BÉLA BALÁZS: EARLY FILM THEORY

Visible Man and *The Spirit of Film*

Béla Balázs

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Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory. *Visible Man* **and** *The Spirit of Film*
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Erica Carter
September 2009

NOTES ON TRANSLATION, GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

This translation is based on the Suhrkamp Verlag editions of Balázs's original German texts, published as *Der sichtbare Mensch* (*Visible Man*) in 2001 (orig. 1924), and *Der Geist des Films* (*The Spirit of Film*) in, 2001 (orig. 1930), both Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Sections of both *Visible Man* and *The Spirit* were absorbed in Hungarian translation into Balázs's 1948 *Filmkultúra: A film müvészetfilozófiája* (Budapest: Szikra), then retranslated to become the 1952 English-language variant, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art* (London: Dennis Dobson) (henceforth *TotF*). The translator was Edith Bone (née Hajós), a doctor, journalist, freelance translator and first wife to Balázs, who moved to the U.K. in the early 1930s. Like Balázs, Bone was active throughout her life in Communist politics, in her case in Hungary, the Soviet Union, Britain and Spain. She was imprisoned in Hungary in 1949, having being arrested on suspicion of spying for Britain (see her 1957 record of her experience in protracted solitary confinement, *Seven Years' Solitary.* New York: Harcourt, Brace). She remained an influential figure in Balázs's development throughout his career; her translation of *TotF* testifies to her intimate knowledge of his thinking, and we have drawn on it as an important source for this volume, cross-referencing where appropriate to highlight divergences or similarities between the earlier German versions and Bone's 1952 translation of *Filmkultúra*.

Returning to the German original has allowed us, however, to break through the multiple layers of translation, reworking and editing that separate *Visible Man* and *The Spirit of Film* from Balázs's later work, and to present a text whose terminological and stylistic difference from *TotF* allows a reappraisal of Balázs's early film theory within the historical context of cinema in the era of the silents and early sound. As a further step towards that recontextualizing of Balázs, we have included in this volume early reviews by Siegfried Kracauer and Rudolf Arnheim, as well as bibliographical references to major secondary works that are not quoted in the Introduction, but that are named here nonetheless to provide the reader with an overview of Balázs reception among recent critics. Film

titles are footnoted the first time they appear in the text, the only exceptions being titles for which no source could be found.

The glossary below takes the reader through some of the most significant terminological issues, and gives some background to our choice of key terms. Inevitably, there will be debate over the translation choices we have made. The most contentious may be our decision to use the generic *man* for the less gender-specific *Mensch* in *Visible Man.* We differ in so doing from Lawrence Garner, who chose the title 'The Visible Human' for his 2004 extract from *Der sichtbare Mensch* (see bibliography). Our decision derives in part from our overall effort to deliver a version that is coloured by the historical idiom of Balázs's time. It relates also to an issue discussed at greater length in the editorial introduction, which is the ambivalence of Balázs's own understanding of the human, his vacillation between a celebration of human heterogeneity, and his leaning at other points towards a definition of the 'standard' human as white, European and male. It was in part in order to signal this tension around Balázs's understanding of *Mensch* (a noun that is also gendered as masculine in German, even though the word itself is commonly understood to be gender-neutral) that we finally opted for the generic *man*.

Finally, readers will note the idiosyncracy of some of Balázs's terminology: his use of what we have termed 'linkage' (*Bilderführung*), for example, for what he will later term 'montage'; or 'foreground shot' (*Premierplan*) as a synonym for 'close-up'. We have retained these early terms to highlight developments in Balázs's thinking, and indeed in the wider history of film analysis and film theory. The international critical language of film was still crystallizing around an agreed terminology in the six years between *Visible Man* and *The Spirit of Film*, and the labile nature of the field is illustrated by the occasional instability of Balázs's own terms in the two texts.

Glossary of Key Terms

In the process of translation, we often conferred over key terms that constitute the conceptual scaffolding of Balázs's early works. This glossary derives from those conversations, and seeks to locate those terms within the broader philosophical and film-analytical contexts with which they are connected. Where terms are used by Balázs in their contemporary (twenty-first century) sense, as in for instance his use of *Tiefenschärfe* for *deep focus*, they have been omitted from the glossary.

Page numbers below refer to the first occurrence of each term in this present volume. Where terms are pervasive in the translation, no page number is given.

Bewegungsgestalt (p. xxxvi): mobile form (see *Gestalt* below).

Bilderführung (p. 39): visual linkage, linkage. This is Balázs's early term for montage, and it literally means 'leading the image along'. Other translators have used *image direction* for *Bilderführung*, but we have usually adopted *linkage* to signal Balázs's proximity to Pudovkin, who used the term as a way of distancing his theory of continuous montage from Eisenstein's montage of attractions. The sole exception is the use of *Bilderführung* to refer to the activity of the director, rather than the syntactics of the montage. In this case, we have retained 'direction', as in 'Griffith's masterly direction', p. 19.

