). Tarr's rain is artificial, as is the driving wind, with its unnatural speed and intensity,

² Others identify this point as late as in the *Almanac of Fall*, as is documented in Feinstein (2006, 138).

the dried-out leaves and rubbish that are to be found in one of the film's notorious images of Irimiás and Petrína, shot from behind on their way to the municipality of an unknown Panonian town. Everything in Tarr's films, including his extremely long takes without any action that could drive the plot, refers to the act of creating, mediating and registering the world, and thus to the omnipotence of a (film) creator. In the world without a God, the artist is the one and only who is able to create its image.

Like Andrei Tarkovsky or Alexander Sokurov, another Russian director influenced by the traditions of spiritual cinema, also Tarr uses subtle asynchronicity between image and sound. This is achieved by adding carefully selected or composed noises to the already shot visual footage. In the opening shot, the sound of the wind and the unnaturally loud mooing of cows mingle with the sound of church bells—but later we learn that there is no source for this specific sound as the nearest town is too far away and the nearby church tower was destroyed as long ago as during the WWII. The used noises do not exist in pre-camera reality; they are slightly exaggerated, highlighted and added to the (visual) image. The result is a sense of the surreal similar to the one evoked in the eponymous novel by Krasznahorkai's idiosyncratic rhetoric, at times referred to as baroque, because of its extremely long sentences, and at others as being apocalyptic or catastrophic (Kolmanová 2008, 105). The film's sense of the surreal is conveyed already in its first shot that presents an image of a completely lethargic listener: the sole listener of the church bells is a herd of cows which, having roamed aimlessly through the god-forsaken village, sets out for the pasture on its own, unaccompanied by a human.

This shot has often been interpreted as a means of tuning the audience into the film's extremely slow pace and its particular atmosphere. Yet, its authenticating function should also be noted. The unguided animals, driven by instinct only, add a sense of documentary authenticity, as does the authentic setting of the dilapidated outbuildings and stalls. The camera, moving slowly to the left where the animals seem to be headed as well, picks out the graffiti on half-painted, ramshackle walls. Although there are traces of a past human activity, the animals are left alone, forsaken by men. The absence of human beings in the opening shot has almost subversive biblical connotations that are revealed also later in the film. Ever since *Damnation*, Tarr seems to have enjoyed moving away not only from the story's protagonists but from human beings as such, moving towards simple textures and smooth "natural" movements (the breeze, rain slowly dripping down the walls). This is not inspired by a desire to find pure and untouched phenomena in a world in which it has become impossible to disentangle the relationships of power and socio-economic interactions. In an artificial world, purely natural phenomena are an illusion, and Tarr's cinematic techniques seem to be alerting us to this illusory condition.

One of the functions of the repeated shifting away from moments of anticipated action and of the film's extremely slow pace is to prevent the viewer from being aware of the artificiality of surrogate "natural" phenomena. In another context, the artificiality of these phenomena could appear amateurish or even comical,³ yet Tarr consistently encourages the

³ As Irimiás and Petrína are putting the villagers into a lorry trailer, the rain is pouring down so heavily that Halics' nose begins to run profusely; besides that, the frontal shot of Irimiás and Petrína behind the lorry's windshield makes it abundantly clear that enormous quantities of water are being poured over the glass.

viewers into contemplation, getting them used to the unusually long duration and slowness, which is as distinct in the movements of the protagonists, animals or natural phenomena as it is in the switching from one episode to another. By consistently “lengthening” the duration and using shots that capture banal actions in real and often extremely sluggish time, the film departs from the eponymous novel where flurries of consecutive words and multiple digressions lead to shifts in the rhythm, often accelerating the narrative flow.

In this sense, the duration of *Sátántangó* can be understood as one of the significant features that help viewers respond appropriately to the film. The world of this film is one of passivity, dullness, inertia and aimlessness. It also involves a loss of faith and endless waiting for the Messiah who eventually appears in the form of the imposturous Irimiás. As noted by the Czech theorist Helena Bendová, “lengthy films are often good precisely because of their length”, since their length is their (constitutive) element, which, despite appearing as a merely formal feature, “becomes the piece’s quality” (Bendová 1999, 5). The impact of the length on the viewer is two-fold. On one hand, lengthening techniques such as slowed-down shots, long takes, frozen shots, repetition and loosening the narrative structure⁴ (all but the first are employed by Tarr) can make the viewer “surrender” to the film, to “*co-habit* with the piece”. On the other hand, exhaustion from and the physiological impact of having to sit through such long films is alienating (Bendová 1999, 21). Czech scholar Jaromír Blažejovský arrives at a similar conclusion arguing that the extreme length of *Sátántangó* becomes integral to its meaning, forcing the viewer to experience the equivalent of the inertia in which the characters live: the “dullness from lowland horizons and the endless rain have to be almost physically felt by the viewer” (Blažejovský 2007, 187).

