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Metaphysics of the sequence shot: the gathering and nihilating of being in Béla Tarr's *The Turin Horse*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the philosophical implications of Béla Tarr's *The Turin Horse* (2011) by attending to the thematic and aesthetic configuration of its sequence shots. The film's durational images, I suggest, perform a gathering and nihilating of presence whereby the existence of the subject is repeatedly affirmed and questioned. I read this dynamic, over and above figurative and diegetic parameters, as metaphysical. In line with its Nietzschean framing and de-creational structure, and in distinction from the hermetic living that characterises *Damnation* (1988), *Satantango* (1994) and *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000), I posit the film's catastrophic vision of the end of the world as revelatory. Placing stylistic analysis in dialogue with film theory and the philosophies of Nietzsche and Heidegger, I argue that Tarr's strategies of attention (on the subject) and reversal (of the action and cinematography) puncture narrative chronology, exposing the spatiality and temporality that structure our existence. For this, I align with Heidegger's thinking on metaphysics and the relation between art and truth. I establish the grounds for a compatibility between Heidegger's philosophy and the worthiness of cinema by appealing to the ontological purpose it attributes to certain works of art and technology. The presencing and absencing of *The Turin Horse's* in turn phenomenal and abyssal sequence shots, I conclude, produces a renewal of ground that illuminates questions of human fragility, freedom and emancipation, attuning us to the responsibilities of our being in a shared world.

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“The opposition is dawning between the world we revere and the world which we live, which we–are. It remains for us to abolish either our reverence or ourselves. The latter is nihilism.”

Friedrich Nietzsche



“In the artwork, the truth of beings has set itself to work. Art is truth setting itself to work.”

Martin Heidegger¹

The Turin Horse [*A Torniói Ló*, 2011] meticulously observes the daily rituals performed by a father and daughter fighting for their lives in an arid farmhouse on the weather-beaten Hungarian plain. The repetition of everyday routines (getting dressed, fetching water, cooking and eating, tending to the horse, sewing and chopping, undressing for bed ...) is set against increasing hindrances which eventually threaten the characters' survival (the horse stops eating, the well dries up, the fire won't light, the sun doesn't rise). Through a structure that reverses the story of the world's creation, these events can be seen as catastrophic. I claim, however, that in the relation between thematic emphasis and filmic form, the director's self-declared final film is in essence revelatory.²

Béla Tarr first gained international notoriety for his cinematic trilogy: *Damnation* [*Kárhozat*, 1988], *Satantango* [*Sátántangó*, 1994] and *Werckmeister Harmonies* [*Werckmeister Harmóniák*, 2000]. Conceived in close collaboration with László Krasznahorkai's fiction writings, these works depict post-communist worlds where hopelessness and self-interest breed despicability and decrepitude, where the only escape from an undignified life—certainly the only outcome for the innocent—is either insanity (Valuschka in *Werckmeister Harmonies*) or suicide (little Estike in *Satantango*). If the sociologies presented in the trilogy denounce the impacts of a dis-integrating community on the individual, *The Turin Horse* confronts us with the disappearance of all life in an appeal for the radical re-evaluation of our world that is most productively understood as metaphysical.

I refer to the film's double dynamic of gathering and nihilating presence whereby the existence of the subject—whether human, animal or world—is repeatedly affirmed and questioned.³ This oscillating movement takes shape by means of, as well as outreaching, the story-bound onscreen figure. Each scene is encapsulated in one or more sequence shots: spatio-

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temporal blocks that I posit serve either to capture its subjects through an attentive gaze that renders their relation to the world phenomenally palpable or to nullify these subjects' being in the world in an undoing of their actions that foreshadows their disappearance.⁴ Taking issue with interpretations that explore the presence, temporality and movement of the human figures in Tarr's *oeuvre* from material or virtual perspectives, I read the film's strategies of attention (on the subject) and repetition (of its action) existentially, as oscillations between life and death, being and nothingness.

My philosophical approach to *The Turin Horse* is first grounded in its Nietzschean framing which, made explicit in the preface's narration of the philosopher's encounter with a horse in Turin, finds expression in the work's de-creational stance, its thematic and structural allusions to the gradual disappearance of God's creation. *The Turin Horse* reminds us that for the threat of the "an-nihil-ation" of being and world to be posited, being and world must first be affirmed. To this end, the camera's detained gaze on character, animal and environment foregrounds their persistent existing within the world of the film. The crucial interdependence in Friedrich Nietzsche's writings between non-existence (the nothing or *nihil*) and existence (the being there of something or someone) is brought to light in Martin Heidegger's confrontation with his predecessor's thought. It is Heidegger who, in the early twentieth century, establishes the ground for thinking the meaning of human being in relation to its world and its finitude. While he never wrote at length about film (see below), Heidegger's phenomenology, metaphysics and philosophies of art and technology offer a rich resource for theorising cinematic space and time out of the subject—to include filmmaker, character-actor and viewer—beyond realist, materialist and epistemological parameters. From these perspectives, this article aims to illuminate questions of human fragility, disclosure and emancipation at the heart of *The Turin Horse*'s thematic and formal strategies.

The territory

I preface my enquiry by setting its territory in three steps. I first consider how my study relates to, yet ultimately distinguishes itself from, the recent category of "Slow Cinema". I then introduce the question of the encounter between Heidegger and film, before grounding the present article in the field of film-philosophy, specifically that drawing from Heidegger's thought, to illuminate existential questions and aesthetics that inform the production and reception of cinema.

On first approach, the cinematic strategies employed by *The Turin Horse*—e.g. de-dramatisation,

the durational sequence shot, a distilled aesthetic, scarcity of dialogue, attention to ambient sound, repetition, stillness, and a preoccupation with finitude—bear strong resonance with the style that defines the recent category of "Slow Cinema" in film theory and criticism.⁵ My study distinguishes itself from this interpretative framework on four points. First, while Slow Cinema firmly situates the question of the direct presentation of time in a realist discourse, often weaving André Bazin's phenomenologically-imbued theories of "duration" with Gilles Deleuze's anti-phenomenological "time-image" (De Luca and Jorge 2016, 8; Flanagan 2012, 73), my enquiry turns to the Bazinian sequence shot in its confluence of ontology, ethics and film form, to help clarify cinematic manifestations of human temporality and primordial time. Second, a large number of studies locate the conspicuousness of time made evident via the slow style at the material dimension, opening up important discussion on "economic productivity" (Lim 2014, 22–24), "globalisation" (Flanagan 2012, 19, 118), racial and gender politics (Gorfinkel 2016, 128, 135, 127, 133), and historical materialism (Rancière 2016b, 245–246). I address notions of injustice and precarity by attending to the contingency of human being and its world from an existential standpoint. Third, while commentators often acknowledge the existential sensibility of films labelled slow, its philosophical import is rarely properly confronted.⁶ Fourthly—perhaps most decisively—reading cinema with Heidegger's ontology of being cannot, as will become clear, be premised on a quantifiable marker such as speed. For this and the above reasons, my enquiry does not fall under the framework of Slow Cinema. Its remit, rather, is to formulate a metaphysics of the sequence shot by placing film theory and analysis in dialogue with the thought of Nietzsche and, more centrally, that of Heidegger.

In his 1949 Bremen lectures, which became the basis for his soon-to-follow celebrated essay "The Question Concerning Technology" (1954), Heidegger denounces broadcast film as severing the link between human and world through its alteration of our experience of space, time, and by implication of our selves. For this he gives two examples: first, the way images may be rendered at different speeds, presenting, for instance, a time-lapse history of the growth of a plant, and second, the manner in which television displays events that have already taken place in some distant location and which are now to be watched at close range and in the present tense, such as the explosion of the atomic bomb (Heidegger 2012, 3, 4, 8).

In spite of Heidegger's suspicious remarks, this hostility towards the transmission of the real in its broadcast form, which would in all probability for him be equally applicable to the deformation of

world, space and time in entertainment film, may be rethought in particular cases of authored cinema, especially when considered in relation to his writings on art and technology. My claim—which I will further elucidate in my discussion of art and truth in Heidegger’s philosophy—is grounded in the recognition that the moving image is both technology and, at its most thoughtful, art. Given that authored cinema stems from a creator’s most personal vision rather than the pressures of commodification, there is scope for the presentation of world, time, space and subject to remain connected to fundamental living. At least, this is what might be intimated from Heidegger’s expression of enthusiasm for Akira Kurosawa’s film *Rashomon*, when, in a reconstructed exchange with a Japanese interlocutor (Professor Tetzuka) dated 1954, the same year as his essay on technology, Heidegger confides: “I believed that I was experiencing the enchantment of the Japanese world, the enchantment that carries us away into the mysterious” (Heidegger 1982, 16). Over six decades of writings, however, Heidegger never elaborated on his elusive comments on the technology of film, providing little basis for further speculation on his views on cinema.

