

# METAPHYSICAL ESSENTIALISM – THE PICTORIAL HARMONY OF BÉLA TARR’S FILMS

JARMO VALKOLA

Tallinn  
jarmo.valkola@gmail.com

*Landscape setting provides a solution  
to the problem of showing situations  
in process: nature never stands still.*

Claude Monet.

*All is connected.*  
Estike in Satantango

In the following article, Jarmo Valkola investigates the originality of the Hungarian director Béla Tarr’s filmmaking practice. Tarr represents European pictorialism that is motivated by the commitment to develop and increase the function and effectiveness of images, sounds and performances that aesthetically formulate, translate and change the effects of contemporary cinema to higher dimensions and qualities of art. Tarr emphasises the selective and manipulative role of the camera in orchestrating his narrative concerns. The significance of the form comes forward, and the photographic dimension of the narrative creates static and momentarily captured intensities. Like Jancsó before him, Tarr also invests the narrative with plan-sequences. Some of them can be very long, involving continuous and intricate camera movements, like simultaneous track-tilt-pans, compounded by the ‘virtual’ movement of the omnipresent camera. Tarr’s filmic iconography sets standards for pictorial filmmaking in the sense of an increasingly personal touch of dramatics defining and distilling a cinematic language that is endless in its search for the almost silent colloquy between the artist’s visions and aspirations. *Sátántangó*, *Werckmeister Harmonies*, *The Man from London*, and *The Turin Horse* are the films referred in this article.

**Keywords:** Béla Tarr, pictorialism, Hungarian cinema, aesthetics, formalism, orchestration, performance



III. 1 *Kárhózat*

Hungarian director Béla Tarr (b. 1956-) is one of the truly original filmmakers of our time. His filmmaking style is highly self-conscious in cueing the viewer to recast assumptions and expectations about the narration's own procedures. In its broadest compass, his special use of time, space, and extremely long takes puts him into the front row of European pictorialism, a way of stylizing narrative. His films' thematic organization and stylistic texture suggest the presence of implicit meanings in the narrative. The mixture of meticulous attention to composition, framing, lighting and editing is profoundly characteristic of Tarr. In that field his closest cousins are another Hungarian, Miklós Jancsó, Russian Andrei Tarkovsky, and Greek Theo Angelopoulos. We can assume that certain philosophical, epistemological and aesthetic views inform all Tarr's films, and the variation from one film to another is a matter of modifications of a fundamental outlook. Through philosophical connections we can find traces of the ideas of Gilles Deleuze, Friedrich Nietzsche, Edmund Husserl, and Jean-Paul Sartre behind Béla Tarr's universe.

Béla Tarr's films are fine examples of artistic originality, because he can invest the narrative with direct perceptual and imaginative engagement with the films themselves, and can give rise to a distinctive aesthetic mode surrounding the films. Tarr is a European filmmaker who molds sensuous or imaginatively intended material into original symbolic form. He brings the rational, sensible and historical aspects of experience into an internal relation. All different elements of his films are, in a way, inseparable, coherent, and mentally and physically embodied. Philosophically, Tarr proposes a complex and ambiguous concept of reality, and its representation, as both perceived reality and with more abstract qualities of life itself. The circle of life seems tragic or tragicomic with associations of amnesia and immobility: people living in an absurd and hopeless search for something or somebody to liberate them. On the other hand, Tarr offers a strange

and stylized collection of sensations, the indescribable reach out for something, stored in the subconscious level of the images and sounds, and trying to catch our innermost feelings of harmony and desire often in the midst of an upbringing chaos. He proposes an alternative way to reach out our obscure memories and experiences of time and space. Behind all this is that inner experience of ideas and sensations, a pure phenomenon of aspects and perceptions, a world of visual perceptions and virtual entities as proposed by Gilles Deleuze. Tarr's cinematic style is a distinctive manner of expression: it features a particular mode of filmmaking process and technique, created, and performed, and also a set of characteristics that enables his films to be classified with others into an aesthetic type of his own specific outlook. Tarr's cinematic style is also a specific manner and method of performing with his distinctive and characteristic mode of address in pointing out and expressing a certain punctuation of audiovisual arrangement and display. In this chapter I will examine how Tarr's specific cinematic balance invests the narrative with equilibrium between the contrasting or interacting elements, resulting in an aesthetically strong integration of audiovisual material. I will also take a sample of selected films to argue and see how he understands time and space and how he uses them in his cinema.

