

# The Sublimeness of Nature in *Days of Heaven*

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In the following text, we will discuss the concept of the lofty/sublime<sup>1</sup> and the role of nature in *Days of Heaven* (1978), a film written and directed by Terrence Malick. The chosen filmic presentation of nature immediately comes across as an illustrative concretisation of Kant's definition of the sublime. In discussing the concept, we will draw on the conceptual shift from Burke to Kant, especially in relation to the filmic sublime, which the American philosopher of art Cynthia A. Freeland also discussed.<sup>2</sup> In *Days of Heaven*, nature does not appear merely as a backdrop, but is also revealed as a mighty dynamic openness of life. Following this filmic experience, we will end by turning from Kant's aesthetic epistemological framework to Heidegger's

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- 1 In the context of artistic speech in the original ancient Greek essay *On the Sublime*, Longinus uses the term *hypsous* or the synonym *megaloprepis*, which was later translated with the Latin *sublimis* (sublime in English and French). There is a difference between the lofty in the original Greek meaning and the sublime in the Latin translation since the first suggests something aloft, something elevated, while the second suggests something deep and hidden behind the surface of outer appearance. Kreft, Lev. 1990: "Vzvišeno med Kantom in Longinom". *Filozofski vestnik*, vol. 11, no. 1, p. 78: [www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-VNMLFDDC](http://www.dlib.si/?URN=URN:NBN:SI:DOC-VNMLFDDC); retrieved 10 May 2021.
  - 2 Freeland, Cynthia A. 2005: "The Sublime in Cinema". In: Plantinga, Carl, and Smith, Greg M. ed. *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion*. London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 65–83.

ontological understanding of human existence. After all, Malick studied philosophy with the American philosopher Stanley Cavell and translated Heidegger's *Vom Wesen des Grundes* (The Essence of Reasons, 1969).

### ***The role of nature in Days of Heaven***

Let us take a detailed look at the social drama full of innocence, longing and still nature, which is omnipresent in the film. The atmosphere created by the incredible film landscape can easily dazzle us with its dreamy nobleness. The romantic narrative about days of heaven, as thematised by the film's title, takes us from the initial beautiful scenes of nature to the sublime and to moral dilemmas. Our aesthetic responses to the landscape, photographed by the famous director of photography Néstor Almendros, include appreciation, awe, disquietude and the feelings of the sublime as an aesthetic idea that is related not merely to the size and extension of natural objects, but also to the transcendence of the moral law. The film holds our attention both by making us marvel at its aesthetical qualities and by showing the moral crisis, life's disorientation and modern human beings feeling at a loss.

The film is set in the period before World War One. The life at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is evoked not only by the introductory documentary photographs of that time, genre motifs, architecture and manual labour at a steel mill, but also the technology characteristic of the time after the industrial revolution. The story begins with a loud event in a steel mill when, during an unfortunate argument and in a fit of agitation, the worker Bill (Richard Gere) knocks down his boss (Stuart Margolin) and unintentionally kills him. After the unfortunate event, Bill flees the urban industrial centre together with his sister Linda (Linda Manz) and girlfriend Abby (Brooke Adams), travelling by train to unknown parts of the US removed from world events.

In the opening sequence, we are accompanied into the film's world by the seventh movement of *The Carnival of the Animals* (Aquarium) by the French romantic composer Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921). The dark film music, expanded and crystallised by the film composer Ennio Morricone, takes us to the incredibly melancholy atmosphere of the film's milieu, in which looking at nature, the stratification of the social world and human psychology makes us feel the eternal and incorrigible romantic world-weariness. Perhaps precisely the romantic "beautiful soul", which, as Hegel would say, merely immerses in deep inner reflection and does not see its inclusion in the broader picture of the historical happening.

Like many Italian immigrants at the time, the protagonists search for ways to survive and opportunities for "precarious" work. In their search for a different life, they find work in the remote countryside of Texas, where an isolated house stands on an expansive terrain in the middle of vast fields and grassland. Due to their size and the vastness of the endless fields, which panoramically spread to the horizon, the surroundings make us feel small.