Effektlicht (p. 39): effects lighting. The German term was used in contemporary writing on cinematography to refer to the nonrealist or expressionist lighting mode that was considered to differentiate German film style from Hollywood.

Einstellung: shot, camera set-up. The German term refers both to a camera position (hence 'camera set-up') and to the viewing position that the shot establishes (*Einstellung* in common parlance means simply 'attitude' or 'view'). It also highlights the activity of setting up the shot, the verb *einstellen* meaning to adjust or frame. Though it is impossible to capture these multiple meanings from a single English term, we have often opted for Edith Bone's *set-up* as a term that captures Balázs's emphasis on the activity of the camera operator in setting up the shot. The use of *set-up* also clarifies Balázs's understanding of the microphone in the sound film as enabling changing spectatorial perspectives on the action: hence his use of the term *Toneinstellung* (sound set-up, p. 188).

Fabel (p. 19): story. Though Balázs here uses a term from Russian formalism, he does not make the formalist distinction between *fabula*, the term used by the formalists for the raw material of narrative events, and *sjuzet*, the finished arrangement of the plot. Indeed he elsewhere rejects the distinction between what he calls '*Sujet und Fabel*' (plot and story), since for him the essential substance of film is not its 'banal', 'abstract' or 'superficial' empirical form, but the 'inner life' that he believes is revealed in the physiognomy of film.[1]

Gestalt: form, shape. *Gestalt* for Balázs is a physiognomic quality apprehended through sensual engagement with film and through intuition. Since it is often used interchangeably with the German *Form* (see e.g. p. 7 on 'new fundamental forms of humanity', originally '*Urformen der Menschheit*'), we have not distinguished the two terms in translation.

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1. B.Balázs. n.d. 'Sujet und Fabel', MTA MS 5014/95.

Großaufnahme: close-up.

Kulturfilm (p. 127): documentary. German cinema was known in the interwar period for its pioneering developments in the artistic documentary, and the term *Kulturfilm* (literally, 'culture film') is indicative of the highbrow cachet attaching to the genre. Documentary is distinguished in this translation from the actuality film (*Tatsachenfilm*, p. 154), the reality film (*Wirklichkeitsfilm*, p. 153), and the instructional film (*Lehrfilm*, p. 55). The latter sub-genre was often associated with the pedagogic film work of the Urania Institutes in Berlin and Vienna; see p. 55, Fn. 5.

leiblich (p. 11): embodied. *Leiblich* can also be translated as *physical* or *bodily*; we chose *embodied* to signal Balázs's debt to early twentieth-century phenomenology, a field in which the concept of 'embodiment' is central.

Miene: facial expression (as in English *mien*). See also *Mienenspiel*.

Mienenlehre (p. 13; also *TotF*, p. 44): 'gesturology'. Since Balázs uses the term strictly in relation to facial expression, his gesturology should not be confused with Brechtian 'gestus', which refers to the larger spectrum of physical behaviour adopted by the actor to convey attitude in social and performance contexts.

Mienenspiel: play of facial expressions.

Mime: performance. In choosing this term, Balázs follows a larger trend in German acting theory of the 1920s and 1930s, which often used the term *Mime* – as opposed to *Schauspielkunst* (acting) – to refer to the ancient art of the mime. Unlike in Roman tragedy, where the actors wore masks and doubled in roles, the mimes of Greek and Roman popular theatre renounced the mask, and emphasized in their performance the expressive powers of the body and facial expression.

Nahaufnahme/Naheinstellung: close shot.

Passagen (p. 68): unlike *walking*, the translation adopted in *Theory of the Film* (p. 134), Balázs's original term *Passagen* refers both to walking as one among the repertoire of cinematic gestures available to the actor in silent film, and to the scene of 'passage' as a specific syntactic element within the film montage. We have retained the term *passage* or *passageway* in order to sustain the double meaning of Balázs's original.

Physiognomie: physiognomy. Balázs does not limit the term to facial features, as in the common-sense English usage, but uses it to refer to

what he also calls the 'face of things', the entirety of the visual world that is contained within the film image. See Introduction.

Premierplan(aufnahme) (p. 39): foreground (shot). An early term for the close-up.