In various ways, Tarr shows that cinematic language is labelled by selectivity, viewpoints that function as developed through choices. The essential cinematic strategy contains the idea by which one can hide things in a film in order gradually to reveal them. Through this kind of mechanism a series of cinematic shots shape into a series of emphasises, throughout the selective and manipulative role of the camera. That is why film is not a reproduction of reality, because, once a scene has been cut into shots, we are not working anymore with the reproduction of reality; instead, we are working with the statements referring to that reality. In a world of Tarr, film seems 'real', because it reproduces the way we see things in the world. In film, cutting into shots sometimes corresponds to selection and manipulation but selection can rely on natural processes, natural perception, and it can rely on manipulation as a trick made by the filmmaker. Such ideas suggest that most of our thinking goes on in the intervening areas between these areas of reality and fiction, which can be called speculation or hypothesizing, an area of uncertainty. Most minimally, Béla Tarr's world is present, both actual and virtual, and despite the seemingly realistic portrayal of the world stricken by aimlessness, poverty and corruption, the reality constructed in the films is not that of social realism, nor is it the representation of historical events, but a creative exploration of reality. The resulting cinematic experience is the sum of several processes operating together, because audiovisual forms converging with factors of meaning create tensions and cinematic language solves the problems of functioning on so many perceptual levels at once through its own specific structures.

III. 2 *Kárhozat*

### *Audiovisual Aesthetics*

At a broader level, Tarr's cinematic syntax makes possible an increasingly complex combination of shots, which can generate an even greater variety of messages and meanings. Such combinations touch on the mystique of cinema: a peculiar and original cinematic reality. His film phrases, constructed through fragmentation, also tamper with reality by showing the total geography of a setting and spatial relationships between the shots. Tarr shows that the intensity of viewer involvement depends on the energies, which radiate from the screen according to the filmmaker's arrangement of dramatic sequences. All of this might imply that the resulting cinematic experience is the sum of several processes operating together. Tarr shows that audiovisual forms converging with the factors of meaning invest the narrative with tensions. His films function on many perceptual levels at once through their own specific structures, properly arranged according to the rules of performance.

In addition, art films are usually expressive of national concerns, and they are characterized by the use of self-consciously artful techniques designed to differentiate them from merely entertaining popular cinema. This strategy enables the art film to be viewed at home as part of a national culture and abroad as exotic and sophisticated, and therefore as worthy of attention. The resulting inference is that in evaluating a work of art, like a film from Béla Tarr, we should take into consideration not only the formal properties of a work of art but also such elements as the philosophical ideas contained in the work, emotional expressiveness, the fidelity to the represented external reality, the depth of insight into, and an analysis of the moral and psychological problems. In the reception and evaluation of a work of art, we do not limit ourselves to appreciation of its formal properties. We need also to look for possible cognitive dilemmas and moral endorsements presented in the work. In Tarr's films, formal elements and larger-scale patterns

are referred to as choices, since when an artist contemplates the best way to articulate essential points she has an array of options before him. Creating an artwork involves electing the forms that the artist believes will function optimally toward realizing the purpose of the work.

Accordingly, forms are formal choices and marked stylistic events because they are elected from a certain amount of options. Also, forms are selected because they are designed or intended to perform certain functions. For example, Clive Bell thought that painting is art if it possesses a significant form. Though the importance of form was made especially apparent by the tendency of modern art toward abstraction, significant form was a property said to be possessed by all artworks, past, present, and future. Significant form is comprised of arrangements of lines, colours, shapes, volumes, vectors, and space. Genuine art, on this view, addresses the imagination like the figures of Gestalt psychology, prompting the viewer to fill the artwork in such a way that we apprehend it as an organized configuration of lines, colours, shapes, vectors and spaces. Films renew our perceptions and other mental processes. Art is as sort of mental exercise. The spectator's relationship to the artwork becomes active, so she is involved on the levels of perception, emotion and cognition, all bound up together.