The first characteristic of the sublime that Freeland points out following Kant<sup>3</sup> is the dimension of awesomeness, greatness, mightiness and power. Kant described the sublime as follows: “*Sublime is the name given to what is absolutely great.*”<sup>4</sup> He connected it exclusively with the relation to nature and not to works of art, for an artist’s imagination is finite and limited, while, for Burke before him, the sublime was also a matter of art. Freeland’s interpretation of the sublime thus moves between Burke’s and Kant’s understanding, so between pleasure related to morality and the artist’s skill and imagination. In art, we can thus talk about an aesthetic category that refers to an impressive, mighty, magnificent, exceptional work. The category of the sublime describes experiences that transcend still beauty and extend into the field of danger, which is why we can only conditionally speak about the sublimeness of nature in the opening part of the film. The introductory tenderness and gentleness of nature arouse the feelings of beauty and it is only through the implicitly present happening – like the church service and the drudgery in the field – that we get an inkling of how the currently favourable weather can turn into an uncontrollable danger.

### ***A labouring life and sublime remoteness***

Linda’s life story unfolds around a deception and a love triangle between Bill, Abby and the unnamed landowner (Sam Shepard). On the one hand, it is staged through her childish poetic narrative and, on the other, through focalisation,<sup>5</sup> which establishes a romantic atmosphere of a close connection to nature. Between nature, earth and work, a love relationship slowly develops, in which each character dreams their own dreams: the temperamental Bill dreams of success, the laborious Abby about peace, the sensitive peasant about a happy marriage and, last but not least, Linda about nature and freedom. The close-ups and scenes of nature are slow, full of atmospheric soundscapes created by crickets and the rustling of the wheat fields.<sup>6</sup> Rabbits and grasshoppers hide in the grass and lone birds fly in the sky, while from all around stormy clouds descend upon the endless wheat fields. Linda indulges in child’s play, daydreams and a careless exploration of the living world surrounding her. The story is told precisely by her, a young girl who, in her “transcendental” separation from the world, poetically describes her impressive experience and thoughts. In her innocence, she tries to understand the characters, their fears, sins and hopes. Her narration is uneven because, in her childish remoteness from world conflicts, she lives in a world of the hypnotic sublimeness of nature, not only beauty. It seems as if we look

3 For him, no sensible form is sublime, for an object merely points to infinity.

4 Kant, Immanuel. 1969: *The Critique of Judgement*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 94.

5 Narrative theory talks about the difference between narration that directs the narrative with the voice and focalisation that directs it with the eyes. The focaliser is the viewpoint/perspective of the story. Zupan Sosič, Alojzija. 2017: *Teorija pripovedi*. Maribor: Litera.

6 The magnificent soundscape, which is always dynamic and flawless and intensifies from the subtle sounds of nature to the noises of heavy machinery, was designed by Barry Thomas.

at the world with her, across the shoulder, observing it from a sublime distance. The scenes consist primarily of genre motifs shot at the golden hour, when the sun is just about to set, which is why the cinematography of everyday peasant labour is reminiscent of the paintings by Jean-François Millet (1814–1875), a realist painter known for his depiction of social content, a remote style and an atmosphere of inner melancholy.<sup>7</sup> The tension between day and night is reflected in the film's light, which gives the film a special feeling of fullness, richness and complexity, in short, a fullness of aesthetic ideas that are hard to fully articulate in line with the concepts of reason.

The atmosphere of the film's world establishes the need not only for a textual, but also a *textural* interpretation of the film, which is related to the bodily and the sensuous dimensions of filmic experience. The music and the ambient sounds arouse a mood of psychological distance from the hard and laborious life. Long scenes and details of harvesting grain create visual hapticity.<sup>8</sup> The thin line between the beauty of the film's nature and its destructive side is but a cut of contingency. The film thus builds moments of tension between the lofty distance and the cruel frightfulness of nature, whereby it addresses at least three aspects of a human being's relation to nature: 1) the sensuous aspect, 2) the narrative-poetic world of Linda's words and 3) our sense of moral judgement.