The first to argue Heidegger’s relevance to thinking about cinema (at least in anglophone scholarship) is philosopher and film theorist Stanley Cavell. In the foreword to the second edition of *The World Viewed* (1979), Cavell recognises a resonance between the “formal radiance” of Terrence Malick’s *Days of Heaven* (1978) and Heidegger’s description of the “Being of beings”. Quoting at length from Heidegger’s 1951–52 lecture course *What is Called Thinking*, Cavell suggests that the “beauty” of Malick’s film must be interpreted ontologically (Cavell 1979, xv). As commentators have acknowledged, Malick’s interest in Heidegger’s thought is scholarly-grounded.⁷ It is no surprise, then, that discussion on his early to mid-period films—in particular *The Thin Red Line* (1998)—should often describe a world outlook resonant with Heidegger’s philosophy.

A good deal of this scholarship attends to the film’s narrative (primarily) and its formal style (to differing degrees) by equally embracing, sometimes shifting between, key notions in Heidegger’s early and later thought (see below). Examples are: the “presencing of Being” as poetic manifestation (Fursternau and MacAvoy 2007); world disclosure as it relates to “being-in-the-world” (in the aesthetic experience, Yates 2006; in the viewing experience, Loht 2017); and “being-towards-death” in its relation to “the nothing”, “*angst*” and “world collapse” (Silverman 2003; Critchley 2009; Dreyfus and Prince 2009). In his recent monograph on Malick, Robert Sinnerbrink attentively interrogates the notion of a “Heideggerian cinema” first proposed by Marc Fursternau and Leslie MacAvoy in 2003 (Fursternau and MacAvoy 2007, 40–71). Sinnerbrink agrees with

Simon Critchley when the latter states that “[a] philosophical reading of the film should not be concerned with ideas about the thing, but with the thing itself, the cinematic *Sache*” (Critchley 2009, 17). A philosophical reading, Sinnerbrink elaborates, does not mean interpreting the film through “a framing philosophical meta-text”, rather, it means “presenting a reading of the film as itself engaged in philosophical reflection” (Sinnerbrink 2006, 29; Critchley 2009, 50). These standpoints openly align with Stephen Mulhall’s important evaluation of the encounter between film and philosophy in *On Film* (2008), where he distinguishes between: “film as philosophizing”, “philosophy of film” and “film as philosophy”—the latter of which he defines, after Cavell, as “cinema that finds itself in the condition of philosophy” (Mulhall 2008, 7, 130–134). While scholarship on the encounter between cinema and Heidegger has largely focused on Malick’s *oeuvre*, a handful of recent studies expand the enquiry.⁸

The question of the relation between Heidegger’s early and later philosophy is addressed front-on by William J. Richardson in his seminal *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (1963), where he identifies two distinct periods in Heidegger’s thought which he labels Heidegger I (up until 1929) and Heidegger II (from 1930). In his preface to Richardson’s study, Heidegger clarifies that his foundational thinking on the discursive *logos* and the phenomenological ontology of human being could not move forward without re-thinking metaphysics from the ground up, requiring him to come to terms with the unconcealing character of truth, which, in turn, sets the path for his later conception on the meaning-giving event of the *Ereignis*. Heidegger describes this “change” as a “reversal” [*Kehre*]—a shift in direction, not in standpoint—that has a transformative unifying effect on his thinking, bestowing it, as Thomas Sheehan points out, with a reciprocal character.⁹ In Heidegger’s own words: “only by way of what [Heidegger] I has thought does one gain access to what is to-be-thought by [Heidegger] II. But the thought of [Heidegger] I becomes possible only if it is contained in [Heidegger] II”. This requires, not a new language, but a new modality, “a transformed relationship to the essenc[-ing]” of the old language (Richardson 2003, 243, 625, 42; Heidegger in Richardson 2003, x, xii, xviii, xx, xvi, xxii; Sheehan 2014, 90, 82). It is from these perspectives that I cautiously engage with Heidegger’s writings of different periods.

Gathering being

In its trajectories through space, the camera of *The Turin Horse* strives to keep its character-actors in view and hence, I argue, in mattering existence.

Two salient characteristics of the film are the patient observation of daily activity as it unfolds in real time and the camera's fixity on its (primarily human) subjects whose actions it closely follows. Much as we saw earlier in the discussion on Slow Cinema and its durational aesthetic, scholarship on Tarr's cinema largely situates the prominence of the human figure in its material dimension. Jonathan Rosenbaum claims that the filmmaker's "camera movements are perpetually and necessarily mired in the physical" (Rosenbaum 2013, 132), Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc explains the "excess of presence" of subjects filmed in interior spaces by the corporeality of their "lumpy and inebriated bodies" (Sibertin-Blanc 2016, 156), and Sylvie Rollet asserts that "[f]aced with the enigma of time, all that remains of human beings is their bodies", describing Tarr's images as a "treatment of random corporeal and inanimate matter" (Rollet 2006, 101; 2016, 132). Commentaries by Lutz Koepnick and Elzbieta Buslowska further defamiliarise the human figure from its subjecthood. Evoking the sense of wonder that, he argues, emerges when we shift our perception from an inner point of view ("subjective intentionality") to an outer seeing (a surface objectivity pertaining to the object domain), Koepnick locates in both Tarr's and Tsai Ming-liang's long takes "an alien phenomenology"—one that discloses knowledge by inviting aesthetic experience at the material, textural level (Koepnick 2017, 109). For Buslowska, after Deleuze's time-image, in Tarr's film art the physical world dissolves via a hallucination that is "both visceral and disembodied", rendering vision all the more real (Buslowska 2015, 52).

Along a parallel yet distinct line of thought, Jacques Rancière remarks that Tarr's *Satantango* finds expression beyond the written page (Krasznahorkai's novel) by prioritising the fixing or movement of bodies in space—situations and trajectories—over the telling of stories (Rancière 2011, 50). Invoking (while inverting) Deleuze's proposition of "haptic montage", Rancière further locates the sensual unity of Tarr's sequence shots in the roaming camera that in *Damnation* finds and loses its subjects across the unmapped space of the Titanik bar, where Karrer's lover sings melancholically to a scattered and lonely audience (Rancière 2016a, 143). Rancière foregrounds the camera's journey through space rather than its points of arrival, stating that "[s]pace and time are not the frame within which events happen. They are material realities", irreducible forces bound up with history and political life (Rancière 2016b, 248).¹⁰

There is certainly a sense of urgency to the ways in which Tarr's camera captures bodies within the frame, tracking their movement in space and time. Interpretations of this urgency, however, should not

be limited to material dimensions of corporeality, virtual or socio-political sense-perception. My claim is that, first and foremost, Tarr's images bear explicit existential weight.¹¹ In his influential defence of the sequence shot [*plan séquence*] over montage, André Bazin praises the integrity pertaining to "the spatial unity of an event", which he argues safeguards the event from being transformed "from something real into something imaginary", from traceable presence to illusionary dream (Bazin 2005a, 50, 46). To this end, the theorist applauds the continuum of reality offered by the sequence shots of Luchino Visconti, Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica and Jean Renoir in their foregrounding of perceived experience over dramatic story, and of Rossellini and Orson Welles for placing the actor in the world environment, or actual site, in which the film takes place (Bazin 2005a, 34, 38; 2005b, 36, 39; 1991, 68). It is from these perspectives, Bazin argues, that the sequence shot, especially when utilising depth of field, surpasses the virtues of montage—understood as film assemblage-making possible what he calls "[e]ssential cinema [...] in its pure state" (Bazin 2005a, 30, 34, 37, 38, 46).

