

# Animal filmicum: Notes on Some Scenes from Béla Tarr

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**Abstract:** Among all the animals that haunt the films of Béla Tarr, there is one, the owl, that demands we challenge Giorgio Agamben's binary and metaphysical definition of man as the only "moviegoing animal." The owl then leads to the whale and the horse. Together, they raise a series of questions reminiscent of Aristotle's remarks about the eyes of animals and their dreams. What if, far from being the privileged domain of mankind, cinema constitutively included the pivoting or panning of an animal gaze? After Bresson and a few others, Tarr's films open new perspectives onto this "filmanimal."

**Keywords:** Agamben, animality, Aristotle, cinema, gaze, Tarr

Cows moovingly come out of barns to spread on the muddy ground. The camera follows them and begins a slow lateral tracking shot along the dilapidated buildings of the village. It stops when, through a path between the walls of the barracks, we see the cows again, and chickens now seem to want to join. The camera remains stationary. The cows end up leaving the frame. The chickens too. Fade to black.

No visible human figure inhabits these first eight minutes of Béla Tarr's *Sátántangó* (1994). The only human beings who can be assumed to be involved in the scene in any way—external stakeholders, so to speak—are those who, not appearing in the images, may be watching, like me at this very moment, the screen where they are projected.

Who—or what—might be watching in this way? Who—or what—could face these cows and chickens?

To the supposed viewer of this show, Edgar Morin, a long time ago, had proposed to give the name of *homo cinematographicus*:<sup>1</sup> a *homo* that would be characterized not so much by the fact of being *faber* or *sapiens*, but rather, says the sociologist, as "*demens*, producer of fantasies, myths, ideologies, magics."

*Sátántangó*'s opening scene echoes much later, towards the end of the film, when we hear the din of hoof noises resonating through the deserted streets of a small town at dusk. This time, horses cross the main square, go around the column erected in its center, and disappear as the camera descends—like the evening—on the three characters who are watching, filmed from behind. This time, unlike the sequence with cows, there are men who observe from within the image, so to speak. One of them notes: "The horses have escaped again from the slaughterhouse" (*már megint elszabadultak a lovak a vágóhídról*). The three men start walking, heading for the street whence the horses arrived. As they move away, some horses return to the square and circle idly around the column.

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<sup>1</sup> Morin 2005, p. 222. See also p. 12: "A membrane separates *Homo cinematographicus* from *Homo sapiens*. As it separates our life from our consciousness."

In his monography on Béla Tarr, Jacques Rancière noted this insistent animal presence, by sketching a sort of animal list through the director's films:

Ever since *Damnation* the animal inhabits Bela Tarr's universe as the figure in which the human experiences its limit: dogs drinking from puddles, which Karrer barked with in the end [in *Damnation*]; cows liquidated by the community; horses escaped from abattoirs, and a cat martyred by Estike in *Satantango*; the monstrous whale of *Werckmeister Harmonies*; all the way up to the fox wrapped around Henriette's neck [in *L'Homme de Londres*].<sup>2</sup>

By uniting this motley collection of specimens under a common denominator, the animal, Rancière says that it would therefore be in the cinema of Béla Tarr a figure bordering on the human. As if these diverse representatives of wildlife found their unity in it, the unity of their roles. This is what the horse confirms in *The Turin Horse*, which forms an apparent exception in Rancière's list only to better unify the animal *limitrophy* as a way of testing the human:

"all that remains is the horse, in whom several roles are condensed: it is the tool for work, the means of survival for old Ohlsdorfer and his daughter. It is also the beaten horse, the animal martyred by humans that Nietzsche embraced in the streets of Turin before entering the night of madness. But it is also the symbol of the existence of the disabled coachman and his daughter, kin to the Nietzschean camel, the being made to be loaded with all possible burdens."<sup>3</sup>

The tool-animal, the sacrificed animal, the mirror-animal in which misery is reflected... In this zoological list of Rancière's, in this list which converges towards the horse as beast of burden and as animal taking on him all others (as *metanimal*, if you will), there is at least one element missing: the owl.