### ***Sin and days of heaven***

Like a metaphor of heavenly days, the second part of the film is, despite the hard conditions of late summer and daylong work in the field, dedicated to the time of rest, play and hunting in the wilderness. With Abby marrying the landowner and Bill entering the house and thereby symbolically also a higher social class, the days of heaven begin. During this period, Malick slowly and masterfully creates an atmosphere and a sense of an unreal, derealised reality, which feeds not only on Bill's suppressed emotions of anger, but also on the unrealised potentials and hopes of all the protagonists. At the same time, the director constantly announces a change with biblical motifs and symbolism represented by heaven, fire, the wildness of grain fields, the house, the murder, grasshoppers and snakes, whereby he thematises the increasingly more evident tension between good and evil.<sup>9</sup> The flimsy drama of pretending that Bill and Abby are only brother and sister creates dramatic

7 Such as his paintings *The Angelus* and *The Gleaners*.

8 Through formal strategies, the strategy of haptic visibility tries to arouse in the viewer a memory of sensuous closeness, foregrounding especially the senses of closeness (smell, touch, feeling) as opposed to those of distance (vision, hearing). Malick manages to do that by using the depth and details of water, landscape, animals, but above all the characters that actively perceive the environment with all their senses. Marks, Laura. U. 2000: *The Skin of The Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

9 Karpfinger, Katy. 2010. "In Search of Perfection: Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven*": [www.newlinearperspectives.wordpress.com/film/k2/](http://www.newlinearperspectives.wordpress.com/film/k2/); retrieved 12 June 2021.

uncertainty of psychical uncontrollability, which, in the decisive moments, will be connected into the enactment of the superior power of nature over humans and the inevitable tragic, but open ending.

And it is precisely the conflictive response to the mightiness of nature that is at the core of feeling the sublime – on the one hand, the feeling of pain and, on the other, pleasure in this pain. We could first describe the sublime with Burke, since, for him, it functions similarly as dread: *a satisfying rapture by the terrifying or the dreadful*.<sup>10</sup> The sublime thus originates in the terrifying, but also tends to the increasingly greater. It draws its power from the mighty dimensions, wildness, solidness and also darkness perceived by all the senses, also taste and hearing. Even though the sublime functions similarly to dread, it does not merely pain us because it also remains pleasant in its distance. Burke, however, could not provide a precise explanation of the real reasons of the sublime, so Kant did it.

Kant first strictly distinguishes between the aesthetic judgement of beauty, which is a product of a free harmonious play between the faculty of imagination and the faculty of understanding, and the much more undetermined aesthetic of the sublime. For him, too, the sublime is a combination of pleasure and pain (dread) that emerges the moment we recognise the limitation of our own imagination. With their size, extensiveness and power that are beyond the capability of presentation, mighty objects seem like a sort of an attack on the faculty of imagination. Our imagination cannot offer a representation that would correspond to the idea of infinity that they point to. It is precisely this overburdening of the imagination that is related to the second dimension of the sublime – ineffableness. The judgement of the sublime thus emerges in the disharmonious interaction between the faculty of understanding and the faculty of imagination. *“This failure in expression causes pain, a sort of a break within the subject itself between what can be thought and what can be imagined and presented.”*<sup>11</sup>

But, for both Burke and Kant, the key condition for the experience is a safe distance, for, without it, the infinite, the indescribable and the ineffable would become pure terror for us.<sup>12</sup> Because the dangers exist at a safe distance, however, the forces are arranged so that they force us to change our mental mode. What blocks our imagination and sensibility, what has a painful and unpleasant effect is then transformed into the feelings of pleasure and respect when, with the help of ideas, we do manage to conceptualise our experience at the higher level of reason.<sup>13</sup> When nature becomes terrifying and our imagination is exhausted, our mind is filled with numerous ideas. The human mind abandons sensibility and faces the finality of ideas.<sup>14</sup>

10 Freeland 2005, p. 66.

11 Erjavec, Aleš. 1993: “Sublimno in aura”. *Filozofski vestnik*, vol. 14, no. 1, p. 12.

12 Freeland 2005, p. 68.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

14 Ošljaj, Borut. 2000: *Človek in narava: osnove diaforične etike narave*. Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče, p. 174.