III. 3 *Werckmeister Harmonies*

An important aspect of the presentation is that there is often a special attention to the constant movement of light and to the arbitrary character of natural phenomena. Béla Tarr is a particular master of rendering the motion inside the still moment in terms of life out of doors. He seems especially to have addressed the idea of showing the small moments of the world depicted in his films as if there were the model and paradigm for all action. Tarr's assessment of cinema as a medium of references materializes itself in his films that explore the language of cinema through their existence as works that cover audiovisual design ideas con-

nected with architecture, photography, and painting. Tarr's approach to pictorial stillness, as referenced earlier with other cases (Angelopoulos, Hitchcock, and Kaurismäki), relates to his understanding of the compositional efforts aligned with the image, and shot lengths, and their unusual nature in the hands of Tarr. 'The stilling of the image', a term used by Christine Ross in her study of contemporary art *The Past is the Present; It's the Future Too* (2014), fits well to Tarr's approach in using extreme shot lengths with minimal movements inside them, and orchestrating the cinematic flow towards eagerly expected resolutions in his treatment of filmic language.<sup>1</sup> Tarr's idea concerns a certain renewing of film's ancient capacities through this stilling of the image. It gives possibilities to work with findings that try to expose the pictorial state of depicted events. How these connections between the characters, and their movements, and the camera, with its movements, can collide and work together to achieve the contested equilibrium of filmic transpositions? Tarr's aspiration deals with pictorial understanding of the image, and the hold of it, to express fully pictorial levels of narration.<sup>2</sup> In a Tarr film, the movements of the characters are described and photographed as statically positioned and visually pinned against a vast background. Characters are arranged in lateral groupings extending from left to right on the screen. Tarr orchestrates the spectacle within what happens to be a largely spatial image in which the performers move from one side to the other through this representational space. When the individual performers move, the camera follows their movements and generally confines them to the representational space of the narrative. The significance of the form comes forward, and the photographic dimension of the narrative creates static and momentarily captured intensity, which is also connected with the use of the soundtrack. Almost nothing happens in his images, which show moments filled mostly with the passage of time, for example, as in the opening moments of *Sátántangó* (1994) when we follow the slow movements of cows entering the frame. The best of these moments are mesmerizing for their tensions of expectation, pregnant with feelings and emotions of waiting, and devoid of incident. The freezing of the passage of time reaches its highest intensity, and with an utmost care Tarr's camera explores the aspects of the depicted scene in question. Another way Tarr experiments with the cinematographic medium is through associations. In many of his films, he plays with various combinations to see how events can be ordered to represent the world of his narration.



III. 4 *Sátántangó*

Béla Tarr is, in his way, documenting rural life with these passing moments. The cows are present in the images of *Sátántangó*, and their quiet responses match the pace of light and its dim presence. The composition itself moves slowly, as it seems to do so vigorously in many other scenes of Tarr's films. There, the cineaste stirs the world of his scenes, the air, and the sky with his own brilliant vision, maintaining his compositional outlook toward the happenings. He seeks to keep anything definite from occurring so that we as spectators can supply all the possibilities, and still be alert for the surprises to come. Tarr's compositional values consist of audiovisual mixture of various ingredients arranged in proper filmic form often in highly evolved manner. Tarr's cinematic code in his landscape images centres round flat panoramas, which invite scanning and seem themselves to be flowing past over us as we are intact upon them. They have their own specific arrangement created by the horizon in them. The sky and earth are present creating the fact that the worldview in them is in current flux. The spectator's eye patrols and travels over the images without a certain feeling forced to rest on any eminence or prominence. The emotion implied by the act of looking must be in control and stay fluid enough to keep moving, and never maintaining solely so that everything could be possessed in one glimpse.