The owl of *Sátántangó* is missing, this owl that we see, at the end of an interminable tracking shot, in the deserted house where Irimiás led the villagers, after the suicide of Esztike, promising them in exchange for their meager savings the bright future of a new collective farm. It appears, this owl, at the moment when everyone falls asleep and begins to dream. It even seems to observe or direct those who dream while it is watching.

Rather than the cows, the horses or the cat martyred by Esztike, it is this owl from *Sátántangó* who should guide us here. Because it is the

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2 Rancière 2013, 2013, p. 77-78.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 78. I understand the term *limitrophy* in the sense that Jacques Derrida has given to it in *The Animal that Therefore I Am* (Derrida 2008, p. 29), namely the *multiplication* of the limits, what feeds them (*trophein*) to multiply them, "complicating, thickening, delinearizing" them.

owl who, in the films of Béla Tarr, will put us on the track of another animal paradigm: what we will call the *animal filmicum*, the animal as a figure of the film or of cinema itself. The whale of *Werckmeister Harmonies* and the horse of *The Turin Horse* also belong to it. Or at least: that which, of the whale and the horse, cannot be simply enlisted in the service of an anthropocentric discourse on the limits, the borders of the human.

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"I said it right, you must never give up hope! You must have confidence, until the last breath!" (*Ugye megmondtam, sohasem szabad feladni a reményt! Bizni kell kérem, az utolsó leheletig!*), exclaims one of the villagers from *Sátántangó* while others try to sleep in the big empty house. One of these voices in the dark tries to imagine the near future and talks about the workshops that Irimiás certainly intends to set up in neighboring buildings. During this awakened collective dream, the camera begins a slow, infinite forward tracking shot towards the silhouette of the owl. At first, it is barely visible. Then, while someone talks about "bright prospects" (*ragyogó kilátásaink*) coming, it gets closer and closer. We begin to see its nocturnal bird's head, which swivels on its neck like a mechanical device which seeks to see everything, to watch everything around at three hundred and sixty degrees.

*Sátántangó's* owl, with its rapid rotation movement mechanically tracing an arc of a circle, is certainly part of a whole lineage of owls on the screen that I will not be able to count here. It would be necessary to investigate, to collect snatches of scattered cinophilic memories: the owl from the river scene in *The Night of the Hunter* (Charles Laughton, 1955), which in turn seems to reincarnate in the owl from the beginning of *Blow Out* (Brian De Palma, 1981), or the artificial, "replicant" owl from *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982)... All these owls also pan with their agile viewing heads. But while these panning movements could go unnoticed if we did not pay attention, in *Sátántangó*, the insistent pivoting of the nocturnal bird, throughout the slow approach of the camera which will end up showing it in close up (it takes almost three minutes, punctuated by the echoes of the voices of the sleepers), this mechanical or mechanical pivoting then seems to repeat itself, amplified and stretched, in the bewitching circular rotation of the camera above the bodies immersed in sleep, while the narrator's voice-over tells their dreams, starting with the dream of the character named Halics, who sees himself chased by "a small hunchbacked man with a glass eye" (*egy üvegszemű, púpos emberke*).

After having told a number of dream tales, the voice-over ends up being silent, but the camera continues its inexorable rotation, again and again, like a sort of carousel spinning empty, like a kaleidoscope trying to capture from above the dreamlike images emanating from the sleepers stuck in their blankets. The fascination of this scene, its hypnotic character, is not only due to the slow circular movement, as if the swirling

camera formerly suspended by Marcel L'Herbier on the ceiling of the Paris Bourse (in *L'Argent*, 1928) had been decelerated to the extreme to better adapt to the psychic effluents of the villagers who dream, to better collect the exhalations of their souls by giving them time to evaporate. No, what is truly striking in this unforgettable moment of *Sátántangó* is the relationship between the brief nervous and jerky panning of the head of the owl and their spreading out, this almost stationary gyration which is its slowed-down counterpart. The movement of the owl, in short, seems to have gone from the diegetic plane (we see a bird that turns its head) to the extradiegetic plane: it is the camera itself which seems to have adopted its rotary gesture, as if it were moving like a filmic or filming meta-owl.