The other noteworthy significant strategy of the analyzed film is intermittent use of significant and insignificant devices. According to semiotician Jurij Lotman, this kind of interplay keeps the artwork saturated with information. Significance is measured by the extent to which the work departs from the norm. A norm can be understood as the norm of a particular period, genre or a particular artistic text such as the fact that the use of colour can be significant in an otherwise black-and-white film (for more details, see Lotman 1976.)

Significance of approach is integral to the consistent disruption of viewers’ expectations. This includes the use of contingency, which in *Sátántangó* is most distinctly manifested by the seemingly unimportant animals. As the viewer is no longer able to predict the next course of action, this improves his ability to keep watching such a lengthy film. The alternation of significant and insignificant elements makes the film dynamic: significant devices include the herd of cows in lieu of major protagonists, the sound of bells in relation to the cows, the interior shots vis- -vis their neighbouring exterior shots, wide shots against close-ups, etc. Viewers’ expectations are also confounded by the fact that the traditional renaissance perspective has been rejected; instead there are, for instance, many flat modernist compositions of the pub scene with previously invisible characters appearing suddenly from behind canvasses, or wide landscape shots of largely indeterminate distances.

Another significant device is music. This is, of course, an issue of its own as the use of Mihály Vig’s music in Tarr’s films is memorable for its melodic simplicity, the endless use of the same theme variations and instrumental imperfections. The sounds of out-of-tune

⁴ See Bendová (1999, 10).

accordion or disharmonic synthesizer that are used in *Sátántangó* belong to its significant devices.

Even though a very similar kind of insistent variations of a same trivial melody was used in also in *Damnation*, the semantic function of the music in *Sátántangó* has been fine tuned to near perfection. The first burst of music is heard after 23 minutes without any musical score, and is heard again later at roughly the same interval, ultimately suppressing the noise track altogether. With the exception of the striking sound of the accordion heard in all allusions to the pub scene, the music does not spring from the narrative space and can indeed be understood as “transcendent” (as opposed to “immanent”, springing from the action itself). Its significance is obvious: not unlike a baroque fugue, which, despite implying the passage of time, continually returns to its initial motif. Vig’s music also evokes ideas about reaching the Sublime, or of rising above and beyond the miseries of life on earth. This initial emotional impact, however, is rendered ambiguous by the music’s formal simplicity, repetitiveness and deliberately amateurish interpretation. Vig has created musical scores specifically for Tarr’s films that sound melancholic and hopelessly provincial and that do not evoke the sublime on its own terms, but seem to suggest that the sublime is to be found at the edges of a faithless world. Unlike Bach’s music, the music that Vig composed for Tarr’s films makes no reference to an extra-terrestrial world or afterlife. Its function is to bring momentary relief, particularly for the viewer. The visual equivalent in the opening sections of *Sátántangó* is the turned-away gaze: a gaze that is turned away from hopeless human bitterness and often from the human race in general. To substantiate this point, music is first heard as Futaki and Kraner argue over keeping the money (that is supposed to be distributed among all the villagers) for themselves. The first bars of the music are heard as the camera moves away from the men’s faces and towards the window, leading us in extremely slow motion to what lies outside: mud and standing in the middle of it is one of the quite ignorant neighbours and a dirty pig—a peculiar symbol of moral decadence in this rundown Pannonian frame.

The same musical motif then resurfaces an hour and seven minutes later. Here it is the same sound of the synthesizer (a modern mass-produced bastardization of the organ) and again, the disharmony between the first voice and the basses. Again, in the usage of music we find an aural equivalent of a gaze that turns away, dispiritedly, from a *particular* instance of human nature toward a melancholic rendition of the *overall* dreariness of the world. This time, the music is heard when the adolescent boy Sanyi explains to Irimiás and Petrina that nothing has changed in the village.