Publikum (p. 6): audience. Although *TotF* uses *public* (p. 17 & *passim*), we have adopted the more restricted term *audience* to denote the collectivity of film spectators, rather than the broader public that would be referenced by the German *Öffentlichkeit.*

Richtung (p. 71): direction. This should not be confused with the activity of the film director, as in references to Griffith's 'direction' (orig.: *Bilderführung*), p. 19. In a passage on the 'direction of images' (*die Richtung der Bilder*, pp. 71ff), Balázs makes clear that his phenomenology of film rests on a view of the image itself as possessing mobility. This dynamic conception of the image derives in part from Bergson: see Introduction.

Sekundärplan(aufnahme) (p. 39): middleground (shot). An early term for the medium shot.

Totale/Totalaufnahme: far shot, long shot.

Abbreviations

GLA: Georg Lukács Archive, Budapest.

MTA: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia (Hungarian Academy of Sciences), Budapest.

PIM: Petőfi Irodalmi Museum, Budapest.

TotF: *Theory of the Film*

INTRODUCTION

Erica Carter

When, in spring 1945, Béla Balázs returned to Budapest after over twenty-five years of enforced estrangement from his native Hungary, he started a campaign for recognition that would absorb much of his creative energy during the remaining four years of his life. Exiled in the Soviet Union since 1931, Balázs had seen his pre-war dream of a progressive cultural internationalism wither in the face of European fascism, a genocidal war, and Soviet state repression. Efforts to publish his major work of film theory had borne fruit at last in the publication of *Iskusstvo Kino* (*The Art of Film*), a compendium and extension of his earlier film-theoretical writings first touted for publication in 1936, and appearing finally in Russian in 1945.[1] The book's poor reception in the Soviet Union set Balázs on a course towards what would become his *magnum opus*, a revised theoretical work published in Hungarian in 1948 as *Filmkultúra: A film müvészetfilozófiája* (*Film Culture: The Aesthetic Philosophy of Film*). Alongside lecture tours, film and theatre projects, and lobbying efforts for official recognition in Hungary, Balázs now mobilized a network of transnational contacts to promote this new volume as the vehicle for the recuperation of the leftist international humanism that had animated his pre-war activities as film theorist, novelist and fairy-tale author, playwright, opera librettist, poet, film director, screenwriter, cultural activist and critic. Hence the rash of post-war correspondence in the Balázs archive in Budapest: letters to and from distant friends and colleagues saluting the publication of *Filmkultúra*, or offering it for translation into French (1948), German (1949), Italian (1952) and English (1952).[2]

One letter of recommendation from the Swiss author Edwin Arnet summarizes the contribution to a post-war European film-cultural renaissance that Balázs's contemporaries saw as embodied in his film writings. 'Herr Balázs's two books, *Visible Man* and *The Spirit of Film*, belong among the classics of film literature. The high quality of observation in his intellectual works on film has in my view yet to be surpassed by other works of film philosophy.' For Arnet, Balázs's early works are further distinguished by a 'talent for formulation and

definition' that makes reading them a 'singular pleasure'. 'Herr Balázs', he continues, writes not only for film critics and theorists, but for a broad readership that transcends the 'inner circle of cinephiles' conventionally addressed by philosophical works on film.[3]

Anglophone readers have for many decades been denied the 'singular pleasure' to which Arnet refers. The English-language version of *Filmkultúra, Theory of the Film* (1952), does reproduce, sometimes *verbatim*, lengthy passages from the two works that made Balázs a central figure in the developing film aesthetics of the German-speaking world: *Der sichtbare Mensch* (*Visible Man*, 1924) and *Der Geist des Films* (*The Spirit of Film*, 1930). But those passages give only partial insight into the mode of engaged theoretical writing that Balázs's early work attempts: a mode characterized, as Arnet rightly notes, by a vivid address to that larger public whom Balázs wishes to engage in dialogue on the aesthetic and cultural potential of the infant medium of film. The translation lag in Balázs's reception has led in turn to his positioning as a formalist concerned primarily with the abstract grammar of the film medium, or a cultural essentialist whose preoccupations with the film image's 'soul' and 'beauty' seem to sit uneasily with Anglophone film theory's later (post)structuralist or cultural materialist turns.[4]

That the time may be ripe for a reengagement with Balázs is suggested by revived scholarly interest since the turn of the millennium in his early works. The German publishing house *suhrkamp* published new editions in 2001 of both *Visible Man* and *The Spirit of Film*.[5] That same year, under the editorship of the Balázs biographer Hanno Loewy, the independent Berlin publishers Das Arsenal launched a series of new editions of Balázs's fairy stories, novels and journalistic *feuilletons*.[6] Early twenty-first century translations have included new Italian and Hungarian editions of *Visible Man*; and Anglophone critical interest, which had simmered since the late 1980s among scholars of Weimar film, gained further impetus with the publication in 2006/7 of English-language extracts from Balázs's film theory and cultural essays in two major journals, *October* and *Screen*.[7]