The ambiguity of Bazin's terminology ("essential" and "pure") gains specificity when read alongside his discussions of Italian neorealism. Arguing for the meaning of human being over the empty iteration of style—"neorealism is more an ontological position than an aesthetic one"—Bazin celebrates its presentation of "the verisimilitude of life" and its impression of unflinching "truth". He thus proposes that in neorealist cinema literary and theatrical naturalism are replaced by what, after his interlocutor Amédée Ayfre, he labels a "'phenomenological' realism" (Bazin 2005a, 31, 58; 2005b, 66, 87).¹² For Bazin, as for Tarr (and Krasznahorkai), this (generally posited) phenomenology takes shape as a distilled sociology that uncovers human drama from the destroyed landscapes and struggling peoples of Germany-occupied Italy and post-war Germany, on the one hand, and post-communist Hungary (or indeed planet Earth and the cosmos), on the other. My point is that Bazin's formulation of the integrity of the sequence shot in its unity of space (and time) is founded upon an engagement with the existential immediacy of phenomena (that which appears and shows itself) as a first degree, or indeed essential, monstration of reality that proves crucial to my reading of *The Turin Horse*.¹³

Sequence by sequence *The Turin Horse* invites a perception of figure and world that supersedes the strict requirements of the diegesis. The primacy of the visible, not only of what is being presented, but the level at which we are invited to perceive it over time, is called into question, freeing a dimension of the image that is most productively articulated from the standpoint of Heidegger's phenomenology of "being-

in-the-world”—the existential interdependence of human being, world, time and space. For Heidegger, human life is inseparable from and always in productive relation with that which surrounds it. From this perspective, *Being and Time* (1927) defines the human as *Da-sein*, the being that is “there”, “thrown” into a world. My condition of “thrownness” [*Geworfenheit*] makes possible a first degree (essential) apprehension of myself and the world, which in turn makes evident my “facticity” [*Faktizität*], the fact that I exist. It follows that in the structure of world, time and space, subject and world are meaningfully “bound up with one another as a primordial totality” (Heidegger 1962, 174, 120–121). Put simply, living implies inhabiting space and time in a shared environment and, since this intrinsic relation is “primordial”—it is originary because constituted at the inception of life—it forms a “totality”, a foundational dimension, that grounds our everyday being alive. The existential character of this dimension lies prior to what in readings of Tarr’s films has been posited as corporeal (Rollet), object-based (Koepnick) and historical materialist (Rancière).¹⁴

In *The Turin Horse*’s durational sequence shots the human is inextricable from the phenomenal continuum they so elegantly enclose. Consider the camera’s attentive gaze on the horse and driver crossing the foggy countryside in the opening scene, or its captivating capture of the daughter’s first trip to the well, followed by an equally unblinking eye on the father’s dressing ritual. When the director states his preference for capturing a sequence in one single take, praising its “continuity” and the “concentration” and “special tension” that it incites on set, and when his editor and co-director Ágnes Hranitzky assures us that “[t]he important thing [...] is to know where not to cut” (Schlosser 2000; Romney 2001), we are reminded that the immediacy of their image relies on the presence (the state of nowness) of its creators (filmmakers and actors) to a world in which fictional environment and lived event overlap. “The longer the sequence”, Tarr asserts, “the more we feel tension, vibration, weight and depth. The sequence shot imprisons the actor who has no chance of escaping the frame” (Thevenin 2012). I will now show that in *The Turin Horse* the frame’s fixation on its subjects paradoxically results in a containment that, contrary to that of the trilogy, meaningfully frees rather than “imprisons” their being-in-the-world.

Spatiality

The Turin Horse employs the continuity of the sequence shot to gather human presence in a careful registration of the subject as she or he carves a personal spatio-temporal world from his or her interaction with the shared environment. An examination of

the daughter’s first trip to the well, with particular attention to the placement of the lens in relation to its subject, serves to spatially illustrate the *thereness* of her being [Figures 1 and 2].¹⁵ As the daughter prepares to open the front door, the camera rapidly moves in to frame her leaving the building in a three-quarter shot. We first follow her from behind, then move slightly round to her left, remaining a good few steps behind her in a wider composition that includes her full body. By the time she reaches the well we have performed a half circle to frame her in a reverse tight-mid-profile shot from a slight low angle. She pushes the cover off the well’s mouth and bends in to strenuously pull up the container of water. We tilt down to match her lowering action in order to distribute the water into the two buckets on the ground, following her up to release the roped container back into the well. The action repeats. We remain by the well as she now circles it, away from camera, to retrieve the cover which she then restores. We swiftly pick her up as she walks towards us on the way back to the house with the full pails, oscillating between a twenty degree side angle and a frontal perspective. It becomes clear in this sequence that to contain its subject within the frame Tarr’s camera is required to enter the space of the film world.

In his celebrated comments on the panorama, Béla Balázs praised the on-set mobility of the camera by claiming that it evoked:

the apparent authenticity of the picture, because in moving along with the tracking camera, it enables the spectator to remain in the real space in which the action takes place. The spectator’s eye can be a witness to everything, nothing is skipped and the tracking shot cannot ‘deceive’ as editing can. (Balázs 1952, 139)

Proposing an alternative to the “surplus of realism” that Bazin champions in Welles’s “*découpage* in depth” (Bazin 1991, 80), Balázs regards as most important in the sequence shot the viewer’s immersion into the dimensional space of the actual world of the film. The travelling camera allows the viewer to identify with the subject as it moves through space and time, rendering her a witness to, first, the subject’s positioning and changing vantage points (which he labels “subjective”) and, second, the actual topography of the film world, as delineated by the distances separating its objects. To this end he remarks: “[s]pace itself, not the picture of space in perspective presentation is what we experience here” (Balázs 1952, 140). Distinct from Bazin’s proposition that the phenomenality of the sequence shot summons the viewer’s “attention and will” to appreciate the existential value of static depth-of-space staging (Bazin 2005a, 35–36), Balázs’s theory of cinematic tracking proposes a realism that posits viewer experience at the physical level.



Figures 1 and 2. *The Turin Horse*.

In a more recent discussion of cinematic theories of camera movement and point of view, Daniel Morgan takes issue with the widely-shared presupposition that the positioning of the camera within the world of the film implies that the viewer is invited to occupy the film environment, whether literally (stepping *into*) or else hypothetically (*as if* they were there) (Morgan 2016, 225–227).¹⁶ For Morgan, the problem lies in the “conflation of camera, viewer, and character that smooths over the epistemic gap that fictional worlds entail” (232). We might be given a place from which to visually take in the world of a film, but that does not mean that we are either physically or even imaginatively *in* that world. Morgan’s insightful correction reminds us that, even when evoking a point of view, the moving camera cannot function as “surrogate” for the viewer (226, 229). No longer bound to the principle of viewer identification that, whether on the physical plane, psychologically or as epistemological fantasy, forms the basis for Balázs’s theory, on the one hand, and Morgan’s critique, on the other, I advance that the viewer’s involvement with the world of Tarr’s 2011 film takes place primarily at the ontological level. Christopher Yates eloquently describes this dynamic when reading Malick’s cinema through Heidegger’s notion of being-in-the-world:

In the aesthetic event, then, far from inviting the spectator out of his or her world into a place of expressive retreat, art assumes the burden of the spectator’s philosophical situation in-the-world and seeks to give the spectator the world of his or her being. (Yates 2006, 8)

By tuning into the phenomenal gathering that emanates from the human world of the film, the viewer connects with her own sense of being-in-the-world, giving her access to her most intimate self, the truth of her being. (I further clarify this point in my later discussion of truth and the artwork in Heidegger’s thought, as it converses with, and distinguishes itself from, Nietzsche’s “will to power as art”).