#### *Images and Intentions*

Tarr seems to be saying this to himself: he is scanning his own images in this way. Although the theme of things seems to be shifting, showing all the slow changes in the image, there seems to be no easy way to pack the intention of the image. Views in this kind of cinema are simply further configurations of the landscape, visions with foreground, middle, and background intermingling without setting themselves as totally separate entities. Tarr frequently uses the minimal

appearance technique for landscape-lighting. This means that the spectator gazes straight at the light source, and all of the objects in the image rise up in some degree of silhouette against it. This method could be construed as a pointedly anti-classical device, since the effect occurs frequently in actual experience but is not often seen in film. Tarr uses also side-lighting effects to balance the appearance of characters and objects in his landscape images that are still committed to classical ideals. They have their specific atmosphere and proportionate arrangements within fixed boundaries. For example, lighting a scene from the rear, like in *Damnation* (1988), Tarr dazzles the spectator's eye and shows a keen interest in recording natural phenomena for their direct emotional affects, showing how important they are when considering the compositional outlook. In this process, however, pictorialism becomes a practice by which film is transformed into what must be called a pictorial reality. *Damnation* was the first in Tarr's production to shift the focus from the performer to the audience. In the absence of musical sound, the observer becomes alert to the ambient noises occurring over the duration of the film's various movements. (The same idea continues in *Sátántangó*). Tarr's visions validate the image as surface, but they never abandon the depth of the landscape whose elements stand forth and convey an unresolved mystery.



III. 5 *Kárhozat*

Sometimes one can see a certain luminous harmony in Béla Tarr's visions, a magnetic gaze that derives ultimately from the relentless eye of the actual that gives Tarr's camera its strength. Tarr actualizes many themes in his films by casting them in his style of artistic reality. The camera-calligraphy plays central role in this. Tarr's predecessor Miklós Jancsó developed the *mise-en-scène* in his strenuously physical way, pacing the terrain back and forth in all directions to work out the movements of the performers and those of the camera. Pure, unattached movement is usually hard to find but In Tarr's visions it exists.<sup>3</sup> At any partially

observed moments, we may not know what comes next, but we must not dismiss from our consciousness what we have heard or seen before, since a film and any kind of work of art grows step by step into a whole, and as we can gradually build our understanding of this development, it is possible for us to comprehend what has disappeared from our direct vision and what has survived in memory. With Tarr, our perception is organized so that things in front of us on the screen persist spatially simultaneously, and influence one another and are modified by new incoming stimuli. Tarr's performances build a challenge and a constant charge for the viewer since they are organized sequentially, which means that different phases (orchestrations) inside a sequence need director's active pushes to maintain the gradually shifting forces of movements that are the controllers of the rhythm of his filmmaking practice. Tarr's conceptual ideas of filmmaking are somehow concerned with the idea of awaking a new stream of audiovisual consciousness into which his narratives could then penetrate with efficiency. His desire to create cinematographic impulses connected with emotional accentuation of the mind works as a demonstration of his emotional and psychological assertions. As a consequence of this, Tarr changes his lighting even within a continuous scene in order to record these specifically planned and rendered visions governing his audiovisual design of the narrative. In the different states of *Sátántangó*, we can see and comprehend how these changes of lighting are executed in the structures of a same scene. The cineaste's delicate use of chiaroscuro, connected with the scenic moods and overall characterization, is also related to the compositional aspect and arrangement of the scene. The black and white world is thus elevated to the level of audiovisual poetry to ensure its artistic power and narrative methods. He could not have done this without the full support of his filmmaking crew. Especially the work of his editor and wife Ágnes Hranitzky is crucial, and her artistic accomplishment is extremely vital by whatever standards. Tarr's artistic solutions are recklessly inventing and combining filmic planning and techniques to achieve the desired outcome. In his works, Tarr develops unsuspected implications of his canonized themes and personal properties concerning his imagery, gradually intensifying the mood of the scenes with ambient sound and music overtures used collaboratively in linked scenes throughout the narrative. He combines painterly and graphic effects, used in fascination with a narrative mode of consistent expressiveness where the tonal possibilities of the works are properly exemplified.

Like Jancsó before him, Tarr also invests the narrative with plan-sequences. Some of them can be very long, involving continuous and intricate camera movements, like simultaneous track-tilt-pans, compounded by the 'virtual' movement of the omnipresent camera. In certain sequences, the camera seems to be exploring, reacting to actions, and also proceeding autonomously around the happenings on the screen. Tarr's production methods form patterns of thought, emotion, and impulse connected to the control of his *mise-en-scène*, the various aspects