This is precisely one of the places in Béla Tarr's work where the animal told and represented also becomes what I would call an *animal filmicum*, a filmanimal or cine-animal. And the owl is not the only specimen of this metafauna which, as we will see, is not simply metaphorical: the whale or the horse are still waiting for us. We will pay attention to them rather than to the animal as scapegoat which, from the short film produced by Edison studios in 1903 (*Electrocuting an Elephant*) to the donkey of *Au hasard Balthazar* (Robert Bresson, 1966), never stopped haunting cinema.<sup>4</sup>

Or perhaps it is the animal which, in Bresson as in Tarr, or even in the cinema in general, does not cease to be divided between what Raymond Bellour, in *Le Corps du cinéma*, calls on the one hand its "inevitable anthropomorphism" and what he describes on the other hand as its "dull eye", which seems to escape or resist any possible humanization. This is why, moreover, in the sequence of *Balthazar's* circus—in these "vertiginous reverse shots" between the gaze of the donkey and that of a lion, a bear, a monkey and an elephant—"our place as beholders", as Bellour rightly notes, begins to tremble or to waver "in this wavering between the animal and the human".<sup>5</sup>

4 I share only to a certain extent the interesting hypothesis of Akira Lippit (Lippit 2000, pp. 196-197): "One final speculation: the cinema developed, indeed embodied, animal traits as a gesture of mourning for the disappearing wildlife. [...] the technological media commemorated and incorporated that which it had surpassed: the speechless semiotic of the animal look. Animal magnetism had moved from the hypnotist's eye to the camera eye, preserved in the emblematic lure of cinema." Filmanimality, in fact, that is to say the animal as film (rather than the animal *in* film), cannot be reduced to the work of mourning that the cinema needs to forget the loss of a nature that it would have helped to make disappear. A few lines further on, Lippit precisely names Edison's elephant as a symptom, in a way, of this sacrificed animality that haunts the cinema (p. 197): "Thomas Edison has left an animal electrocution on film, remarkable for the brutality of its fact and its *mise-en-scène* of the death of an animal. [...] The advent of cinema is thus haunted by the animal figure, driven, as it were, by the wildlife after death of the animal." More generally, on the question of animality in the cinema, I can only refer to the remarkable book by Raymond Bellour (Bellour 2009). Bellour, who devotes a long note to Lippit's work (p. 436-437), systematically explores the links between the posterity of "animal magnetism" described by Messmer in 1773 and (proto-)cinema.

5 Bellour 2009, p. 576.

Is an owl dreaming? Does it dream with its eyes open or its eyes closed? Aristotle, in his *History of Animals*, clearly said that animals also dream:

"Furthermore, it appears that not only men (*ou monon anthrôpoi*), but horses, dogs and oxen, dream (*enupiazein*), indeed sheep too, and goats and the whole group of viviparous quadrupeds. Dogs betray the fact by barking while asleep."<sup>6</sup>

Regarding other animals like the oviparous or those that live in the water (*ta enudra*), continues Aristotle, one cannot say on the other hand if they dream or not. And since some do not have eyelids (*blephara*), it is from their apparent immobility that we can conclude that they are sleeping.

Man seems certainly to have, for Aristotle, a certain privilege as a great dreamer among the living, but in the end this privilege is so relative that one wonders even if it is one. "The animal which dreams most of all is man", he writes (*enupniazei de tôn zôôn malista anthrôpos*), but he immediately adds:

"Children and infants do not dream at all; but dreaming begins in most cases about the age of four or five. Instances have been known of full-grown men and women who have never had a dream in their lives. Some people of this sort have in fact come to dream later in life..."<sup>7</sup>

From Aristotle to contemporary neuroscience via Darwin and a few others, the animal is regularly attributed with the faculty of producing images, namely *phantasia*, imagination.<sup>8</sup> And yet, even if the analogy between the dream and the cinema has become a commonplace, even if the animals could therefore also *have filmic fantasies* [se faire du cinéma], it seems that the name of *homo cinematographicus* proposed by Edgar

6 IV, 10, 536b (Aristotle 1970, p. 83).

7 *Ibid.*, 537b (Aristotle 1970, p. 89). We find in the *Problemata* (whose attribution to Aristotle is however debated) a passage which goes as far as wanting to distinguish *ways of dreaming* in animals and man (X, 16, 892b15-19; Aristotle 2011, p. 295): "Why do some of the other animals not have nocturnal emissions (*ouk exoneirôttei*), while some have them rarely? [...] is it because the other animals do not dream in the same way (*ouk enupniazei ta alla homoiôis*), but a nocturnal emission always occurs with imagination (*meta phantasias*)?"