A number of factors underpin this renewed interest in Balázs. Balázs's early works appeared in a period of accelerated technological development that witnessed the emergence of the 'unchained camera', experiments with stereoscopic film, colour and widescreen, and, most lamentably from the perspective of early theories that located the specificity of film art in its status as image, the coming of sound.[8] For Balázs, moreover, theory-writing was no academic pursuit, but a creative practice fashioned first in the Vienna cafés where he penned his early film reviews for the daily *Der Tag*, then polished in a process of productive attrition between his speculative theorizing, and practical engagement as screenwriter, director, or translator and promoter of key works of Soviet film. Both *Visible Man* and *The Spirit of Film* are peppered with allusions to his own screenplays, including *Die Abenteuer eines Zehnmarkscheines* (*Adventures of a Ten-Mark Note*, 1926),

Grand Hotel (1927) and *Narkose* (*Narcosis*, 1929). Redolent also with the piquancy of his experiences of a film practice mobilized for revolutionary ends, including in his rare screen appearance in Sergei Eisenstein's lost political farce *The Storming of La Sarraz*, 1929, Balázs's early film theory thus invites a reading as the product of a practice of cultural production that drew on its author's first-hand experience of film technology and creative practice, and embodied his ambition that his writings might help shape the medium's future development.

Twenty-first century film theory, it has been suggested, stands at a similar crossroads to that confronting Balázs in the heady period of the first emergence of the moving image. The digital revolution, as Francesco Casetti has observed, has produced an instability both in film theory's object of study, and in the practice and institution of film theory itself. As the film medium disperses across multiple platforms – the digital cinema, home computers, the internet, digital television, cable TV, mobile phones – so too film theory becomes a 'dispersed … object', split between abstruse reinventions of Grand Theory, and empirical research that 'prioritizes "case studies" over general analysis', building 'local and localized models' that condemn film scholars to 'investigating fragments without being aware of their specific role in the larger framework of which they are part'.[9]

One response to the uncertainty Casetti describes has been an exploration of the lessons taught by history on the relation of film theory to the moving image screen. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson's *Inventing Film Studies* is one example of a contemporary volume whose investigation of 'tendencies (that) have constituted … film as an object of study' is conducted with the polemical intent of 'generating discussion about … why the knowledge we generate matters, and what the politics of that knowledge is within and outside the university'.[10] A similar polemic infuses Annette Kuhn's demand, in an essay on the fifty-year history of the journal *Screen*, for a history that contemplates not the edifice of 'Theory', but the historical practice of 'theoriz*ing* [as] an activity that is open and continuing', and that enables film analysts therefore to understand, explain, or indeed to help transform objects of study that are 'not only diverse but also in a process of changing and becoming'.[11]

Just such a history is offered in this volume. Anglophone scholarship has begun to explore how an engagement with Balázs's early work might meet a larger film-historical interest in recuperating for contemporary film studies a history of theoretical practice in its relation to early film. In the absence of full English versions of Balázs's early writings, however, this work of recuperation remains incomplete. Offered below, therefore, are both the first full English translation of *Visible Man* and *The Spirit of Film*, and an introductory essay that contextualizes those works within a historical geography of early twentieth-century critical intellectual life. The focus here is on three features of Balázs's early film theory: his work

on the filmic body, the close-up and montage. These are explored from three corresponding cultural-political perspectives: Romantic modernism, Marxist cultural theory, and cosmopolitan universalism. Those tendencies both animated Balázs's writing on film, and provide a context for the exploration of the historical conditions of emergence of a film theory whose author engaged in active dialogue with a developing film medium, situating his writing therefore not as hypostasized theoretical edifice, but as an active force of cultural production in the history of silent and early sound film.

Balázs as Romantic Modernist

Béla Balázs was born Herbert Bauer to a bilingual German-Hungarian Jewish family in Szeged, Hungary, in 1884. His literary career began in 1900 when he submitted his first poem to the local paper, *Szegedi Napló,* and assumed his Hungarian pen name as the signal of a commitment to a revived vernacular Hungarian tradition. Like many in the radical circles towards which he was to gravitate after his later move to Budapest, Balázs opposed from early on those forms of Magyar cultural nationalism which, while they had fuelled nineteenth-century Hungarian liberal opposition to Habsburg rule, also promoted a Biedermeier vision of Hungarian community as split between a folkloristic rural peasantry and a bourgeois metropolitan elite. When he won a scholarship in 1902 to the prestigious Eötvös College in Budapest, Balázs was befriended by the composers Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, two figures who would help him refine his alternative utopia of a Hungarian renaissance rooted in vernacular popular-cultural forms. Balázs accompanied Kodály and, on one occasion, Bartók, on field trips across the multiethnic territories of early twentieth-century Hungary to collect phonographic recordings and musical transcriptions of Magyar, Romanian, Slovak, Ruthenian, Serbian, Romany and Arab folk songs. The collection was designed to establish as Hungary's core musical heritage not the 'gypsy' music of cultural nationalist folklore, but the musical traditions of the rural peasantry. While the two composers drew on that heritage to develop a distinctively modernist percussive and pentatonic compositional style, Balázs turned to poetry, drama and prose fiction as vehicles for his version of a new Hungarian folk vernacular.