in the representation of images and sounds, and how the elements are joined together. Tarr's *mise-en-scène* is built on stylized efforts that stretch and expand the nature of the narration, and might sometimes go even beyond it. The film's true narrative mode can be described as symbolical fantasy, enriched by a strong phenomenological sense of realism. Most unusual, as in the case of Jancsó, is the choreography of walking with its changing positions of body-language creating a sense of impassivity, especially in *Sátántangó*, *The Man from London* (2007), and *Damnation*. Characters are in a continuous state of waiting while Tarr's camera creates its changing rhythms, and shifting vectors. The dimension of pictorialism is impressive, especially in the landscape images, often revealed gradually, and controlled by the shifting camerawork around them. Camerawork can have an independent visual command which usually is a sign of complex aesthetic choices done by the filmmaker. These choices are concerned with lines, volumes, movements and figurations, all related to the overall visual design that controls the work. With Tarr, already single images are filled with these aesthetic evaluations. The framing and grouping of the performers in *Damnation* and *The Man from London* has the arbitrariness and immediacy at the same time, different from their more fixed presence in *Sátántangó*.



III. 6 *Sátántangó*

Tarr shows how the camera movements themselves can become a focus of attention: they have their own kinetic presence with their definitely and in many cases elegantly created movements. This is camera-calligraphy in the true sense of the word: Tarr's camera seems to move across the scene accentuated and punctuated by a tightly controlled orchestration of cinematic ideas.<sup>4</sup> This is something that differentiates Tarr from others since calligraphic camerawork does not always do this. Tarr's camera movements are especially intricate and persistent they do not simply change the shape of a scene. Also the meticulously wrought soundtrack is

extremely important in Tarr since the overlaid sounds of a scene create and add a sense of the aural space to the images, and to the pictorial/visual space. This laid interaction of sounds and images produces a new texture into the narration. The sparse, piecemeal, and oblique verbal narration is comprehensive in its shortness, and the ideas involved in this invest the narrative with an extended and enlarged atmosphere to these actions, which also work on wider patterns of historical understanding. Kovács describes:

The camera almost never follows the characters. It is consistently independent from the characters' movements. Either the characters walk out of the frame or the camera moves away from them. When there is, however, some sort of following movement, it is very short and compensated for by other independent movements (2013: 57).<sup>5</sup>

Tarr's orchestration of appearances relies on the physicality of moving, restless bodies, on vividly photographed landscapes, and on faces, which create an aura of personal, atmospheric, and changing expressions. They can be motionless but occasionally also vibrate with life and, instead of repeating the usual characters' roles, they weave dissonances, riddles, and a specific human ambiguity around them. Kovács again:

By far the most frequent technique to slow down the narrative of Tarr's films is the following of an action sequence in all of its most significant details. This creates a sense of radical continuity meaning that virtually no element of an action sequence is omitted through the continuous representation of the given action sequence. *Sátántangó* abounds with scenes of this kind. The most spectacular of them is the doctor's episode, in the first part. This episode lasts exactly one hour. It recounts the doctor's everyday activities, consisting mainly of reading, spying on the neighbors, taking notes of their activities and commenting on them, drinking and satisfying his biological needs. As he is very fat and ill, he does everything very slowly and with great effort (2013: 124).<sup>6</sup>

Tarr's microcosm means the private application of general mystery, and it is shown by emphasizing arrangements inside small circles. Main characters in *The Turin Horse* live their life privately indoors, with only a provisional relation to the outdoor happenings. This invests the narrative with a conduct of private phenomenology of feelings. The landscape around them is a continuation of this private vista suggested mainly through a window. Light and spatial arrangements are disposed with the same intensity throughout the narrative. Tarr's filmic atmosphere mirrors the psychological state of the two inhabitants, father (Janos Derzi) and daughter (Erika Bók) in *The Turin Horse* (2011) through a passage of glances and facial responses with a camera moving in on them and focusing on their small

interchanges. The mystery and intimate expressions of the characters in *The Turin Horse* form a staged tableau of events, intensified only occasionally when something that happens outside of their interior-world becomes an influence in their life. They very much have the flavor of a recurring dream: each view of the room is the same, but each set of details is slightly different. Each image is full of its own complete suggestive movements and situations. The subjective consciousness of the characters is invoked anew each time. This all creates a figuration of destinies doomed in their own behaviour. At any moment, the camera can establish them or move besides them and concentrate on the small amount of visual details around them. The whole pictorial outcome is a frame from a larger story that goes beyond them, and in which these isolated figures are only passers-by of the dramatic whole. This assertion sums up Tarr's attitude to his narrative, meaning that he and his audience are continually introduced to various functions of 'reality' corresponding human perspectives, which would ideally continue to be brought into new existence along a continuum of aesthetics and technologies of representation.