8 As Derrida notes in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (Derrida 2006, p. 62-63): "The question 'Does the animal dream?' is, in its form, premises, and stakes, at least analogous to the questions 'Does the animal think?' 'Does the animal produce representations?' a self, imagination, a relation to the future as such?" Darwin (Darwin 2009) does not hesitate to write (p. 62): "No one supposes that one of the lower animals reflects whence he comes or whither he goes—what is death or what is life, and so forth. But can we feel sure that an old dog with an excellent memory and some power of imagination, as shewn by his dreams, never reflects on his past pleasures in the chase? and this would be a form of self-consciousness." Or again (p. 58): "A long succession of vivid and connected ideas, may pass through the mind without the aid of any form of language, as we can infer from the prolonged dreams of dogs." Or finally (p. 45-46): "The *Imagination* is one of the highest prerogatives of man. [...] Dreaming gives us the best notion of this power [...]. As dogs, cats, horses, and probably all the higher animals, even birds, as is stated on good authority, have vivid dreams, and this is shewn by their movements and voice, we must admit that they possess some power of imagination."

Morin has, in the eyes of some, something pleonastic to it. Suffice it to think, for example, of the definition of man that Giorgio Agamben offered, namely that “man is a moviegoing animal.”<sup>9</sup>

By paraphrasing another Aristotle—not the one from the *History of Animals*, but the author of the ultra-famous formula of *Politics*, namely that “man is the only animal that has language” (*logon de monon anthrôpos ekhei tôn zôon*, 1253 a)—Agamben thus adds to the traditional list of the metaphysical privileges of man that of being the only one among animals to have a relation to images as such. Such a massive assertion is already problematic in view of the scope of experimental data which should lead to complicating it: certain animal—monkeys, elephants, dolphins, for example—indeed seem to recognize their own image as such; others, like pigs, can find an object by locating it with its reflection in a mirror.<sup>10</sup> But above all, such an assertion does not allow us to think about what I am proposing here to call the *animal filmicum*, namely the constitutive animality of the film, even the animal as film.

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So let's take a closer look, on the side of this “dull eye” of the animal of which Bellour speaks by naming it in the singular.<sup>11</sup> And let's ask ourselves already: why one eye, why only one rather than two?

In the *Problemata* attributed to Aristotle, there is a sketch of a comparative analysis of the distance between the eyes in humans and in animals. Aristotle—or the pseudo-Aristotle?—writes as follows:

“Why does the human, of all animals, have the least distance between the eyes (*diastêma tôn ommatôn*) in proportion to size? Is it because he, much more than the others, is in accordance with nature (*kata phusin*), and perception by nature is of what is in front? For that toward which the movement is directed should be seen beforehand. Now the greater the distance between the eyes, the more the organs of sight will face sideways. So if something should be according to nature, then this distance should be as small as possible; for in this way the sight will most of all travel forward. Further, it is necessary for the other animals to see sideways, since they don't have hands (*kheiras*). This is why their eyes

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9 Agamben 2002, p. 314: “Man is the only being who is interested in images as such. Animals are very interested in images, but to the extent that they are fooled. You can show a male fish the image of a female fish and the male will eject his sperm; you can fool a bird with the image of another bird, in order to trap it. But when the animal realizes it's dealing with an image, it loses interest completely. Now, man is an animal who is interested in images when he has recognized them as such. That's why he is interested in painting and why he goes to the cinema. A definition of man from our specific point of view could be that man is a moviegoing animal. He is interested in images after he has recognized that they are not real beings.”