Pleasure thus belongs to our intellectual capabilities that can transcend their own limitation of presenting and understanding, while we experience a sort of a Kantian catharsis – a moral purification and an enthusiastic realisation that, as beings of the transcendental law, we too are sublime. With the emphasis that, as moral beings of the understanding, we can advance towards an end and transcend the conception of the sublime as an adrenaline experience.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Outburst of the sublime truth***

Abby is torn between her husband and Bill. With the visual images of nature, such as the approaching storm or the slight breeze among the wheat ears giving way to a stronger steady spinning of the pinwheel on the roof, the film crates an increasing tension related to the inevitable revelation of deceit and moral groundlessness. The landowner's distant gaze at the kiss between Abby and Bill finally breaks the last illusions in him, which Malick emphasises with an increasingly stronger wind, the feelings of unease in the lungs and a precise choice of camera angles.

We see the first grasshoppers that fly into the kitchen from the divine viewpoint. Then the fields are attacked by a giant swarm; to save the crop, they try to chase them away. All the accumulated anger culminates in the outburst of uncertainty that definitively disperses the last traces of trust. Nature, which in the film is not merely an unimportant omnipresent backdrop, now expresses itself in its autonomy. The swarms of grasshoppers above the grain fields can strike us to the core, for they reflect the moral drama of hopelessness. The feelings of beauty that pervade the film are now complemented by a sudden outburst of natural catastrophic sublimeness. In the scenes, we detect a parallelism in which human psychology and nature are caught. When the evening gives way to night, Bill and the master get into a spat. Just before the harvest, the wheat ears are engulfed by an unstoppable blaze, while the suppressed emotions are caught in the flames of moral fire. Rampant horses spread the fire across the field, illuminating human faces with a dramatic *chiaroscuro* malevolence. The day that was constantly on the edge of night finally gives way to it, while days of heaven darken into hell. Burke already connected the sublime with darkness, night and other elements of the older dimly romantically-dreadfully sublime.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the film pushes us into the sublime in the ethical and moral sense, but also with its visual motifs, for, in complete darkness, the scene is illuminated only by the destructive fire. The night, which has always had a metaphysical power, brings a change in the lighting: the forms of nature are blurred and its hidden sides and unusual shapes that are only latently present during the day come to light. The

15 Guyer, Paul. 2015: *A History of Modern Aesthetics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

16 Recall the apocalyptic scenes in the paintings by Salvator Rosa, Caspar David Friedrich, Washington Allston (night scenes), John Martin, William Blake, Benjamin West, Philippe Jacques de Loucherbourg, J. M. W. Turner, Thomas Cole.

unknown emptiness is full of unexpectedness, which the ideas about the terrifying and the dreadful are connected with. Darkness veils the sharp day view, which is why the experience of the surroundings turns inwardly, while hearing takes on the role of primary perception. What comes to the fore is the aural landscape of the motif – the screams, sirens, grasshopper noises and sounds of the wind make a cut into the dim visibility. In a way, nature reflects the pugnacious seething of passions of interpersonal relationships, while its intervention into the story functions as a sublime purification. We could say that the stifled and hypnotic feeling of the entire atmosphere of the narrative returns in the form of a psychological and natural catastrophe. The close-ups of faces show extremely painful feelings that are beyond the imaginable for everyone. Severely pained by the betrayal, the landowner is pushed into a transgressive destruction of everything he used to love. In the expression of suppressed emotions and deceits, the unbearable rage spills over into an act of violence and criminal vengeance. But in the breakdown of anger and attempted murder, the landowner dies under Bill's screwdriver. At the end, Bill, Abby and Linda again flee into the unknown. Linda's words are even more poetically distanced: "*We don't know where we're going or what we're going to do*". But this time, the police catch them. Bill soon loses his life, while the girls are left each to herself.