The whole world lies in this chamber of events, which works as a visualization of certain happenings, and yet nothing is really happening. The atmosphere is rendered through the use of slightly muted light, creating the arbitrary oblique angles of vision, the suggestive use of figures, emphasizing the painterly affectation through which the characters pose as emblems of this tableau. The dim rendering of spaces and the ambiguous personages half shadowed under the minimal light, portray not just the overall structure but more likely moments of waiting, of uncertainty about the future happenings. This general uncertainty, in a still-like universe, contains a double vision: one that is based on light and appearances; and another that is based on deeper carried visual quality of solutions in editing, acting and the use of music. Faces have the restrained expressiveness of half-emotional presence, incorporating ordinary realism, embodied in certain moments with the presence of almost motionless environment. The light is used idiosyncratically, bringing forth the compositional aspects of design, concerning Tarr's complex schemes for expanding his black-and-white cinematic reality in the mode of describing some phenomena and revealing others. The use of shadowy radiance that illuminates the whole world gives the lighting affectation a shimmering surface glow, reflecting the sensibility of this 'realism'. The dramatic events are in slow progress, uniting a sense of classical mythology rendered as part of these appearances where the cyclic human spectacle seems to have a specific cosmic significance. This is the Hungarian way, where the controlled disposition of bodies in space is conjoint with the overall compositional logic of the narrative, and the arrangement of subject matters, and the interaction between the characters conveying the idea of a controlled duration of artistic presence. Tarr's images have this unity of sweep and coherent motion. The old and modern subjects are united in *The Turin Horse*, where the true originality lies in the creative modernization of something very old.



III. 7 *Werckmeister Harmonies*

There is a sense of doom in the air, the Nietzschean recollection of solitary moments, the eternal return faced by these transitory situations of unfinished quietness and sensual despair in process. The notion of eternal return displays a paradox, since usually history implies change and development, but looking at history over the long term, it seems that it may be perceived through an understanding that certain patterns of events seem to recur regularly. Nietzsche's paradox concerned with the eternal return is connected with the idea that what returns will never actually be the same, but will be, more or less, recognized as the same by virtue of its temporal difference. What recurs returns in the form of misrecognition, for it is only what the present recognizes of itself in the past, not the past itself. This is crucial in understanding the relations between the present and the past, and how the perception between them is founded. It also explains the temporal elements of duration and succession, how they are experienced and intentionally structured, constituting through their flow a temporality that suggests the very being in the world, characterized by this process of unity in experiencing stages of past and present.

Tarr's scenes, whether pictorial views of the outside world or more limited side-views, echo the gaze of the filmmaker and his receptive consciousness, which is inspired by this specific point of view created into the narration. Characters occasionally seem to be indifferent to emotional shifts and discharges, unforeseeable regroupings or other formations, while the narration goes on. What follows is an extended cinematic vision, featuring scenes that are unique compared to others. Usually, not much is explained, the emotional and social circumstances of the characters are hinted in some moments when there are shifts and changes between the scenes, or something surprising will happen. The total flavor of Tarr's cinema is in fact uneven, as if each film, instead of being a complete example of a filmmaker's ongoing struggle for perfection, looks rather one of an endless series of trials, experimenting and executing private visions, many of

which come out brilliantly and some seem more restrainedly constructed. The atmospheric charge of Tarr's oeuvre is connected with the placing of figures in cinematic space. There might be signs of restraint and prudery in Tarr's characters, which appear more like figurations inside the narrative. This features an affinity with a slight awkwardness concerned with the rendering of their personal affections. Such a stylization of corporeal being of the characters in the images seems a deliberate design to keep the flavor of reflected, sometimes unfortified emotions stronger but still controllable in the overall effect of the work. Tarr's style is, in this sense, a figurative screening of bodily co-ordinations as a determinative force of the representation of the characters. Characterization works in context with the depicted landscapes, similarly conceived on the filmic canvas, across which the action is unfolding, sometimes affected by sudden uncontrollable forces like in the end of *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000), or in single scenes of *Sátántangó*, and *The Man from London*. The atmosphere of the situation is the point in many cases, and, from time to time, scenes are worked out like captions with notions of ambience. The captions may help but they are not doing all the work. The spectator immediately understands that she will need to be active to make sense of a particular narrative. Tarr is often more or less ambiguous in his depiction of direct forces (human or nature) that are driving the circumstances into conflict, and by being not always very specific about the immediate causes behind these reflections. Showing a figure, a face, or group convocation, gives Tarr the prospect to spotlight a line, a form, or a simple gesture.