Collaboration among the trio bore fruit in musical settings of poems by Balázs; in his ballet, *A fából faragott királyfi* (*The Wooden Prince*, 1917), written specifically for Bartók; and most famously in his secular mystery play *A kékszakállú herceg vára* (*Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, 1912), which Balázs dedicated to Bartók and Kodály, and saw adapted by Bartók for his opera of the same name.[12]

Balázs's early cultural radicalism found expression, then, in a Romantic commitment to a popular vernacular that drew simultaneously on folk tradition, and on a mystical modernism rooted in symbolism and

the fin-de-siècle avant-garde. Another key Balázs associate was the modernist poet Endre Ady, whose work was indebted among other influences to Baudelaire and Verlaine. Bartók drew inspiration from the musical impressionism of Debussy; and Balázs himself based his *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* on an 1899 version of the Bluebeard legend by the Belgian symbolist Maeterlinck.[13] What drew this group together in the pre-World War I years was a shared belief in the power of artistic utopias, and a shared hostility to the twin reactionary forces of a decadent aristocracy and gentry on the one hand, and on the other, of folkloristic conservative nationalism. The onset of war, however, would in time lend a revolutionary sociopolitical dimension to what had until this point been Balázs's predominantly aesthetic critique of Hungarian national cultural norms. In 1915, Balázs joined forces with his other key Budapest intellectual associate, György (Georg) Lukács, to found the Sunday Circle, a loose association of writers, philosophers, scientists and other intellectuals who met on Sunday afternoons in Balázs's home. Alongside Bartók and Kodály, who visited occasionally but were by this point no longer Balázs's principal associates, the Circle numbered among its members the sociologist Károly (Karl) Mannheim, the poet and illustrator Anna Lesznai, the Marxist art historian Frigyes (Friedrich) Antal, the writer and philosopher Emma Ritoók, and the two women who, along with Balázs and Lukács, formed the group's nucleus: Balázs's wife Edith Hajós, and the woman whom Edith tolerated as Balázs's lover (and who would become his second wife in 1919), Anna Hamvassy.

Hanno Loewy sees the Sunday Circle's founding as evidence of Balázs's 'emphatic turn towards [a] concrete Utopia': a utopia that foresaw radical cultural transformation, but whose grounding in a metaphysical idealism rendered its protagonists as yet unfit for political action in the turbulent wartime world.[14] When it launched a Free School of the Human Sciences as a public forum for ethical and philosophical debate in 1917, the group, however, began a shift to public engagement that would see many of its members embracing revolutionary struggle in the short-lived Hungarian Commune of 1919. Balázs, indeed, having joined the Hungarian Socialist Party in 1918 and gravitated thence towards revolutionary communism, would join Lukács as a leading functionary in Béla Kun's Soviet Republic, taking a role as head of the Governing Council's literary department, and working to disseminate culture to the masses until the Republic's collapse sent him into exile in Vienna in November 1919, alongside Anna Hamvassy and other Circle members including Lukács, Anna Lesznai and the psychoanalyst René Spitz.

Although Balázs would not turn to film criticism until his appointment as film reviewer for the Vienna daily *Der Tag* in 1922, the earlier story of his formation as public intellectual in the declining decades of Habsburg rule illuminates the material context out of which would emerge his later theory of film. In his post-World War II correspondence, Balázs would

refer repeatedly to memories of a Central European café society whose key axes were the metropolitan centres of Budapest, Vienna, Prague, Paris and Berlin. These multiethnic, multilingual and cosmopolitan cities had nurtured Balázs's generation of what Mannheim would later call 'free-floating intellectuals': cultural commentators and practitioners – Balázs, Bartók, Kodály, Lukács – situated at the nodal points of broader transformations in class, social and ethnic structures and political systems including, in Hungary as across Central Europe, the rise of a new bourgeoisie, partial Jewish assimilation into the bourgeois class, and a burgeoning of nationalist and anti-Imperial sentiment. Born out of this 'mass of mutually conflicting tendencies', the intelligentsia of the modern Central European metropolis met in informal public venues (the café, the theatre, the cinema, private homes) to form a heterogeneous collective detached from traditional class, political and ethnic affiliations, but finding common ground in their pursuit of modernist cultural regeneration.[15]