10 Cf. especially Broom, Sena and Moynihan 2009, pp. 1037-1041.

11 Bellour 2009, p. 576. See also Bellour's comments (p. 522) on the “shark's eye” in *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975) described as “all seeing”, as well as on “the giant eye of Moby Dick” (in the eponymous film by Huston in 1956).

have been set apart more, especially in sheep, because they usually move with their heads bent down.”<sup>12</sup>

Of this divergent strabismus of the animal looking sideways—that is to say towards two different sides—the horse of *The Turin Horse* is the embodiment par excellence, as we can see with the two close-ups which linger on him during the film, first during the fourth day, then during the fifth. Old Ohlsdorfer and his daughter are going to visit their horse, which refuses to eat, in the stable. Between them, standing and framing the horse's head, the camera approaches it, it advances towards the animal until the two human beings leave the frame. We can only see the flat muzzle, parallel to the screen, repeating the screen in the screen in the form of a hairy, black and opaque surface, while the two eyes squint, diverge so radically that they make looking at the camera impossible. In fact, the closer the camera is to the muzzle, the less the horse looks at us; the less it *can* look at us. Then the camera goes in the opposite direction, it moves away, the father withdraws the halter, and the daughter leaves and closes the door. Close-up on the closed door of the stable: we now know that the horse will not move; will not go out.

We will no longer see it, but its impossible gaze, spread apart by the abysmal distance which seems to have opened between the two eyes, will not cease to haunt the following images. Of the next shot, a fixed view through the panes of a window, we can no longer say which eyes see it. First there is only the greyness, the leaves and the dust that spin outside in the wind, as if the image itself began to decompose, to pulverize, to incinerate, to become an ash-image or a powder-image. We are almost surprised when the camera, stuck on this window for an interminable minute, finally backs up by including the father, from behind, in the frame: was it he who was watching what we were looking at? No doubt, but the granular image which was being atomized, which disintegrated in the frame, will nevertheless have seemed to belong to no human gaze.

From the horse of *The Turin Horse* to the whale of the *Werckmeister Harmonies*, the distance between the eyes of the *animal filmicum* increases more and more, until it becomes potentially infinite. So let it come, this whale, let's watch it arrive in the little town to which the director of the circus is transporting it.

What we see first, without knowing anything yet, is a trailer pulled by a tractor. Its approach, with the thundering noise of the engine and the headlights which pierce the thick night enveloping the streets, lasts two minutes. Two endless minutes, taut with the intense effort, vibrant with the work of this infernal machinery; two minutes of fixed shot, without camera movement. Then, when the tractor arrives in the foreground, the camera slowly rotates to the right, it follows the machine with a slight panning which freezes again to let the ridges of the corrugated iron of the trailer go by, while the silhouette of János Valuska (Lars Rudolph), from behind, enters the field. Everything is suspended, the spatial coordinates,

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12 X, 15, 892b5-14 (Aristotle 2001, pp. 293-295).

the points of reference are abolished; there is only this man who looks, with his back to us, at the image of a pure striated scrolling.

At the end of this endless sequence, János walks away and lets the camera linger on the poster announcing with a lot of exclamation marks—“attraction!!” (*atrakció!!*), “fantastic!!” (*fantasztikus!!*)—the show of “the biggest giant whale in the world” (*a világ legnagyobb oriasbálnája*), with the guest star of the show (*sztárvendég*): “the prince” (*a herceg*).

We will only learn little by little what—or who—it is all about.

First, we hear the gossip and rumors about the arrival of the whale and the prince. They can be heard at the postal sorting center where János picks up the newspapers he has to distribute. “The world has gone completely crazy” (*teljesen meg bolondult a világ*), says an employee, “and now on top of it all this circus is coming (*és akkor mindennek a tetejébe megérkezik ez a cirkusz*), they bring this horrible big whale, and this prince (*hozzák azt a borzalmas nagy bálnát, meg ezt a herceget*), it is said that he weighs ten kilos (*állítólag tíz kilo*) [...] and that he has three eyes (*három szeme van*).” Before we even see it, the prince, a sort of prosthesis of the whale, is announced as the bearer of an additional eye—one more eye which seems to constitute the symmetrical counterpart of the single and cyclopean eye of the whale: of the latter, you never see two eyes at the same time, it is doomed—we come to this—to be able to have only one in the frame.