In the *Turin Horse*, the camera performs a double movement of immersion and distantiation—now

urging closeness, now pulling back to an outsider’s gaze—soliciting our attention not only critically but fundamentally. It is as if the filmmaker was urging us, in a first instance to take the place of the character, and in a second instance to look at ourselves in that position. To these ends, the manner in which the camera committedly accompanies the young girl to the well invites a sense of nearness, at once in depth and in movement, that transcends the common experience of watching a character in the telling of a story. I borrow the notion of “nearness” [*Nähe*] from Heidegger, for whom the wholeness and integrity between self and world relies on the human being’s self-awareness “within” its spatio-temporal world and in relationship with the environment, things and other beings (Heidegger 1962, 138–143).¹⁷ Understood from this perspective, nearness ruptures the distant feeling (of watching from the outside) adopted by Tarr’s gaze in his extensive use of the deep-focus sequence shot in the trilogy. The difference is that the trilogy performs an observation ‘of’ and *The Turin Horse* a being ‘with’ the onscreen subject.¹⁸

Consider *Damnation*, where the camera is either locked off or else performing horizontal tracking movements from right-to-left and left-to-right which, as Rollet remarks, bear a metronomical feel of locked time (Rollet 2013, 6). Here, figures seem fixed in space, positioned in perspective in relation to each other, as if waiting for the lens to find and trap them within the confines of the frame. If in *Satantango* in-depth vision supersedes the persistent horizontality of *Damnation*, the magnetism forged by the latter between frame, figure and space is carried through with equal intensity. To this end, Tarr employs two key strategies that do not depend on shot-reverse-shot or dialogue. I refer, on the one hand, to the lining up of figures across different perspectival planes: whether overlapping bodies in confined space (the villagers waiting for their messiah in the derelict mansion [Figure 3]; a defeated Karrer at the entrance of the bar, while an accordionist plays inside and the owner listens in the background); or else creating distance between two confronting



Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6. *Satantango*.

subjects (the stilled villagers as they look into camera to the supposed coming of Irimiás [Figure 4] or little Estike in the background watching die before her [and us] the cat she has poisoned [Figure 5]). On the other hand, there is the camera's signature frontal tracking or circling of still subjects (Mrs. Schmidt's devastated face as

she realises there is no future ahead [Figure 6] or a hopeless-looking crowd gazing at us from the grim *Damnation* bar). In both these films, the fixed or moving shot is used to study characters locked together in a fated (because futureless) space that is uninhabitable and which consequently the camera cannot share.

If in the trilogy the camera is limited to observing its (for the most part) passive subjects in a world that they no longer relate to, since their essential experience of being-in-the-world is closed off, *The Turin Horse* invites the possibility of being 'with' the active subjects by fundamentally attuning to the world which these subjects still, if only just, inhabit. While the magnetic vacuity imaged in the trilogy exposes the existential entropy of its characters, the unity of time, space, subject and world through which *The Turin Horse* gathers the living presence of its figures signals a Bazinian force where "the scene charges itself like an electrical condenser", imparting on the viewer a "heavy [existential] spell" (Bazin 1991, 68, 73, my addition). The recognition of being 'with' comes to the fore for us via a double attunement: to the phenomenality of the human figure as witnessed by the camera (as I discuss in the present section), and to the fragility of both the subject's own being and its relations to others, made evident by the foreshadowing of its disappearance (which I demonstrate in the latter sections).

In *The Turin Horse* most *mise-en-scènes* are built on trajectories through space from one threshold to another: from the doorway to the well, the doorway to the stable, the kitchen fire to the dining table. As bodies move through space, the camera doesn't just follow them, but creates its own map of the environment around them, rendering visible their personal territory. The dense form of the being-there that emanates from the young woman as she braves the storm to fetch water is to be perceived not as voluminous matter that takes up measurable space across a calculable trajectory, but as a presence whose being is disclosed in the spatial and temporal inhabiting of its everyday environment. At the level of the viewing experience, our being 'with' the onscreen subject—in this instance Erika Bók—as that subject *is* alongside the camera *in* the world of the film, evokes the ontological dimension that for Heidegger opens up in the meeting of human and world. I earlier showed that this is the very continuum (understood as wholeness or integrity) that Bazin hails as the first attribute of the sequence shot. I will now examine what this means beyond the static in-depth staging that is the focus of the latter's analyses.

Despite Tarr's consideration as to whether Yasujiro Ozu's fixed camera might in fact be the genuine means to film art,¹⁹ the strategy of attention that drives *The Turin Horse* strongly relies on camera mobility. In his discussion of Tarr's stylistic shift commencing with *Damnation*, András Bálint Kovács recalls that the

director “wanted the camera to move continuously [...] The movement of the camera had to be descriptive from the outside” (Kovács 2008, 6). Distinctly, the combination of virtuous camera movement and sustained depth of field that characterises the 2011 film evokes a sense of shared world that I read, with Heidegger, to bear a “nearness” which implies, in turn, an immersiveness, an “insiderness” [*Inwendigkeit*]. Contrary to, in Heidegger’s own example, Henri Bergson’s idea of space as being located outside the subject, and being therefore quantifiable rather than qualifiable, *Being and Time* describes a dimension in which space, time, and subject are existentially bound, opening onto a deeper understanding of self and world. As she moves through space, the daughter in *The Turin Horse* generates, sustains and shows herself, not by her bodily appearance or location, but in her meaningful interactions with the environment, things and other entities, manifesting, through this “nearness”, her “spatiality” [*Räumlichkeit*]—her fundamental relation with space (Heidegger 1962, 79–83, 134–135).

In a talk on sculpture delivered at the Art Gallery of St. Gallen in 1964, Heidegger asserts that if “[t]he space occupied by a body, *topos*, is its place”, it’s because the human being “does not *have* a body and *is* not a body (*Körper*), but *lives* its body (*Leib*)” (Heidegger 2009, 19–25, my emphases). We understand from his *Zollikon Seminars* one year later that the thinker is here making an important distinction between the lived (fundamentally inhabited) and the corporeal or else objective dimensions of the body, which he posits to bear different limits. Whereas “[t]he corporeal thing stops with the skin [w]hen we are here, we are always in relationship to something else”. My body is not just a material mass occupying a calculable area of space; crucially, my body is *mine*, it pertains to the existential structure of my being human in its open relation to the world (Heidegger 2001, 86–87). It here becomes clear that while Heidegger’s approach to space, as it is inhabited by the human, has undergone a transformation in language and expression from that of *Being and Time*, written nearly forty years prior to the above talks, the orientation of his thought remains deeply familiar. Establishing a meaningful connection between movement, space, seeing, and self-showing, Heidegger writes: “[t]hat which, in an indeterminate way, we name space is represented from the *optics* of a body advancing into *presence*” (Heidegger 2009, 18, my emphases). The sculptor’s (for our purposes the filmmaker’s) creative engagement with space enables them to see and show themselves in their exposedness, for the fragile human beings that they are.

Out of the thirty-one sequence shots that constitute *The Turin Horse*, thirty are moving shots. Moreover, with the exception of the opening sequence of the father and horse riding across the misty plane (captured with a crane), the film’s moving shots are captured primarily on a steadicam (I use this term generically). The skill of the steadicam is that, merely bound to its operator, it

travels freely across space, softly compensating for the abruptness of the human walk, resulting in a gliding quality that resembles the perception one might have of the human gaze as it spatially engages with the world. From this perspective, the virtuous mobility of the Tarr-Kelemen (director–director of photography and camera operator) shot remains to all intents and purposes anthropocentric. Firstly, in spite of its release from gravitational pull, the steadicam is human-carried and operated; secondly, Tarr’s primary subject is consistently the human being.²⁰ I maintain, however, that, over and beyond configuring the worldly aspects of the film’s environment into an actual viewing stance or point of view, what is primarily being registered by the film’s sequence shots is the phenomenal presencing emanating from the simultaneous spatial engagements—understood after Heidegger as an *optics*—of character-actor (depicted subject) and filmmaker-operator (registered gaze).

My discussion so far has aimed to show that it is not so much the viewer’s immersive fantasy in the fiction that matters, but her attunement to the existential dimension generated, *in* the film—at a level that at once takes into account and transcends the diegesis—by the intimate interactions of the subject with its environment.

Nihilating being

I have argued that the sequence shots of *The Turin Horse* render ‘palpable’, through spatial expression, the existential presence of the character-actor and by extension the filmmaker(s), as the camera’s sustained gaze on the living subjects poignantly foregrounds their being-in-the-world. I will now address the manner in which those same sequence shots announce the contingency of subject and world via strategies that render evident the metaphysical register of the Tarr-Krasznahorkai-Kelemen collaboration.²¹

The Turin Horse is built on iterations of everyday actions: dressing the father, sitting by the window, fetching water, feeding the horse, eating potatoes ... The feature of repetition in Tarr’s *oeuvre* has mostly been posited by commentators as a strategy of circularity that denounces the fatality of human beings in a disintegrating world. While Corinne Maury describes Tarr’s action as “a wandering that is infinitely circular” (Maury 2016, 42), Yvette Bíró refers to the films’ “closed-in Time” as the mark of unavoidable destiny (Bíró 2015, 319). Both scholars allude to an “eternal return” that broadly refers to Nietzsche’s doctrine of the “*eternal recurrence*”, or “eternal return”, of the same—the condition by which all things, including the events that make up human life, relentlessly repeat in an inescapable cycle that erodes all human goals and orientation, resulting in utter existential despondency. In the posthumously published notes

towards what was to be his *magnum opus*, *The Will to Power* (1883–1888), Nietzsche describes this state as “[t]he most extreme form of nihilism: the nothing (the ‘meaningless’) eternally!” (Nietzsche 1968, 544, 545, 255, 224, 35–36; Richardson 2003, 374–380). From this standpoint, in what Kovács also identifies as a closed circle where “everything repeats itself the same way” (Kovács 2004, 242; 2008, 9, 12; 2013, 133), the only movement characterising Tarr’s worlds is that of entropy (Sierek 2016, 115; Rollet 2016, 134). While some commentators extend the cyclical pattern of disintegration and resignation from the trilogy—where, as I have shown, its application proves justified—to *The Turin Horse* (Bayon 2016, 56; Wright and de Lastens 2011, 95), I maintain that in the latter work a distinct dynamic, no longer worldly but metaphysical, is at play. I first examine this dynamic by freshly engaging with Nietzsche’s evolving notion of “return” that I trace, through his discussions of “nihilism”, in dialogue with Heidegger.