After this rather subtle sign of human malice the three men that have been followed walking along a muddied track, shot in profile, finally pass out of camera range. Sanyi’s words overlap with a musical motif and then finally fade out, while the camera lingers for several seconds on a shot of an empty road awash with torrential rain, before moving along the bare branches of autumnal trees reflected against a darkening sky. Much like the sound of church bells in the opening shot of the film, the music once again appears only to accompany a sense of a world that has been deserted by humans. And yet, the melancholic and seemingly transcendental “eye” of the camera suddenly betrays its technical nature as, apart from the camera’s smooth motion, a fly happens to land on the lens—an unlikely occurrence in all this “natural” rainy scenery.

The gaze and perspective

As we have seen, the universe of *Sátántangó* is man-made. It is mediated by a film camera that functions as a parallel to the human eye that cannot, however, provide a reliable interpretation of reality. Accordingly, the film is shot using recurring references to the act of looking, but the actual gazes of the characters are largely unfocused, indifferent or, at best, misty. It is equally difficult to tell what the characters are looking at and what they see as it is to determine the overall nature of perspective in the film. Czech scholar Jaromír Blažejovský describes the perspective used in *Sátántangó* as transcendental, with the caveat that “the God of Tarr’s transcendence must be a very, very slow God, if not actually a Satan, as the title would suggest” (Blažejovský 2007, 186-7). The gazes lead neither to action nor to knowledge and, at times, not even to reliable recognition, and the viewer is encouraged to respond in the same way.

However, the camera at times contradicts the extent to which the protagonists appear “active” or “passive”. Often, the camera remains static when the principles of classical film narration would have it follow the action or movement of characters and vice versa. This approach and the film’s positioning of point of views has a semantic parallel in the repeated motif, discussed earlier, of the characters aimless looking mostly out of the window, or of them gazing ahead in an unfocused manner, more or less towards the camera. Thus, “the eye of the camera” principally assumes and embodies the passivity, inertia and automatism of the story’s characters.

In the first part of the film, there are several variations on images of persons looking out of a window. In the opening few seconds, Futaki is seen returning to the window twice to check that what he is indeed hearing is the bells (as if looking out of the window would answer his question!). His mistress Schmidt is also facing a window after she got out of bed trying to tell her nightmare.

Of course, most of the time it is the doctor that is looking out of a window—and this activity is mostly associated with him in the novel as well. Yet, instead of classical combination of close up of the doctor, shot of the window and then the medium shot of doctor’s view out of the window in direct juxtaposition, Tarr initially uses either shots of the doctor in profile or medium shots showing him from behind together with “his” view—the outer world he is observing through the window. The first introduction of the character of the doctor is however merely implied: we again see Futaki looking out of a window, now shot face on, not from behind. Futaki is seen framed simultaneously through the binoculars and through the window and is thereby presented as being part of the scene the doctor is observing—but we do not yet know who is the holder of the binoculars (and thus the holder of the view through them).

The sense of *mediation* is enhanced by many references to optical devices or partly transparent materials that allow, improve or disturb the clear view: the lenses in the binoculars, the rain streaming down the windows or the texture of the curtains, the glass in the window (or exceptionally, the windshield of the lorry or even the lens of the camera itself when the fly lands on them). The film’s plot is thus not narrated from the point of view of a transcendental observer. On the contrary, the “narrator” is as human as the doctor who appears reduced to his awkward bodily existence and becomes associated with the

mastermind of the story only as the film ends. Not only is this narrator no God—is no Satan either. His automatism and inertia, his nausea and inactivity are neither insensitive, as Jaromír Blažejovský argues, nor exceedingly compassionate. This makes *Sátántangó* a true sense of the term, a variation of “human, all too human” condition, as once seen by Nietzsche.

