

**Prof. Dr. Alfred Toth**

## **A semiotic Satan's tango**

1. Renowned Hungarian film director Béla Tarr completed his masterpiece “Sátántangó” in 1994, and since then this movie is considered a cult movie, comparable to Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s “Berlin Alexanderplatz” (1980). The following description of the movie’s content, I take from an interview with of the British newspaper “Guardian” with Tarr: “The plot deals with the collapse of a collective farm in Hungary near the end of Communism. Several people on the farm are eager to leave with the cash they will receive for closing down the community, but they hear that the smooth-talking and charismatic Irimiás, who had disappeared over two years ago and whom they thought to be dead, is returning. Much of the film’s plot concentrate on the impact and consequences of Irimiás’ return through multiple POV’s as the comuners must cope not only with Irimiás’ scheming, but that of each other” (Tarr 2001).

The structure of the film is based on that of the novel by László Krasznohorkai, which borrows, as its title says, from tango. That is, the film is broken into twelve parts, and does not necessarily move chronologically (cf. Toth 2008b), as it follows the tango scheme of going 6 moves forward, then 6 back (hence  $6 + 6 = 12$  parts in total). The twelve parts are titled as follows (in original Hungarian and translation). Highlighted are the 1<sup>st</sup>, the 6<sup>th</sup>, and the 12<sup>th</sup> title, as they refer to the semiotic tango structure to be discussed above:

1. A hír, hogy jönnek [**The News that They are Coming**]
  2. Feltámadunk [We are Resurrected]
  3. Valamit tudni [Knowing Something]
  4. A pók dolga I. [The Work of the Spider I]
  5. Felfeslők [The Net Tears]
  6. A pók dolga II (Ördögsecs, **sátántangó**) [The Work of the Spider II]
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7. Irimiás beszédet mond [Irimiás Speaks]
  8. A távlat, ha szemből [The Perspective, when from the Front]
  9. Mennybe menni? Lázálmodni? [Ascension? Feverdream?]
  10. A távlat, ha hátulról [The Perspective, when from Behind]
  11. Csak a gond, a munka [Nothing but Worries, Nothing but Work]
  12. A kör bezárul [**The Circle Closes**]

2. A dyadic semiotics, like that of de Saussure, based on a sign model that consists of “signifiant” and “signifié”, is insofar compatible with classical two-valued logic, as the pre-semiotic dichotomy of expression and content repeats the logical dichotomy of form and substance and the semiotic dichotomy of sign and object (cf. Toth 1991). However, the dichotomy of sign and object is just a dyadic part-relation of the complete triadic sign relation of the Peircean sign model. Thus, from the standpoint of non-classical polycontextural logic, the third semiotic value adds subjectivity to the basic dyadic distinction between sign and object in the notion of the Peircean “interpretant” (cf. also Ditterich 1990, pp. 28 ss.).

A pre-semiotic sign class based on only 2 values has only 4 permutations. However, a complete semiotic sign class based on 3 values has 6 permutations. The third logic value, which is represented in semiotics by the interpretant relation, must be, from the viewpoint of classical two-value logic, qua subjectivity, the main representative of evil: the Satan, since it is clear that logical objectivity corresponds with ethical goodness. Since the tango is a pair dance, it is Satan who is the third party in the dance. Therefore, the 6 tango steps forward correspond to the 6 permutations of a semiotic sign class of the general form (3.a 2.b 1.c):

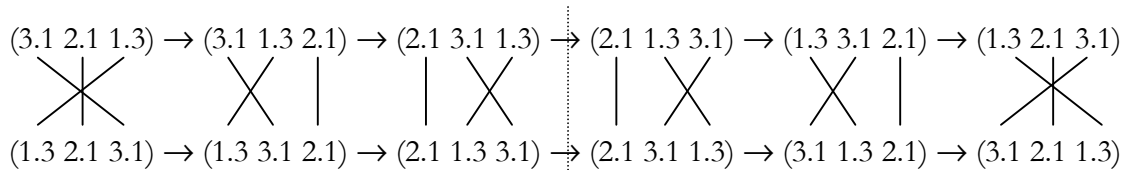
(3.a 2.b 1.c), (3.a 1.c 2.b), (1.c 3.a 2.b), (2.b 3.a 1.c), (2.b 1.c 3.a), (1.c 3.a 2.b), (1.c 2.b 3.a),

and the 6 tango steps backward correspond to the 6 permutations of a reality thematic of the general form (c.1 b.2 a.3):