We will see this whale after having followed János for a long time as he crosses the town square, full of silent men who wait for who knows what, with their serious, threatening faces. We hear the creaking of the sheet metal and the chains of the trailer door which opens slowly to let in those who would like to see the giant cetacean. János is the first to pay a hundred forints.

In the whale’s lair, in this rolling cavern in the shape of a caravan, János finds himself facing the eye of the naturalized Leviathan. The camera follows him and fixes on this double of itself, this glassy eye that does not blink and on the surface of which is reflected a fragile point of light, perhaps the shimmering of the filming itself in the dark. Going beyond the eye, János finds himself in front of the baleen that fills the mouth of the monster. Arranged regularly in an almost silky curvature, they evoke a stage curtain, a veil made of threads that would open on the inside, on the other side of the eye. Like a drapery, a fabric that would form a screen, also striated, like the sheet metal walls of the trailer.

But János, the new Jonas from the time of cinema, does not enter the whale. János turns around it in a long tracking shot which now leaves the drapery of the baleen to move towards the other eye of the cetacean. We see it emerge, this protruding eye, from the shapeless mass of the large mammal, before the shadow cast by János covers it.

János runs alongside the large body and heads slowly towards the exit of the cave, towards the light.

Later, János returns to see the whale a second time. The town square is even fuller of hostile men gathered around improvised braziers. The trailer is closed. János runs along it, the ridges of the corrugated iron roll again in one direction, in the other, until János discovers an opening, a door on the side.

It is as if János was moving aside the striations themselves: he goes through the hatches that divide and split the image, he enters the interstice of the inter-image which stripes the screen and he disappears in the trailer. The camera remains fixed, as if dazed facing the corrugated iron.

When a change of shot finally occurs, it is the whale’s eye that we see. As if the mechanical eye was precisely what resides in the interstices, in the interstripes of the corrugated iron that forms the screen. In the folds of the image, it gazes: there is the “dull eye” of which Bellour speaks, the eye of the *animal filmicum*, so close to—and yet distinct from—“the eye of matter” that Deleuze wrote about.<sup>13</sup>

We are motionless in front of this eye to which János’ voice-over is addressed in the complete darkness (“You see all the harm you do”, he says softly, *látod mennyi bajt csinálsz*, “and yet it has been a long time that you cannot harm anyone”, *pedig már régóta nem tudsz te ártani senkinek*). Then, while other voices are heard, the camera shifts from the whale’s eye to the eyes of János, who is listening. Lurking in the darkness near the whale, he overhears the argument of the director of the traveling circus and the prince’s interpreter.

Of this prince whom his interpreter describes as uncontrollable—he is endowed with a “magnetic force” (*magnetikus ereje van*)—we will only see the cast shadow, in a scene that evokes Fritz Lang’s Mabuse<sup>14</sup>. The shadow of the prince speaks with two voices: his own (in Slovenian, it seems to me) and that of his interpreter (in Hungarian). Perhaps three eyes, said the postal worker—and who could contradict her by counting the eyes of a shadow? Three eyes and more than one voice: the prince, a sort of appendage of the whale, embodies supplementarity itself.

János is still listening to him, in the dark.

The camera slowly advances towards János’ face. At first we only see one eye emerging from the shadows, as if János himself had become a whale. But no, the other one also appears. The shadow of the prince, now off-screen, lapses into curses, calls for massacre and destruction, while a new shot shows János running through the dark streets. He runs out of breath and his two eyes shine like embers in the deep night.

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<sup>13</sup> Deleuze 1997, p. 81: “Vertov’s nonhuman eye, the cine-eye, is not the eye of a fly or of an eagle, the eye of another animal. [...] On the contrary, it is the eye of matter, the eye in matter [...]”

<sup>14</sup> When asked: “What’s your interpretation of the Prince character? What does he signify?”, Béla Tarr answers: “I don’t know. I haven’t seen him. I have only seen his shadow. That’s all, what you too have seen. The same. You know, I don’t like to explain anything about the story.” (Daly and Le Cain 2001, online at [sensesofcinema.com](http://sensesofcinema.com)).