These illustrations are illuminative, not always on the level of the story than of a certain condition or state of being, which includes also the way the surrounding scenery is affecting the events. This is the narrative and aesthetic mode of Béla Tarr, through which the images, pictorial formations of the narration, light up the flow of the recital and individual incidents. The tales have their objectifications since the images and sound are selected for the described moments, and, in this fashion, there is no need to clarify a strict storyline. Tarr can rely more on encounters and personal discoveries fabricating and establishing sequences in the middle of which we are engaged. Tarr's films are full of such distinctions or the suggestion of them; and they are delivered as if the audience would be engaged in that same forward movement toward a shadowy future. For instance, the lighting of *The Man from London* shows the foreground of an image in light contrasted against a shadier distance, no matter what else is in the image. The film works as an example of a specific strain in the development of an expressionist lighting effect that relies on the controlled form of these chiaroscuro-affects. This is essential for Tarr's cinema and creates an inflection of possible specifications to treat lighting and camerawork as transcendental impulses of art generally, and encompassing that steady pull of excitement in place at Tarr's oeuvre. His films have an advantage of flourishing unexpectedly,

and tempering the audience to uncertain conclusions. In Tarr's hands, the art of the events reconstitutes its own terms as to be personally inflected, and to deal with the elements of his spectacle. The Hungarian way to do it relies on a wide range of overtones from the earlier artistic past including references to symbolism. Tarr sticks to his exact individualism in conveying his worldview and his acute attention to stylistic details. Such material pinpoints and purports a plain recollection of events and tries to convey a deliberately built environment under tactile artistic control in which the drama usually includes several people, giving meanings to human fantasies in the middle of their very existence. This includes a filmic form that is different from exaggeration or a sense of spectacular effects. The impulse behind everything is a conscious one, opening a reflexive and sometimes 'muted' photography of ideas and happenings, suggesting the presence of character plainness composed into pictures of pure observance and eternal waiting.



III. 8 *Kárhozat*

Tarr's filmic iconography sets standards for pictorial filmmaking in the sense of an increasingly personal touch of dramatics defining and distilling a cinematic language that is endless in its search for the almost silent colloquy between the artist's visions and aspirations. Through his stylization Tarr extends the standard perspectival methods of optical depth in keeping the action of an individual scene as a fixed entity staged in the distance, showing these dimensions on the screen and using them as extended impressions of the described 'photoplay' on the overall picture plane. This is the pictorial landscape created by the cineaste. The consequences are diverse, and customarily the 'story' happens outside of our imaginative sympathies. In Tarr's universe, there is room for detached pictorial information that exists in uniform with a meticulous, diligent style, demonstrating an apparatus of relations and associations from a stable distance, scene

after scene, and tableau after another with the characters prominent in the middle of this spectacle. Tarr establishes dialectic of near and far appearances, inner and outer states of mentality, and private and public acknowledgements.

### Notes

- 1 Ross, Christine, 2014. *The Past is the Present; It's the Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art*. New York, London: Bloomsbury, 168.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 134.
- 3 See about the Miklós Jancsó style in Durgnat, Raymond, 2003. Psaume rouge. In: Feigelson, Kristian and Valkola, Jarmo, eds. *Cinéma hongrois: le temps et l'histoire*. Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 111–26.
- 4 Valkola, Jarmo, 2003. L'esthétique visuelle de Béla Tarr. In Feigelson, Kristian and Valkola, Jarmo, eds. *Cinéma hongrois: le temps et l'histoire*. Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 181–92.
- 5 Kovács, András Bálint, 2013. *The Cinema of Béla Tarr*. New York: Columbia University Press, 57.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 124.