Nietzsche’s notions of “nihilism” and “return” have had a significant impact on Krasznahorkai’s novelistic and screen writings. If the question of God’s absence from our world, his dismayed withdrawal or grievous death in the throes of modernity, rings across Krasznahorkai’s and Tarr’s collaborative works in tune with Nietzsche’s philosophy, in *The Turin Horse* this reference becomes explicit. The film is prefaced by a quote from the introduction to Krasznahorkai’s 1990 text “At the Latest in Turin”—a fictionalised description of Nietzsche’s 1889 emotional encounter on the streets of Turin with a horse that is being whipped by a cab driver for its refusal to move. It soon becomes clear that the film is not strictly a portrait of the horse that Nietzsche encounters in Turin (as the title and preface suggest), nor, despite Ohlsdorfer’s paralysed arm, is it a characterisation of the philosopher himself (who became immobilised by his syphilitic condition). Rather, as I argue in what follows, *The Turin Horse* hypothesises a gradual slipping away of life, announcing the eventual annihilation of the cosmos (and with it the Earth and all its beings), thereby eliciting the ultimate confrontation of the human with its contingency (the fact that it is finite) as final wake-up call. It is in this spirit that Krasznahorkai, after Nietzsche, greets “nihilism” as the only means to a degree zero from which to imagine a new world (Krasznahorkai 2013, 24–25).

“Nihilism”, Nietzsche asserts, signals the realisation of the “meaninglessness” of existence in light of the no-longer viable morality on which society has been founded: “*That the highest values devaluate themselves*” (Nietzsche 1968, 7, 9). As he had already pointed out in *The Gay Science* (1887), quoted in the epigraph to this article, the project of humanity’s survival is incompatible with the state of our world. From this unconsolable realisation two standpoints

are possible: to either wearily resign to our declining power of assertion and vitality in “*passive nihilism*”, or to embrace the opportunity of renewal by engaging our vigour in a cleansing act of destruction (of our world and values) that Nietzsche terms “*active nihilism*” (Nietzsche 1968, 17–18). Put simply, the point of nihilism is that it induces an extreme state of despair—a loss of meaning and ground—that, in turn, encourages the strength for overcoming that same nihilistic position. In his analysis “The Word of Nietzsche: ‘God is Dead’” (1943), Heidegger presents the essence of “nihilism” as a historical movement that embraces a worldly state where values have declined and God is (often) disavowed, where true change requires a willingness to embrace the catastrophic by forsaking the very conditions which ground that living (Heidegger 1977, 62–63, 67).

While in Tarr’s trilogy the characters are left turning in circles in a hermetic time presented as endless, arguably echoing Nietzsche’s starting premise for the “eternal return” of the same, in the world of *The Turin Horse* subjects face an all-overthrowing destruction that I claim is, in a first instance, aligned with the overcoming of “nihilism” for Nietzsche ultimately grounded in that very “return”. The film unfolds over six days. With each day, the characters’ structured routine—dressing and undressing of humans and horse, fetching water, cooking and eating, making leathering, sewing, washing and hanging laundry, resting, gazing out the window, lighting and putting out the lamp ...—is challenged by a new (seemingly random) event that signals an oncoming chaos: the gradual extinguishing of life. On the first night, Ohlsdorfer remarks that he can no longer hear the woodworms; in the morning the horse refuses to move; on the third day they discover that the animal hasn’t eaten; the daughter’s trip to fetch water on the fourth day reveals the well has dried up and the horse still hasn’t fed and now won’t drink; their attempt to leave the uninhabitable land by foot does not succeed and, while on the fifth day they can still feed themselves, they resign to the imminent death of the horse and face an unprecedented darkness when the lamp won’t light up. Their determination to survive (“Tomorrow we’ll try again”) is not rewarded as they wake up to complete darkness on day six. Unable to nourish themselves on uncooked potatoes they give in to their inevitable demise. It is indeed no surprise when Tarr confirms that his and Krasznahorkai’s narrative “is an anti-Creation story” (Levine and Meckler 2012).

If, as Kovács rightly states distinguishing *The Turin Horse* from Tarr’s trilogy, “[t]his is an apocalypse, not an everyday hell” (Kovács 2013, 148), the point, I add, is that this apocalypse is brought about by a judgement that neither comes from God nor derives from shared rationality. It is Nietzsche’s Madman who reminds the people of the “messianic” announcement of God’s death, stating that humans

are to be held responsible for the murder. In bewildered despair, the Madman asks:

Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? [...] Aren't we straying as though through an infinite nothing? [...] Don't lanterns have to be lit in the morning? (Nietzsche 2001, 120)

These sorrowful words strongly resonate with the godless (because barren, isolated and dark) world that the Ohlsdorfers ultimately face. Indeed, all that the travelers (the Tzigane people) in *The Turin Horse* can gift the daughter in exchange for water is an anti-Bible. The ringing that resounds across the plane confusing Futaki and the Doctor is not a holy call, but the efforts of the village “madman” who, despite persistently bashing against a derelict bell clapper, is unsuccessful in resurrecting the divine. The “madman”'s bell-less tolling is however not insignificant; nor is the Ohlsdorfers's neighbour's description of the decayed and burnt down world in which he sees promise of unprecedented change. Announced in *Satantango* and delivered by *The Turin Horse* is the idea that “active nihilism” (as formulated by Nietzsche) is the only positive response to our irretrievably fallen world.

If for Nietzsche, the only means for enduring the “eternal return” of the same is a revaluation of all values, this revaluation is to be undertaken through “will to power”. Nietzsche defines “will to power” as the driving force for all worthy “purposes, aims, meaning” directed at overcoming and enhancing oneself, “will to power as self-elevation and strengthening” (Nietzsche 1968, 356, 218). What is crucial, as Heidegger and Richardson remark, is that Nietzsche's “will” is not only commanding, but self-commanding (Heidegger 1991b, 152; Richardson 2003, 365–366). Over and above the physical and psychic realms, “will to power” is for Nietzsche a “primitive form of affect” that transforms energy into life. However, as the latter recognises in his confident assertion, “no longer will to preservation but to power”, at stake in this radical revaluation is the very life that it so committedly seeks (Nietzsche 1968, 366, 340, 545).

The Turin Horse is not ultimately concerned with the preservation of its fictional characters and world, but on awakening the viewer to her own existing in the actual world. Upon the release of the film, Tarr declares that “[w]hen the lights come up and people leave the cinema, they should feel stronger. It is my responsibility to give them dignity” (Chiffolleau 2013, 22). The strength and dignity (interpreted as self-possession) that Tarr wishes to elicit recalls Nietzsche's evaluation of tragedy as “a tonic”, where the “preference for questionable and terrifying things is a symptom of strength”, as is the willingness to suffer and forsake the need for an ending, thereby attaining “an exalted feeling of power”. In what is the only fixed camera shot in the entire film, the final

image of *The Turin Horse* depicts the figures of the father and daughter, motionless and defeated, awaiting death. In attentive anticipation, we are called to recognise the inevitability of our own demise, not in “resignation”, but through the affirmation that we are, in this present moment, alive, producing an exhilarating rush akin to Nietzsche's “formula”: “Life is will to power” (Nietzsche 1968, 449, 450, 420–421, 434, 148).