The director Michael Kertész (Curtiz) would later recall how Budapest's Café Venedig (Café Venice) entered cinematic legend in 1911 as the birthplace of Hungarian cinema. On regular evenings, the proprietor, a certain 'Herr Ungerleider … drew down the blinds and projected flickering images onto a white screen'.[16] When Ungerleider later extended to Kertész 'a kind invitation to play a role in the first ever cinematic work on Hungarian soil', his action confirmed the crucial function of the café and other informal public venues as 'spaces of modernity': fluid and culturally heterogenous sociospatial milieux that marked out new experiential and philosophical horizons for Balázs and Kertész's generation of cultural intellectuals.[17] Just as Kertész's film career grew out of chance meetings in a Budapest café, so too Balázs's film theory was born in the marginal cultural spaces of the central European metropolis. In his Sunday Circle salon, as in the cafés of pre-war Budapest and interwar Vienna, intellectual production was organized around Romantic ideals of passionate friendship – 'friendship of the old style', as Karl Mannheim put it in a later letter to Balázs – among an avant-gardist intelligentsia committed to the utopia of a new cultural subject forged in the 'experiential space' (Mannheim) of a heterogeneous mass-cultural modernity.[18] From Balázs's correspondence from his early years in exile, there thus emerges a picture of a writer engaged in cultural practice across a range of genres and cultural forms, and in animated dialogue with contemporaries including the writer Arthur Schnitzler, the feuilletonist Alfred Polgar, and the filmmaker Berthold Viertel (with whom he would collaborate as scriptwriter on *Adventures of a Ten-Mark Note*), as well as now exiled compatriots from his pre-war years in Budapest. As a journalist and critic, Balázs eked out a living after 1919 with contributions to titles including the Viennese *Der Tag* and *Wiener Tageblatt*, the Swiss liberal-bourgeois *Basler National-Zeitung*; and the German-language Budapest daily *Pester Lloyd*. His work as lyrical poet, dramatist, novelist and fabulist

continued with publications including the Hungarian poetry volume *Férfiének* (*Song of a Man*, 1923); a collection of Chinese tales, *Der Mantel der Träume* (*The Mantle of Dreams*, 1922); agitprop dramas for the Hungarian and Austrian Communist Parties; and early forays into screenwriting including for Hans Otto Loewenstein's *Kaiser Karl* (*Emperor Charles*, 1921), *Der Unbekannte aus Russland* (*The Unknown Russian*, 1922), and the co-scripted *Moderne Ehen* (*Modern Marriages*, 1924).[19]

Balázs in Jewish Cultural History

Looking back on those heady years of feverish productivity and cultural-revolutionary zeal , Balázs would later recall in a letter to Alfred Polgar their 'shared evenings at the theatre in this city of a humanity that is now long gone'.[20] His reference to a now fragmented 'humanity' points up a second feature of sociospatial context that was significant for the development of Balázs's film theory from the early 1920s on. Balázs's letter to Polgar was penned from his third exile destination, Moscow, the city in which he hoped (erroneously, as he was soon to discover) to find realized his long-nurtured utopia of a revolutionary mass culture. Leaving Berlin, where he had moved in 1926, to emigrate to Moscow in 1931, Balázs now contemplated with horror the Nazis' 'global witch-hunt for Jewish extermination'.[21] Their annexation of Austria in 1938 not only destroyed the informal infrastructure of the Viennese avant-garde; more crucially, it fractured and dispersed the Jewish intellectual networks that had sustained Central European modernism, and provided both the local social milieu for Balázs's work in Budapest and Vienna, and the setting for his vigorous engagement with transnational intellectual currents that traversed Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Rome, Zurich and beyond.

In his illuminating study of Jewish libertarian thought in Central Europe, *Redemption and Utopia*, Michael Löwy makes passing reference to Balázs as one figure in the larger story of a blossoming of the Central European Jewish intelligentsia from the mid-nineteenth century to 1933. Charting the history of a 'generation of dreamers and Utopians' – largely German-speaking, but scattered across the disparate territories of pre- and post-unification Germany, Austro-Hungary and Czechoslovakia – Löwy writes of a 'subterranean network of correspondences linking … the most creative intellects' (his examples include Franz Kafka, Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem, Georg Lukács and Erich Fromm), and of a 'revolutionary social imaginary' that animated this 'new social category' in its otherwise disparate strands.[22]

It was in particular Balázs's friendship with Lukács that made him a ubiquitous presence in the Jewish circles of Löwy's account. The friendship was precipitated by their joint attendance in 1906/7 at the private Berlin seminar of the cultural philosopher Georg Simmel, the luminary around whom crystallized one of the numerous informal circles

that Löwy identifies as pivotal for early twentieth-century Central European Jewish intellectual life. Other groupings included the Max Weber circle in Heidelberg, also frequented by Lukács (who studied under Weber) alongside the philosopher Ernst Bloch and the Expressionist dramatist Ernst Toller; and the Frankfurt circle around Rabbi Nobel, whose informal members included Siegfried Kracauer, Leo Löwenthal and Erich Fromm.[23] Balázs and Lukács would move together in these circles, sharing pivotal life experiences, exchanging lovers, and debating matters of philosophy, culture and politics, until political differences fractured the friendship after their joint participation in the Budapest Commune in 1919.