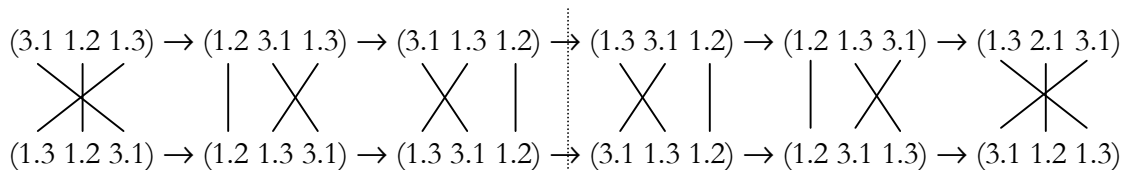
(c.1 b.2 a.3), (b.2 c.1 a.3), (b.2 a.3 c.1), (c.1 a.3 b.2), (a.3 c.1 b.2), (b.2 a.3 c.1), (a.3 b.2 c.1).

3. However, we can distinguish between different forms of non-permuted and permuted semiotic tangos:

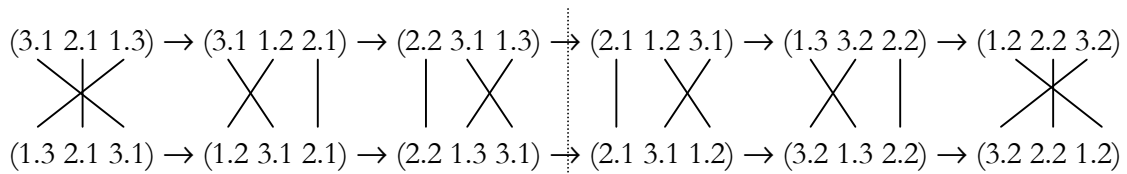
### 3.1. Semiotic tango with sign classes without substitutions



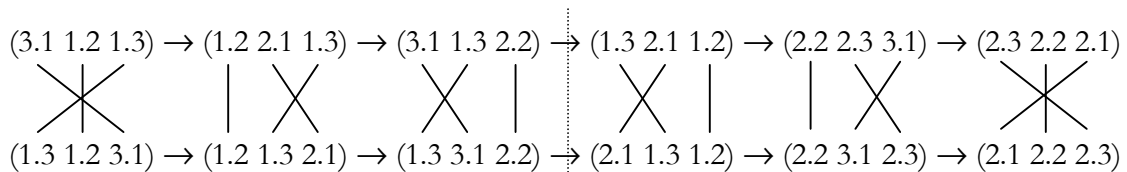
### 3.2. Semiotic tango with reality thematics without substitutions



### 3.3. Semiotic tango with sign classes with substitutions

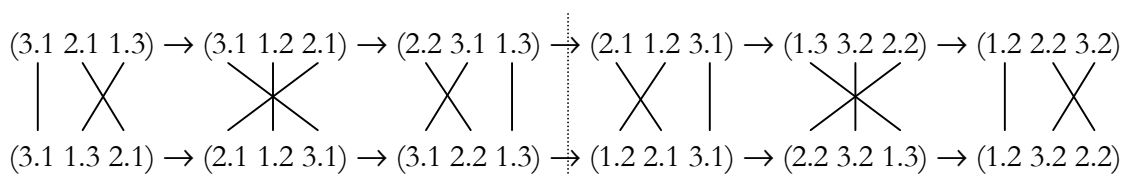


### 3.4. Semiotic tango with reality thematics with substitutions

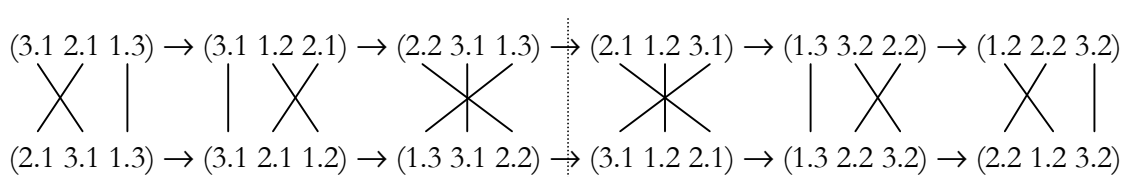


### 3.5. Semiotic tango with sign classes, with substitutions and permuted steps (cf. Toth 2008a):

#### 3.5.1. Third sub-sign is moved to first place



#### 3.5.2. 2 Second and third sub-signs are moved to first and second place



As one recognizes, the semiotic tango pattern is, up to permutation, always the same for each of the 6 types, and in each type, the semiotic symmetry axis is located between the third and the fourth, and the eighth and ninth steps, respectively.

## Bibliography

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