In aphorism 343, with which the fifth book of *The Gay Science* begins, Nietzsche writes that, following the death of God, “finally the horizon seems clear again, even if not bright” (199). Heidegger explains this shift in Nietzsche's thought—no longer mourning but celebrating—by stating that what is favourably at stake in God's demise is an “an-nihil-ation” that, at a cosmic level, offers the possibility for absolute renewal (Heidegger 1977, 70–71).²² In his extended monologue, the neighbour in *The Turin Horse* clarifies that the eradication of life he has witnessed is not caused by the relentless whip of the wind; equally, it does not result from a disaster, such as the tsunami-triggered Fukushima accident that tragically took place the same year as the film's release. Furthermore, differentiating itself from the trilogy, nothing in the world of the Ohlsdorfers explicitly points to the workings of the political, economic or ideological domination of Soviet communism. Rather, as Kovács points out, the anti-creational premise of *The Turin Horse* foreshadows an apocalypse. Signalling the end of time, the ancient Greek term *apokálypsis* is the translation of the original Hebrew word *gala*, meaning to expose or lay bare. By this lineage, from the Old Testament (the story of the Great Flood) to the New Testament (John's witnessing of the resurrected Christ), the Apocalypse comes to signify revelation.

Reading the dynamic of presencing and absencing that forms the unity of the sequence shots of *The Turin Horse* as revelatory raises the contentious question of the relation between art and truth, which for the present study better aligns with Heidegger's position than with Nietzsche's. It is significant that Heidegger's first (proper) engagement with art, “The Origin of the Work of Art” (1935–36), surfaces contemporaneously (1936–37) with his confrontation with Nietzsche's “Will to Power as Art” (compiled in Book III of *The Will to Power*). While the productiveness of this encounter cannot be fully mapped out here, a number of points serve to lay out the two paths of thought as they interweave thematically and differ philosophically. In Nietzsche's view art and truth stand in irreconcilable discord. The notion of truth at the foundation of Western thought (“will to truth”) is deemed deceitful and art is announced as the means by which that deceit is at once made visible and overcome, provocatively asserting that “art is *worth more* than truth”. If Nietzsche's concern is that the Platonic “Idea” has led

to the creation of value-systems—religion, morality, philosophy—he aims to supplant the latter in two moves: first, by placing the “sensuous” (the worldly) as the higher reality, thus inverting Plato’s proposition of the “suprasensuous” (the ideal or truth founded in ideas), second, by positing the opposite of truth, deception, as guiding principle, appealing to art for its “falsity” and “immorality”, famously exclaiming: “[w]e possess *art* lest we *perish of the truth*” (Nietzsche 1968, 453, 419, 435; Heidegger 1991b, 201, 226, 133, 176).

In his attentive confrontation with Nietzsche delivered in the 1936–1940 lecture course *Nietzsche* (which includes his discussion of “Will to power as art”), Heidegger credits Nietzsche as the thinker who has decisively “gathered and completed” the tradition of Western metaphysics, thus announcing its end. It is significant, Heidegger writes, first, that Nietzsche should recognise the permanence of being as that which makes possible the movement of becoming that for him facilitates change, second, that thinking Being as eternal return “means thinking Being as Time”. The problem for Heidegger, however, is that the decisive questions of truth, being, and being as time, remain in Nietzsche’s metaphysics (and since the beginning of the metaphysical tradition) essentially unasked, providing no definitions from which to build a properly grounded metaphysics. Put simply, if Nietzsche’s project of “will to power” effects the “consummation” of Western metaphysics, it remains within the conceptual frame and language of that metaphysical tradition (Heidegger 1991a, 4, 19–20, 218, 148–149, 95; 1991b, 157; Nietzsche 1968, 330, 369).²³

Heidegger bypasses the problem of the definition of truth (or lack thereof) in metaphysics by returning to the original meaning of the Greek word *aletheia*. Often rendered as truth, *a-letheia* etymologically signals the un-covering of what *is*, the exposure of the hidden; its gesture is therefore one of dis-closure, of opening up to reveal. “[T]he openness of beings”, Heidegger thereby asserts, “we call unconcealment—*aletheia*” (Heidegger 1991a, 68). For Heidegger, not only is “great art” revelatory, since it is disclosive of truth, but, in its essence, truth always already means the truth of being (Being), which at this time (his later thought) refers both to Dasein (the being that is *there*) and to the Being of beings (the meaningful existing of all beings). He thus advances that “[i]n the artwork, the truth of beings has set itself to work. Art is truth setting itself to work” (Heidegger 1993, 166, 165). While Nietzsche’s “Will to power as art” posits an “*aesthetic state*” that, pertaining to the physiology of the artist, is nurtured by intoxicating “rapture”, configuring art into “the great stimulant of life” through which the world self-generates, Heidegger’s “The Origin of the Work of Art” defines “[w]illing” as a “sober unclosedness” that, through the creation of a world in fundamental continuity with our own, discloses the ontological

dimension of the artwork (Nietzsche 1968, 422, 449, 419; Heidegger 1993, 192, 169).

My earlier analysis of cinematic spatiality showed that *The Turin Horse* offers a living world created out of the artist(s)’ most personal world, their spatio-temporal existing. If being-in-the-world is for Heidegger a disclosive condition, one that reveals the truth of Being, embodied-extension-in-the-world (my term) is for Nietzsche an “explosive condition”, wherein muscular movements involuntarily coordinate with inner processes, such as images and thoughts (Nietzsche 1968, 429).²⁴ While, as Heidegger points out, Nietzsche’s “aesthetic state” is indeed “visionary”, its objective—a self-termed “perspectivism” imbued with Cartesian undertones—is to master space and extend one’s force (Heidegger 1991a, 139; 1977, 127; Nietzsche 1968, 340). The connection between movement, space, seeing, and self-showing that for Heidegger manifests “from the *optics* of a body advancing into *presence*” (see my earlier discussion) is for Nietzsche–Heidegger states evoking the photographic technologies of the time—“determined as the panoramic gaze into the comprehensive vista, as overpowering” (Heidegger 1991b, 152). Somewhat recalling Balázs’s reflection on the exalted experience of reality brought about by the filmic panorama—if crucially differing in its celebration of deceit over the experience of the true—Nietzsche’s commanding vision, as described by Heidegger, is far removed from the ontological dimension that for the latter, and, I argue, Tarr’s film, meaningfully opens up in the meeting of human and world.

My study proceeds from the conviction that the redemptive properties of the modern artwork, for Heidegger accomplished through intentionality and craft, may also (for him) be found in the technological art of moving images. For this, two conditions need to be met. The first, as Heidegger cautions in “The Age of the World Picture” (1938), is that the human does not adopt the position of the modern subject. The danger is that the world (as it is) is mediated by the subject (as she sees it) through the gaze of a collective interpretation (the “world view”) that is shaped by scientifically and culturally-influenced values, resulting in a distorted representation of the world as “structured image” [*Gebild*] that disconnects us from our essence (Heidegger 1977, 148–149, 131–134, 142, 149, 150). The second condition is that we use modern technology conscientiously by “accomplish[ing] a worthy confrontation with it” (Heidegger 2012, 56–57). If the danger of technology lies in our relinquishing mastery of ourselves thereby becoming slaves to the medium of production, as it is employed for the exploitation rather than the preservation of our world, the arena Heidegger contemplates for putting technology to ontological use is the fine arts (Heidegger 1993, 320, 21, 323, 329).

Nearly twenty years apart, Heidegger's seminal essays on art and technology posit, on similar grounds, that, upon completion, the work assumes its autonomy, leaving no "trace of a work material" (Heidegger 1993, 173). When Heidegger states that "the essence of technology is nothing technological", he is referring to the falling away of the mediating apparatus [*Gestell*] that defines the structured instrumental character of technology (Heidegger 1993, 340, 324–326). What is this "self-subsist[ing]" entity that is not a thing? Heidegger asks regarding the artwork. It is a world, since, "[t]o be a work means to set up a world" (Heidegger 1993, 169–170, 173). In resonance with this standpoint, "t]echnology", for our purposes the cinematic work, "comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *aletheia*, truth, happens" (Heidegger 1993, 319). The point is that this mode of revealing rejects the "correctness in representation" afforded by the "world view", in favour of the presentation of "things' general essence", their metaphysical ground (Heidegger 1993, 177, 162). It is from this perspective that I argue for the revelational stance of *The Turin Horse* outside the frame of the Christian Apocalypse.²⁵

My ongoing claim is that, at once destructive and revelatory, *The Turin Horse* solicits not just awareness of our unchanging world, but rebirth and renewal. I will now discuss the means by which, at the level of temporal construction, the repetition of action that drives the return pattern is reversed, resulting in an intermittent effacing of world and figure that, while resonant with Nietzsche's nihilating return, is most productively examined in dialogue with Heidegger's evocation of the oscillating dynamic that, between Being and nothingness, offers a generative opening.