The film’s narration is controlled by the doctor as a *viewer*, not as a writer as he appears in the end of the Krasznahorkai’s novel. The shifting of weight from one activity to another (from writing to observing) can be seen as a classical example of translation from one semiotic system to another. Nevertheless, as we have seen, direct views of objects of interest are disrupted by specific shot compositions often involving glass obstacles, torrents of water or half-transparent materials. In a sense, Tarr is responding to the age of post-structuralism, as witnessed in its deconstruction of traditional renaissance perspective in which the observer is situated at the centre of the visual field, wielding power over the observed scene. A loss of faith in the immediate knowledge of the world is also reflected in the fact that *Sátántangó* is based around a series of sequences which often portray a single event from the perspective of different witnesses. There are many instances where attention is diverted away from passive protagonists (whose activity is often reduced only to walking along the wide landscapes without a clear goal). Moving of attention towards still-lives, landscapes or spaces seen “through the window” are a far cry from Tarkovsky’s shots of unbearably slowly moving spilt milk, water torrents or plants blowing gently in the wind... In Tarkovsky’s films, images of these phenomena and motions function similarly as carefully recorded noises with no visible source: they point to the existence of a parallel universe, an unknown transcendental will or entity that lies beyond that which is visible.⁵ Tarr’s films, in contrast, merely offer a turned-away gaze as a *response* to human pettiness. On these occasions, the “phenomena” which the camera lingers on fascinatedly provide a kind of general summary of an impasse in a world where humans are left behind without any hope. These images reflect a particular way of thinking where melancholia is seen not as a kind of passivity and laziness, but as a philosophical attitude of an intellectually superior individual who is achingly aware of his inability to change the world order.

Another aspect of the self-consciousness of the cinematic image in *Sátántangó* is its relation to the visual representability of a miracle. This aspect is revealed for instance in the episode of Irimiás’s encounter with a ghost of a dead girl Estike on a misty morning. In the novel, Irimiás—for a while—really believes he saw a ghost, but in film he just kneels down before an undefined entity, numb from leaving the position for a long while. The reverse shot shows only the mist; with the mist gone, Irimiás stands up and goes on his way with the two of his companions. Arguably, Tarr does not permit himself to visually represent miracle that was suggested in the verbal description of the novel. He suggests it by aural level of the film, however. As we have already seen, the film’s overture—the image of an abandoned herd of cows roaming about a pasture unguided—is followed by the reminiscence of the opening sentences of the novel: by the sound of bells that are nowhere near to be found. As we would find out before the end of the film (or the novel as well), the “miraculous” sound of bells is made by a lonely lunatic who has moved into the destroyed church and is thumping away

⁵ See e.g. Truppin 1992, particularly “Sound, Source and Revelation”, pp. 237-241.

assiduously on an old rail while shouting out an anachronistic warning—"Turks are coming!" The point both the author of the novel and the director of the film seem to be making is the same: a miracle is the expectation the reader/viewer is encouraged to feel as he is continually guided by the narrative. There are no real "miracles" in the fiction world of the film, as most of the unusual situations have pedestrian explanations. The reader/viewer, however, is put in a privileged moral position as he always becomes entangled in the narrator's trap. The protagonists meanwhile respond by feeling neither awe nor the sublime.

What world?

The film's purported concept of the image should be understood also in two further ways: the first is that the camera movements and frames of the image often lead to distortion of the viewer's sense of narrative space, and the second is the significance of the indeterminacy of the film's geographic locations and time-frame.

As a general point, the plot is played out between an unnamed provincial town and a distant village, populated by a handful of married couples and several isolated individuals. There are no institutions to be found here, though we are reminded by some of the characters that at one time there might have been some; in fact, the headmaster and doctor are referred to only under these names. The town is represented primarily by scenes that take place at municipality which, in the words of one of its employees, actually represents the law; in reality, it is more reminiscent of the secret police. There is also a pub as well as an exceptional urban chronotope—an empty classicist square, through which a pack of horses runs at dawn (the result is an image with a surreal effect, but also with a trivial explanation: "running away from the slaughter-house again", as the Sanyi boy remarks).

The architecture, costumes and stage-design present a mixed vision of the 1950s and 1970s, though the plot may well occur in the same period in which it was adopted for the screen and finally shot, i.e. between the late 1980s and early 1990s. History survives in functionless archaeological layers, as it does in the protagonists' costumes—crumpled work clothes—a common sight in impoverished communities in Pannonia even today. The visual design of Tarr's films is neither exaggerated nor fabricated—apart from the images of natural elements that are "discreetly" emphasized at times. As noted by Gyula Pauer, the set designer of *Damnation*, all the sets in the film, both exterior and interior were real. The only artificiality in their ultimate appearance is dictated by the film's typically synthetic-analytical nature. The sets in *Damnation* were constructed in much the same way as they were in Kuleshov's experiments with cinematic language: from actual environments that were, however, miles away from each other.⁶

A similar strategy is used in *Sátántangó*. In addition, the film's different settings are not only detached from each other, often amounting to separate chronotopes, but Tarr