For Löwy, what binds together this dispersed and socially marginal intelligentsia is its commitment to a historically particular blend of Jewish messianism and libertarian social utopia. What united Balázs and Lukács in their Budapest years was thus a common revolutionary consciousness whose cultural roots lay both in Romanticism – hence Balázs's commitment, in his folk version of Hungarian modernism, to a revolutionary culture that also harked back to a utopian pre-capitalist past – and in a mystical modernism that would only belatedly transform into Marxist calls for political action.[24] When Balázs published his first volume of poetry in 1908, Lukács was his most vociferous supporter, writing that '[i]n Béla Balázs … the most fundamental and intellectual problems of today's generation are transformed into art, grow into music'.[25] The Romanticism of both writers' commitment in this period to art as the vehicle for a utopian transcendence of sociopolitical strife was echoed in their emulation of the wandering life of the Romantic traveller, and in a friendship whose passionate nature harked back to the Romantic cult of the libidinous homosocial bond. Hence their avid and often ecstatic correspondence during the pre-World War I years when the two roamed widely across the metropolitan centres that were the core destinations of Löwy's libertarian intelligentsia: Berlin, Frankfurt, Paris, Florence, Budapest. By 1914, however, divergences were apparent. Lukács was moving towards a growing asceticism, expressed philosophically in his *Die Theorie des Romans* (*The Theory of the Novel*, 1916) in a critique of the 'demonic' quality of the classical novel hero who 'chooses the direct, straight path towards the realization of the idea'. Lukács's growing distaste for a cultural utopianism that privileged aesthetic over political ideals was evident also in his often tortured denial of fleshly pleasures, most poignantly expressed in his renunciation of his lover Irma Seidler (who later committed suicide after a brief liaison with Balázs).[26]

When Lukács was appointed Acting Director of the People's Commissariat for Education in spring 1919, his efforts to instigate revolutionary transformation by means of cultural reform did evidence a residual enthusiasm for the socially transformative power of art. With Balázs in tow as Director of the Literature and Arts section of the

Commissariat, Lukács nationalized and collectivized all forms of cultural production, took measures to open up arts and educational institutions to the working masses, and declared communism a route to the transcendence of capitalist alienation in a 'society of love'.[27] But the doctrinaire Marxist Lukács of later years would dismiss his activities during the Commune as a naïve exercise grounded in a misplaced belief in the revolutionary power of culture. It would be 'laughable', wrote Lukács in his 1970–71 autobiographical manuscript, *Gelebtes Denken* (*Lived Thinking*), to defend 'our attempt … to eradicate the commodity character of art works … as a Communist measure'.[28]

On this issue, Lukács would irrevocably part company with Balázs. Though the two fled together to Vienna in 1919, they pursued radically different paths. Lukács committed himself increasingly to party politics, working underground and illegally to unite exile Communist factions. Balázs, by contrast, continued to espouse a visionary and eschatological Marxism that focused 'in the first instance on transforming his own artistic practice, and on changing the relationship between the profane world and its symbolic, "sacral" forms.'[29] Initially, the focus of his writing was on drama, a new novel, fairy stories and ballet. But when Balázs was approached in 1922 to write film reviews for *Der Tag*, there began a lifelong engagement with a medium that he would come to perceive as realizing the utopian demand – now abandoned by Lukács, but still pursued by other notable figures among Löwy's Central European intelligentsia, most notably Ernst Bloch – for a material realization within contemporary popular culture of revolutionary ideals.

The Utopian Body on Film

Between 1922 and 1925, Balázs would publish over two hundred critical articles on film for *Der Tag*, alongside essays on fine art, theatre, radio drama and other popular cultural forms. In 1924, those articles became the basis for the first full-length work in the German language on the theory of film, *Visible Man*. The book is exemplary of the Romantic, libertarian modernism that underpinned Balázs's revolutionary vision in this period; and it is around his idea of the filmic body that this utopian modernism in the first instance circulates. He writes (pp. 10–11):

> [S]ince the advent of printing the word has become the principal bridge joining human beings to one another. The soul has migrated into the word and become crystallized there. The body, however, has been stripped of soul and emptied … The culture of words is dematerialized, abstract and over-intellectualized; it degrades the human body to the status of a biological organism. But the new language of gestures that is emerging at present arises from our painful yearning to be human beings with our entire bodies, from top to toe and not merely in our speech. We long to stop dragging our body around like an alien thing that is useful only as a practical set of tools.