Repetitions, returns, reversals

On day two, we watch the father and daughter cut through the windstorm in order to gather the carriage and horse, which then refuses to move. This sequence presents a structural summary of the film's signifying form. Constructed in three distinct, yet temporally continuous movements, the characters perform a detailed preparation (wheeling out the carriage from the barn, taking the horse out of the stable, preparing the leathering, dressing the horse and stepping onto the carriage, Figures 7 and 8). After the second movement (the horse refuses to move, the owner whips it, the daughter runs out to stop him), the first movement is, in a third section, meticulously undone in action, framing and perspective, as a reversal of itself (stepping off the carriage, undressing the horse, putting the leathering away, returning the horse to the stable, wheeling the carriage into the barn). What is striking about this sequence is not only its strong resonance with the encounter between Nietzsche and a horse in

Turin (second movement) but the pointlessness of the effortful action either side of the stasis at its core (the unwillingness of the horse to move). The vertiginous feeling is heightened when we discover that the scene is itself encapsulated by another "doing/ undoing/ redoing" sequence: the clothing, un-clothing, re-clothing of the father, in the scenes which immediately precede and follow this one. This structure appears again on day four in the characters' failed attempt of exile where their effort is voided by their return.

On first approach, these reversals of action can be perceived as mere returns: journeys of doing and undoing that incessantly bring the characters back to where they started, locking them in what would appear to be the circular time of the diegesis. At the level of film form, however, Tarr's reversal transcends the established cinematic strategies that influence time perception such as, on the one hand, backward and forward motion, fast and slow motion and what Noël Burch calls "time reversal"—a cut that overlaps the action of outgoing and incoming shots (Burch 1981, 7–8)—and, on the other hand, the flashback device, which Mary-Ann Doane describes as a unit of past time that, framed within the present of the filmic narrative, is "irreversible" (Doane 2002, 11, 131). Such stylistic effects are conceived to alter time linearity within diegetic experience. Distinctly, I propose that Tarr's reversal punctures narrative chronology to expose the temporality that grounds our existence.

We have seen that the durational capture of the father's and daughter's dressing and undressing of horse and carriage offers, within one sequence shot, a meticulous reversal of both action and cinematography. In the concluding moments of the sequence, however, symmetry is denied. Not only is the viewing perspective (of the father and daughter preparing to wheel the carriage back into the barn) not matched—since the expected angle shift from profile to frontal view is denied—but we also don't stay with the characters as (presumably) first the daughter then the father return to the house, focusing instead on the erosion of the stable doors by the earthy gust. The exception afforded in the last few moments of this shot rejects the closure of the circle thereby offering an opening. Along these lines, the director takes issue with the established notion of ongoing circularity in his work by asserting that the structures of *The Turin Horse* are not circles:

They are spirals, it's never the same thing. Contrary to the circle, the spiral is in movement [...] It could appear as a loop, but it's different since in this case it does not return to itself. (Maury and Zuchuat 2016, 17)

Upon the release of the film, director of photography Fred Kelemen further articulates his and Tarr's thematic intentions:

Béla's films [...] describe a being. They articulate a progression into the abyss [...] [M]e and Béla want



Figures 7 and 8. *The Turin Horse*.

to know something about the murmuring of being—that darkness and stillness, and that ground, from which everything comes and into which everything reverts. (Kelemen 2012, 39)

Kelemen traces a movement of reversal from being to nothingness and from nothingness to being that, presumably mirroring the spiralling dynamic described by Tarr, evokes the at once engulfing and generative opening of an abyss. Heidegger's writings on metaphysics (from 1929 to 1936) describe the "abyss" [*Ab-grund*] as the gaping hole of the nothing into which we disappear (nihilation or death) and out of which something or being is made possible (createdness or birth). The abyss is "the ground for the oscillation of the essent [an entity that has essence], which sustains and unbinds us, half being, half not being" (Heidegger 1959, 28, my addition). In this fluctuating state Dasein is invited to experience its horizontal constitution, the fact that it at once exists (is sustained) and is finite (is unbound), thereby providing the foundation for human freedom (Heidegger 1998, 134). Heidegger notably visualises this primordial dynamic in the form of a spiral that, like the Tarr-Kelemen sequence shot, is open at both ends (Heidegger 1985, 136–137).²⁶ It follows that, read with Kelemen and supported by Heidegger, the reversals that structure the dressing and undressing of the horse and carriage are not ordinary, since they do not ultimately refer to a backtracking of diegetic time. We are instead urged to rip through our impressions of the world as we ordinarily know it, reminding us of our primal temporal condition, the fact that in this present moment we are alive and at some point in the future we will die, with the aim of generating awareness of both our fragility and the possibilities that lie before us.

Conclusion

I have shown that *The Turin Horse* performs a gathering and nihilating (presencing and absencing) of subject and world which can be interpreted, after Mulhall, not just as philosophical, but as "cinema that finds itself in the condition of philosophy". At times, the camera's durational and spatial following-of, for instance, the daughter and

her surroundings as she journeys to the well—captures a density that, beyond the visual intelligibility of matter, makes manifest that which is, existence or being. Other times, the vertiginous feeling evoked by the film's reversals of action and cinematography—exemplified in the dressing and undressing scenes of the father, horse and carriage—invites a confrontation with that which is not, the *nihil* or else nothingness.

The oscillating dynamic that drives *The Turin Horse's* at once distending and puncturing sequence shots can be productively read, in line with Kelemen's description of the film's "progression into the abyss", as the movement of the "clearing" of being which for Heidegger traces a two-way trajectory between nothingness (the origin and end of being) and existence (being itself). Evoking the luminous opening that is created in the midst of a forest by an area of land devoid of trees, the "Clearing" [*Lichtung*] refers to the fundamental site where the human sees, understands and shows itself for what it is (Heidegger 1962, 171, 214, 401–402). Heidegger's writings from the mid-to-late-30s formulate the movement of the clearing as a "strife" that, implicitly responding to (yet crucially transcending) Nietzsche's call for nihilism, ruptures the relation between human and world, as it stands, opening ground for a fresh one to emerge. Along these lines, "The Origin of the Work of Art" posits strife, not as "discord and dispute" or "disorder and destruction", but as a productive wrestling between world (existence) and earth (ground) that deepens each into their essence. This opposing movement in turn binds world and earth in meaningful unity and separates them in an opening up of essential truth (Heidegger 1993, 174, 180, 185–187). By creating a sustained tension between existence and ground—light (being) and darkness (abyss)—art, for our purposes Tarr's film art, invites self-reflective living.

We have seen that in Nietzsche's thought the renewal of being (understood as becoming) depends on the radical overthrowing of established forms of truth and worldly values at the risk of wiping out our entire civilisation, and that, distinctly, Heidegger's project is to uncover the truth of Being in its constitutive relation to nothingness. Crucial to Heidegger's

proposition, as to my metaphysical reading of *The Turin Horse*, is that following this catastrophic break the existential unity of subject and world be preserved, that time (and space) not only remain intact, but that they are laid bare. Like the treeless patch of land that in the midst of the forest is exposed to the open sky, here (‘in’ the viewing experience), the human (the viewer) stands naked, stripped of worldly disguises and behaviours, positioned in perspective against her historical background, face-to-face with herself.

At this level, the cinematic experience of *The Turin Horse* frees us (however momentarily) from the concrete spatio-temporal and social structures that blind our understanding of ourselves (however much estranged and irreducible) and which, in turn, block our seeing in the face of widespread economic injustice and impending environmental catastrophe. Tarr’s rigorously crafted artwork opens up a space of questioning that, while necessarily configured via human means, extends its scope beyond the primacy of the human subject in its localised context. Appealing to a global re-evaluation that bears cosmic consequences, *The Turin Horse* urges our return to the here and now from where, more lucid, we may re-imagine life and effect deep change.