For Kant, the sublime is also theological, for it helps us discover the place of humans in the world, nature, existence and relation to God. The sublime opens the possibility of a more moral world and the consideration of whether morality is also part of nature. Nature itself thus merely allows morality, it allows us to recognise the moral finality in it even though it is questionable to what extent the empirical world of nature actually embodies moral realisation. That question remains open and undetermined.<sup>17</sup> And that is precisely the role it plays in the film. Despite the magnificent and destructive role of nature, which reveals people's lies and, through sublime dread, grounds them again, it shows Malick's understanding of nature as something ambiguous. At the end of the film, this proves to be an emphasised incompleteness of the world, which asks us the following: *do heaven, nature or God always know what they want?* Thus, it is not only the characters that are lost, but we can also ambiguously say that God himself is lost since the question of his existence remains without a definitive answer. Malick's understanding of nature is therefore more deeply related to his ontology, which is revealed as the filmmaker's filmic landscape of the mind.

We have thus arrived at the third characteristic of the sublime, which encourages moral reflection. For Kant, the awareness of the moral law and our moral duties is related to the dimensions of the ineffable both outside in the infinity of the starry sky and in our heart, in our deep feelings of duty to the Law.<sup>18</sup> In that sense, the sublime

<sup>17</sup> Kante, Božidar. 2009. *Estetika narave*. Ljubljana: Sophia, p. 162.

<sup>18</sup> Freeland 2005, p. 69.

sharpens the awareness of oneself and one's finality, which we perceive as a unique independence from nature.<sup>19</sup> While, for Kant, the sublime is doubtlessly a matter of our duty to the ethical imperative, Freeland does not wholly agree with that since she sees no necessary reason for an aesthetic experience supporting the moral law. Instead, Freeland tries to understand the moral dimension of the sublime from the perspective of comprehending a film as a work of art on the whole. She seeks the feeling of elevation in the shift from our emotional involvement and imaginative experience at the sensory level to the intellectual cognitive experience brought about by our reflection on the moral standpoint of the work of art. That means that a work of art can push us in the direction of recognising the cognitive relevance of a film. We could also say: in the direction of the metasymbolic level and not only our emotional excitement over aesthetic pleasure. If the pain and dread are too severe, our awareness moves from the diegetic "immersion" in the narrative to the higher level of our reflection on the story, where we recognise the artistic value of the work on the whole.<sup>20</sup> *Days of Heaven* prompt a reflection on the moral standpoint that the film takes towards existence. Therefore, its sublimeness also lies in it evoking emotions related to moral reflection.

### ***The horizon of life***

The film's ending is most interesting, for it leaves the viewers with the feeling of complete openness. After Abby leaves Linda at an orphanage and, together with the soldiers heading for the battlefields of World War I, leaves town, Linda escapes through a window of the boarding school with a friend. Next to the railway tracks where they wait for a soldier named Edward, their words slowly paint a world of lost abandonment. But that does not frighten them; they courageously march into the world, longing for a better life. Their naïve dreaminess opens the dimension of marvelling and a sort of a "walk on the rope of life's duality": they did not know where they were going or what they were going to do, but they felt that anything was possible. In a complex way, the film thus tells a simple story about the duality and indeterminacy of life in constant tension between misfortune and fortune, peace and excitement, good and evil and earth and heaven. And also between fear and respect,<sup>21</sup> which kept people at the time torn between wakefulness and dreaminess. Malick himself describes his characters as full of desires, dreams and appetites in a world where happiness is a matter of fleeting moments.<sup>22</sup> Stanley Cavell writes: "I

19 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 73–74.

21 In Kant, the feelings of attraction and repulsion are the key categories of the sublime. Kante 2009, p. 192.

22 Marterre, Buddy. 2013: "Defense of the Spiritual Power of Film: With an Analysis of Days of Heaven": [www.academia.edu/5135285/In\\_Defense\\_of\\_the\\_Spiritual\\_Power\\_of\\_Film\\_With\\_an\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Days\\_of\\_Heaven](http://www.academia.edu/5135285/In_Defense_of_the_Spiritual_Power_of_Film_With_an_Analysis_of_Days_of_Heaven); retrieved 10 December 2021.