The eye of the whale, this eye still waiting for the other, which however remains too distant to form with it a human gaze, we will see it a third time, after a long sequence where János is still running, fleeing the ruins of the general rampage. He runs on the railroad tracks as a helicopter approaches and circles around him, much like the plane chasing James Stewart in *North by Northwest*.

When the helicopter stops, suspended in the air facing János, a few meters from the ground, it is like a buzzing insect with a duller, glassier look than ever. We look at this helicopter for a long time from János' point of view, before the next shot, a sort of elliptical reverse shot, shows us the latter sitting on his bed in the mental hospital, his eyes empty, while his friend György Eszter, the composer who dreams of re-tuning the temperament of the world, talks to him.

Eszter has left the hospital and is now approaching the whale spread out in the middle of the square, among the ruins of the trailer. We see it for the first time in broad daylight, outside the cinema-cave where, welcoming every Jonas who passes by and is ready to pay a hundred forints, it made them dream by casting shadows.

Eszter looks at the dead beast's eye, stares at it before lowering his head and continuing on his way. He hesitates for a moment, one last time he turns around, he takes a last look back at what was an eye without glance, neither alive nor dead—at this cycloptic and always open eye which couldn't be humanized in a pair. But now the undead eye of the dead whale is dead.

Eszter leaves the frame. The camera continues to stare at the large stranded body, gradually disappearing into the greyness that invades the image. It is as though there is a veil of dust, or better, a cataract, which descends on the eye of the camera. Faced with the death of the dead eye of the dead whale, the filmic gaze also dies. With the end of the *animal filmicum*, which was never simply alive or dead, it is the film which ends, which turns gray; gray like ash. Everything is incinerated. Or better, as I have suggested elsewhere, everything is *cinéfied*.<sup>15</sup>

And that's what happens in *The Turin Horse* as well, which started with the voice-over reading the first sentences of a story by László Krasznahorkai, *Legkésőbb Torinóban*.<sup>16</sup> We hear the narrator recall briefly, sharply and factually, the story of Nietzsche throwing his arms around the neck of a beaten horse in the streets of Turin, in January 1889. And the voice soberly concludes: "What happened to the horse, we do not know" (*hogy mi lett a lóval, nem tudjuk*).

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15 On cinema and ashes, on *cinéfication*, see Szendy 2015, p. 73 and p. 127.

16 "At the latest, in Turin". This story appears in the collection *The World Goes On* (New York: New Directions Books, 2017).

With these words, the first shot of the film shows us a horse pulling a cart. It is backlit, you can't see its eyes, hidden in the shadow of the blinders. And the camera, from its slight low angle, seems to have trouble fixing the head of the beast that moves constantly in the effort—it also keeps covering and uncovering the face of the old coachman in the background. The coupling of these two, launched through the wind, the dust and the twirling leaves, is the impossible coupling of two gazes which follow each other, fragily held together by the bar of the cart, with its leather straps and chains.

Repeating on a large scale the final gesture of *Werckmeister Harmonies*, the latest film by Béla Tarr (which should be his last, according to the director's declarations) perhaps tells nothing more than the slow, long closure of the *animal filmicum*'s eye. That is to say, the unbinding, the untying of the impossible coupling of gazes, the severing of their ties.

From the moment—let's remember—when the horse gives a last diverging look to the camera, from the moment when the stable door closes like a wooden mega-lid on the eyes of the filmanimal that turn sideways, the end of the film is announced not so much as a freeze frame but rather as a freezing of the blink, in a general becoming-dust and becoming-ash, which hyperbolically amplifies the last shot of *Werckmeister Harmonies*. As if the black greyness that lasts ad infinitum when the oil lamp of the coachman and his daughter goes out by plunging them into the darkness of the sixth day; as if this half-light was that of the eye already half-closed of the dying horse that we no longer see.

The filmanimal's eye slowly closes, like a last blink of an eyelid that one would try to slow down as much as possible. The duration of the film could well have been that of this singular blink.

*Translated by Rodrigo Gonsalves*

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