Notes

1. Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 84; Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art”, 165.
2. Tarr has in recent years produced a moving image installation work, *Missing People* (2019), and made public a video annotation, “Muhamed” (2017).
3. I employ the active form of the neologism “nihilation” (“nihilating”) to more closely align with Nietzsche’s use of the word “*Ver-Nichtung*”, which translates as destruction and signifies annihilation or “making into nothing”. Since the premise of a cinematic work is necessarily hypothetical, I refer to Nietzsche’s notion of nihilism by “judgement” (“an-nihil-ation”, doing away with beliefs and ideas) in distinction from the more literal nihilism “by the hand” (“annihilation” as killing, “*mak[ing...] perish*”) (Nietzsche 2003, 225, incl. fn.).
4. Lutz Koepnick clarifies that “[t]he language of classical film analysis distinguishes between the long take and the sequence shot. The first describes a prolonged and unedited capturing of profilmic events; the latter involves a camera that moves through various planes of action, follows the trajectories of different actors, and might perform a series of panning or tracking maneuvers with the aim of integrating, within the space of one extended single take, the narrative events usually comprised in an entire filmic sequence. Not every long take is a sequence shot” (Koepnick 2017, 39).
5. For a comprehensive history on “Slow Cinema”, including its indebtedness to Tarr’s cinema, see De Luca and Jorge 2016, 1–2.
6. Commentators have acknowledged the existential import of slow films either implicitly—by pointing to the characters’ states of “alienation” (Jaffe 2014, 152), “boredom” or “ennui” (Lim 2014, 24, 41)—or else in remarks that, while helpfully alluding to the films’ place within an existential discourse, remain undeveloped. For instance, Flanagan signals the endurance evoked by the sequence shots in Tarr’s and Kelemen’s cinemas (Flanagan 2012, 113); Jaffe states that “[c]haracters in Tarr’s films often refer to the pervasiveness of emptiness and death in the universe” (156); and Grønstad intriguingly proposes an “exploration of the optics of slow” as an ethical medium “uniquely equipped to capture temporal presence as spatial form” (Grønstad 2016, 275, 282). How the latter envisions a perspective that draws on Jean-Luc Nancy’s (Heidegger-informed) notion of cinematic presence while retaining a materialist focus has not (yet) been clarified.
7. Malick wrote an undergraduate thesis on the concept of “horizon” in Husserl and Heidegger (1966), had planned a doctoral project on the notion of “world” in Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, and produced a translation of Heidegger’s *The Essence of Reasons* (1969) (Critchley 2009, 16–17; Sinnerbrink 2006, 2019, 28 and 1–2).
8. A significant contribution is Shawn Loht’s *Phenomenology of Film* (2017), which offers insight into the application of Heidegger’s phenomenology to film viewership by attending, alongside Malick, to the cinemas of Haneke and Gordon. I take issue with Loht’s proposition, however, where it appears to conflate Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology with realism. “As I have described it”, Loht states, “film-viewing’s character of realism is originative in a Heideggerian notion of being-in-the-world” (Loht 2017, 48).
9. Elaborating on Richardson, Sheehan explains that Heidegger I is focused on *Dasein* (the being that is “there” in the world, the human being) and Heidegger II on *Sein* (Being as “the meaningful” that requires the human being to uphold it), and each is in need of the other. The distinction constitutes for Heidegger “the ontological difference” (Sheehan 2014, 82–83, 91).
10. I refer to the French text separately, since the English version has several additions to, as well as subtractions from, the original.
11. When Sibertin-Blanc and Rollet describe the devastated (because absent-minded) bodies of the characters in Tarr’s trilogy, they are evoking a loss of humanity that signals, yet falls short of developing, an existential reading.
12. Ayfre graciously explains that “if later on [in 1957], he [Bazin] accepted the term ‘phenomenological’ that I had proposed [in ‘Néo-réalisme et Phénoménologie’, 1952] to qualify the newness of this realism by way of a helpful adjective, it is only because he considered it to sum up what had been longtime since the essence of his thought” (Ayfre 1969, 156; 1964, 214, my additions). In 1948, for example, Bazin writes that Visconti’s non-dramatic resources are “a concern with things themselves, as in life”, implicitly citing Husserl’s famous phenomenological expression (Bazin 2005b, 41).
13. The realist focus of Bazin’s film theory appears incompatible with Heidegger’s thought, where he asserts that “in realism there is a lack of ontological understanding” (Heidegger 1962, 251, § 43). While it is not possible to draw a correspondence between Heidegger’s philosophy and Bazin’s eclectic cinematic Real, the latter is—certainly on phenomenological grounds—conversant with the former. I further trace the potential of this relationship in “Cinema and Heidegger: the Call to Being in Ozu, Antonioni,

- Tarr” (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2020, publication in preparation).
14. *Being and Time* states that the existential dimension that upholds human life is not accidental or transitory, rather, it comes before everything else; “it is not pieced together, but is primordially and constantly a Whole”. For these reasons, in his quest for the meaning of being, Heidegger defines this dimension as “essential” and “fundamental”. In doing so, he is not however claiming that it is possible to epistemologically or anthropologically know and articulate what a human being is—“one may even question whether ‘having’ the whole entity is attainable at all” (Heidegger 1962, 38, 65, 238, 276, 59). Instead, Heidegger invites us to perceive our humanity with an immediacy that, when applied to the moving image, helps us appreciate its power to interpellate and affect us in ways that surpass diegetic telling.
 15. In the interest of foregrounding the role of cinematography in the construction of the sequence shot, I will complement my (more general) use of “camera”—the entire film apparatus—with specific references to the camera’s lens, as the optics that frames and configures the field of vision registered by the camera’s body. Whether fixed or moving, the position of the camera is always relative to the framing provided by the lens. The lens delimits and focuses, the camera captures.
 16. On this question, Morgan challenges Mitry (225), Vertov (225), Bordwell (229), Sobchack (229–233) and Danto (230).
 17. While I reference *Being and Time* from the 1962 Macquarrie and Robinson translation, I choose the more recent rendering of *Nähe* as nearness (*Näherung* as near), favoured by for example Andrew J. Mitchell (Heidegger 2012), over the former’s “closeness” and “close”.
 18. By being ‘with’ I refer to the human’s mindful cohabitation with other human beings in the shared world. My definition overlaps with Heidegger’s notion of “Being-with” [*Mitsein*], which I understand as the open site where multitudes of beings attune to each others’ existing as they venture into their deeper selves (Heidegger 1962, 149, 157, 162, 205). A conscientious use of Heidegger’s term exceeds the scope of this article.
 19. “I keep thinking of Ozu and how he got to a point where he didn’t move the camera at all; maybe that’s the real film art” (Tarr in Geoff 2007, 20).
 20. The steadicam is not always used to anthropocentric effect. Its ethereal quality is often employed to simulate flight, altered states of mind and otherworldly presence. See, for example, Alejandro Iñárritu’s *Birdman* (2014) and David Lynch’s *Lost Highway* (1997).
 21. Metaphysics must here be understood as the enquiry into the ground of being that for Heidegger implies, in the first instance, the human being’s questioning of its essence out of and beyond itself. In “What is Metaphysics?” (1929), Heidegger asserts that, in distinction from Ancient metaphysics and the Christian tradition, the relation between being and the nothing is constitutive: “From the nothing all beings as beings come to be”, and so, “Metaphysics is the basic occurrence of Dasein” (Heidegger 1993, 108–109). Heidegger later rethinks the latter stance as he discards any possibility of grasping “the whole” and formulates the disclosure of being as historical dwelling and metaphysics as “onto-theology”.
 22. John Caputo reminds us that the death of God that is announced here refers, not to the God of Abraham, but to the dying off of classical metaphysics and its accompanying theology. “One important thing we mean by the death of God is the death of the absolute center, of inhabiting an absolute point of view” (Caputo 2007, 117).
 23. Nietzsche’s bold enquiry into art, for instance, falls short of “overcom[ing]” the tradition of “aesthetics” (Heidegger 1991a, 131).
 24. Discussion on the productive connection between Nietzsche’s philosophy and Deleuze’s “time-image” is beyond the remit of this article.
 25. Heidegger cautions that “the world picture is Christianized in as much as the cause of the world is posited as infinite, unconditional, absolute”, which in turn transforms “Christian doctrine into a world view” (Heidegger 1977, 116–117).
 26. In *Abiding Grace*, Mark C. Taylor posits that Heidegger’s spiral sketch presents Time as the “originary givenness” that makes us free, the movement of which he productively labels a “chiasmic reversal” (Taylor 2018, 182, 191).

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