*think the film does indeed contain a metaphysical vision of the world; but I think one feels that one has never quite seen the scene of human existence – call it the arena between earth (or days) and heaven – quite realised this way on film before.”*<sup>23</sup>

An unusual reciprocity takes place – when we watch the film, it watches us back. At a certain moment, subject and object switch their roles: we do not know who we are, where we are going and what we are going to do. By destabilising us too, the film carries out a sort of a chiasitic turn: we also do not know what life offers us (we share that lack with the characters). What appeals most to us viewers in this scene is the unimaginable openness of the world as a whole, the fact that anything can happen, since life is constantly threatened by tragedies, deceits, complications and accidents, but also new relations, resolutions and happiness. The sublime, which, in addition to the sting of danger, also contains astonishing beauty, should therefore not be sought merely in the apocalyptic outburst of misfortune, for the film is pervaded by the self-negation of nature, which submerges the atmospheric worldness into a contemplative colouring. For this second kind of sublimeness, we borrow the pair apocalyptic–contemplative used by the American philosopher Edward S. Casey in his conception of the sublime in landscape painting.<sup>24</sup>

The contemplative sublime originates in the feelings of loss, which is why it is closer to the phenomenon of grieving, which Burke describes as a feeling of general loss, dreadful emptiness, darkness, loneliness and quiet.<sup>25</sup> The encounter with real nature thus has two sides to it. It can be unveiled to us as a horizon of beauty, which comes across as a reward, or a horizon of dread, which pushes us towards purification. It is interesting that Kant also talks about the phenomenon of a special experience of time in which the successive sequence of events disappears. In one single moment, a temporal break can occur in which succession is replaced by simultaneousness. That is because our imagination tries to capture the extensiveness of an object in one stroke, which in turn creates pressure on the imagination. Reason demands that it presents simultaneousness that can only be seen in succession. The pressure on time is a pressure on the very *a priori* condition of all phenomena, also the means of constituting one’s subjectivity.<sup>26</sup> The annihilation of the succession of time, which is the fundamental condition of awareness, is summed up well by Božidar Kante: “*It seems that now, in the sublime feeling, the regression of imagination strikes a fatal blow to the very foundations of the subject. In the sublime feeling, the subject is extemporised, that is, placed outside time. Or as Lyotard puts it: if taste offers the subject a beautiful life, the sublime threatens it with disappearance or erasure.*”<sup>27</sup>

23 Cavell, Stanley. 1979: *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*. London: Harvard University Press, p. XIV.

24 Kante 2009, p. 160.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 161.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 167.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 168.

But the subject is also placed outside itself, for, at least since Longinus, the sublime is also connected with ecstasy. The sublime is a paradoxical violence to the faculty of imagination, also as its own *ecstasy*, for in order to transcend its limits of the presentable, it excludes itself from its own limits of presenting. The imagination senses and suggests a certain presence beyond presentability, but, in its negative ambiguity, somehow manages to transcend its own limits. Put differently: in a sort of an act of self-harm, the imagination breaks away from its finality, annihilates itself, but, with the emptiness it creates, sees something.<sup>28</sup>

At this point, we move away from Kant, who essentially related the sublime with the reasonable, and turn to Heidegger, who never discussed the sublime explicitly, for the term is part of metaphysics, which he wanted to overcome.<sup>29</sup> Based on the distance between subject and object, Kant emphasised the understanding and strictly resisted everything sensuous. Rather than a rational reflection, the experience of ecstasy is an immersion in experience, in which, due to the intensity of the situation, one loses one's critical distance.<sup>30</sup> If, for Kant, the sublime is an aesthetic experience, then, with Heidegger, we could search for a "sublime ecstasy" at a deeper level of being-in-the-world expressed in disposedness (*Befindlichkeit*). According to Heidegger, Dasein is always part of the world and always also part of the original openness (being-in-the-world). Openness is the ontological meaning of Dasein, of our practical, affective situatedness, as the constitutive moment of its ecstatic structure.<sup>31</sup>