⁶ When interviewed by A. B. Kovács, G. Pauer says "the sites are real, but we shot the film in very different locations. Sometimes we only recorded a street scene; sometimes only a house-wall; and we even have a house in the film with an exterior that is in Budapest, an interior in Ajka, and a next-door shop in Pécs. So the film's world consists of real elements, which, however, do not create a real space" (Kovács 1988, 18).

deliberately creates a sense of disorientation within single locations. An example of this is hinted at in the clip of the doctor's trip to get his *eau-de-vie*: he is seen leaving his house, where the viewer has already been given a sense of orientation; yet in the next shot the doctor is shown from behind, in a mid-shot, walking through the muddy village. This disrupted set perspective creates the impression that the doctor is walking in a hesitant circle (in fact he changes direction at one point), until he enters the first building he encounters on his way.⁷ The effect of the parallel motion of the camera and of the protagonist is similar to that in Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, where there is a mid-shot of a girl who seems to gradually walk full circle (while it becomes distinctly clear that the girl shot in profile is not walking on her own but is being carried on her father's shoulders). However, this image of Tarr seems to convey a sense of aimlessness rather than of the sublime or the miraculous we can sense in Tarkovsky, believing for a while that the little immobile girl has been cured.

Disorientation in space is further suggested by the use of wide shots, creating the impression of enormous distances. However, the characters seem to cover the distances rather quickly and accompanied by the unnaturally distinct sounds of their "own" footsteps and voices.

It is possible to associate this sense of spatial disorientation with another recurrent motif of the analyzed film: that of cyclical time or visual images involving circles (i.e. the loudspeakers on the tape recorder, glasses or the circular pattern on the curtains). At the end of both the novel and the film, the circle motif seems to be emphasized by an almost identical recurring image of the doctor writing at his table, accompanied by the sound of the bells. In both cases, however, the last image appears to have been slightly altered in comparison with the opening; the difference between the two similar images in both the novel and the film is inferred by the knowledge the reader/viewer now has and, more importantly, by the self-referential nature of the final version of the mentioned image. In the novel, we learn that, having spent years merely observing life beyond the window of his decrepit house, the doctor is now returning home from hospital. Ignorant of the fact that all the inhabitants have left the village during his absence, the doctor sits down at his table and begins to make notes on what the villagers are busy doing, assuming that they are all sheltering inside their rundown houses from the autumn rains, not intending to leave them again before the arrival of spring.

At that point, a miracle seems to happen. The doctor suddenly begins to sense some strange changes, leaving increasingly poetic sentences on the paper in "his own" handwriting... until Krasznahorkai seems to literally return to the first two pages of his novel.

In retrospect, the novel becomes the work of a disagreeable doctor who has witnessed the miracle of writing, a miracle which is liberated—as both Barthes and Foucault have taught us—from the person of its author. In the film, the return to its beginning is not symbolized by the light shining from the words written on the paper but rather by the darkness which literally surrounds the doctor's workroom. In the final shot, we can see doctor blocking out the window by hammering planks of wood over it. The "window onto the world" becomes increasingly narrow, and with it so does the intensity of the light on the screen, until the

⁷ The novel, in contrast, suggests that the doctor, struggling after a rather long and tiresome journey, decides to pause and take a rest in an old mill. In the film version, the distance from the mill appears to be minimal; in fact, the mill seems to be situated in the middle of the village.

doctor—and the viewer—is surrounded by total darkness. The darkness which the film begins and ends in is perhaps the most significant reinterpretation of the peculiar hope contained in Krasznahorkai's novel. By portraying the doctor voluntarily dived in darkness, Tarr conveys a metaphorical message about the functions of cinematic image. The darkness that completes a symbolical circle of film plot suggests a new beginning, as is the case with those stories that begin again and again at the point of their own end. Notably, however, Tarr's film does not end with its final image; at that very point, the film rather starts to unfold anew in the viewer's mind. It is no longer a story or novelistic narrative but a series of contemplations about notions of what could be *seen*. The image has been lost in darkness, but the sound of bells lingers on even during the final credits. Thus, we can still believe. Not in the birth of the author, as in Krasznahorkai's novel, but in the rebirth of cinematic universe that continues in the viewer's mind.⁸

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- Aurora* (dir. Cristi Puiu, 2010)
- Damnation* (Kárhozat; dir. Béla Tarr, 1988)
- Dealer* (dir. Benedek Fliegauf, 2003)
- Delta* (dir. Kornél Mundruczó, 2008)
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