To illustrate this better, let us look at the film's epilogue because it realises so well the idea of the openness of existence or Dasein, which is manifested precisely through the film's moods. If we know that Heidegger's ec-static feeling of ex-istence is the confrontation with one's own Dasein as a radical constitutive centrelessness expelled in itself, then we see that the ontological uncertainty that lies in existence remains a secret to both the characters and the viewers. The sublime that in the film functions as a shock could also be interpreted as an uncontrollable feeling that breaks the course of one's everyday existence.<sup>32</sup> In that, the viewer easily notices the film's artistic standpoint, for, at certain points, it expels us from the diegesis of the film world. The experience of

28 Zepke, Stephen. 2019: *Sublime Art: Towards an Aesthetics of the Future*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 65.

29 The relation between Heidegger's philosophy and Kant is an interesting starting point for a more detailed further research.

30 Bolt, Barbara. 2007: "The Techno-Sublime: Towards a Post-aesthetic". In: Bolt, Barbara, Colman, Felicity, Jones, Graham, and Woodward, Ashley, ed., *Sensorium: Aesthetics, Art, Life*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, p. 45.

31 Fuller, Andrew R. 1990: *Insight Into Value: An Exploration of the Premises of a Phenomenological Psychology*. New York: State University of New York Press, p. 51.

32 Coyne, Lewis. 2013: "Heidegger and the Problem of the Sublime". *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 10, no. 1: [www.debatesinaesthetics.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/PJA-VOL-10-No-1-3.pdf](http://www.debatesinaesthetics.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/PJA-VOL-10-No-1-3.pdf); retrieved 10 February 2022.

Malick's sublime is thus related to radical decentralisation,<sup>33</sup> into which the film pushes us already at the level of perception. The transformation taking place on our skin is slowly revealed through the cracks of sedimentary knowledge, since it emerges at the roots of the perception of the sensuousness of the film's visual poeticalness. The dramatic narrative gains the force of such an ex-centric rhythm through unconventional techniques of film photography and editing. If analytical editing very graphically establishes the story's space and time, the constructive technique of editing does not do that. Instead, it leaves the construction of the symbolic space to the viewer, who has to co-create it from the narrative hints according to the principle of the Kuleshov effect. Malick thus breaks the rules of traditional editing, which destabilises the film's serenity and opens the doors to poetic realism.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, watching the film, made difficult by the cognitive efforts to construct the cognitive maps of the space, prompts the construction of the terrain of existential space. It generates a structural lack of being in us and the absence of the awareness of where in space and time we even are. With its faulty information, it activates the field and the feeling of the atmosphere of existential space, which the viewer has to reconstruct from the mentioned hints about space and time. This lack is also the (reflected) lack of knowledge, which in the story appears as the existential search for one's own place in the world. It is the reason for the existential drama, which is a consequence of us being thrown into the world, into the fact of existence and its Dasein, of us not knowing who we are.

With Heidegger, we want to show that Malick's use of the sublimeness of nature is not only a filmic illustration of the concept, but functions as a fundamental disposedness, which masterfully reveals our ontological connection with the world, that is, our being-in-the-world. Even though the concepts of Kant's sublime and Heidegger's disposedness (*Befindlichkeit*) are not quite commensurate, since the first is necessarily based on the difference between subject and object, which Heidegger rejected, they become connected in the film. In the film narrative of *Days of Heaven*, the feeling of sublimeness as a form of attunement (*Stimmung*) testifies to the constitutive openness of or to the world, which perhaps nobody has been able to bring close to the viewers in as metaphysical and sensuous a way as precisely Terrence Malick. The aroused feeling of the dynamic and terrifying sublimeness of the cosmos, which cannot be characterised as exclusively religious or worldly, expresses the very fabric of life, which Heidegger understood as being-in-the-world. The film's world maintains the disposedness of surplus, mystery and openness, which both Linda and life itself remain faithful to. At the end, it is revealed that all that we can do is live in the arena of life, in the agent-arena relation, which is the relation of Dasein. And it is precisely the thrownness in the Heideggerian essential openness of being-in-the-world that we all share, which is why we are able not only to understand the film, but also feel it so strongly.

<sup>33</sup> Marterre 2013, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

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