> This new language arises from our yearning for the *embodied human* being who has fallen silent, who has been forgotten and has become invisible.

Balázs's understanding of film as a medium with the potential to overcome the curse of Babel by reintroducing into culture the universal 'language of gestures and facial expressions' (p. 10) has resonances with numerous other writers of the period – Vachel Lindsay, Ricciotto Canudo, Louis Delluc and others – who similarly celebrated film as a new universal language.[30] Particular to Balázs is his emphasis on print culture's link to capitalism, and his understanding of the potential of the filmic body to overcome capitalist alienation. Echoing both Marx and Simmel on the abstraction that grounds social interaction in capitalist economies in monetary value alone, Balázs writes of printing as a technology that 'accelerated the process of "reification", the term used by Karl Marx to designate the growth of abstraction. Just as in the minds of men the intrinsic *value* of objects has been displaced by their market *price*, so too people's minds have gradually become estranged from the immediate existence of objects in general. It was this intellectual climate that enabled the book culture of later centuries to become so dominant' (p. 84).[31] In film, by contrast, alienation is being overcome, paradoxically, through the use of a quintessentially modern cultural technology – the moving photographic image – to resuscitate what appears at first glance as a pre-modern mode of embodied experience and expression: the language of 'visible man'.

Balázs's Phenomenology of Perception

Balázs repeatedly underlines that the new filmic body is not equivalent to the prelapsarian body of 'primitive' or folk cultures. The historicity of the modern body is underscored first in his comments on the new filmic body language as the product of a 'cultural process' of perception and cognition in which the 'gait and everyday gestures' of figures encountered on the street, in the family home, or in the moving image are recognized, consciously remembered, then absorbed to become an 'instinctive sensibility … materialized as culture in the body'(p. 13).

Secondly and relatedly, the body in cinema becomes historical through its status as the subject of those new modes of perception that are engendered by film. Significant here is Balázs's repeated allusion to what he terms 'apperception', a perceptual mode that he identifies both with film spectatorship, and with sense perception *tout court*. 'Apperception' was the term used by Kant among others to distinguish a mental process that brings sensory awareness of empirical phenomena into association with inner mental processes. As William James put it, apperception describes 'the fate of every impression … to fall into a mind preoccupied with memories, ideas, and interests'; thus sense impressions acquire a

'mental escort … drawn … from the mind's ready-made stock'.[32] James's phenomenological epistemology here refuses empiricist dualism with its separation of the subject of perception – the 'mind', 'consciousness' – from its object, and considers perceptions of the object world instead to be always already infused with subjective 'memories, ideas and interests'. A similar mistrust of dualist epistemologies informs Balázs's conception of 'visible man'. Much of what has often been a philosophical distrust of Balázs has its origins in his insistence that the image on film cannot be read as a linguistic sign arising out of a fundamental splitting between language and the unconscious (as in Freud), between a Lacanian symbolic and imaginary, or indeed as the product of a performative practice in which meaning and identity are spoken in discourse. Provocatively, Balázs proclaims instead that in film, 'the body becomes unmediated spirit, spirit rendered visible' (p. 9).[33]

Balázs's recourse to Jamesian notions of 'apperception' reveals the grounding of this understanding of filmic 'spirit' in a longer phenomenological tradition represented, alongside Bergson and James, by such key figures in Balázs's own intellectual development as Simmel and Lukács (or indeed Siegfried Kracauer, though his relations with Balázs were more distant). A further key term from *Visible Man* points up, moreover, a second point of origin for Balázs's phenomenological understanding of the 'spirit' of film. In an early passage, Balázs sums up his understanding of how symbolic meaning is generated in the interaction between spectator and film. Refusing dualistic conceptions of spectatorship as shifting between what Christian Metz termed primary and secondary identification – from perception by and of the body, then, to symbolic identification – Balázs insists that perception itself is always already symbolic, attaching immediately to those 'mental escorts … memories, ideas, and interests', that, as we saw above, William James had insisted were mobilized in the very moment of sense perception.[34] The 'decisive fact as far as film is concerned' is thus for Balázs that '*all objects*, without exception, are necessarily symbolic. For, whether we are aware of it or not, all objects make a physiognomical impression upon us. All and always. Just as time and space are categories of our understanding, and can thus never be eliminated from the world of our experience, so too the physiognomical attaches to every phenomenon. It is a necessary category of our perception' (p. 56).

Physiognomy

In the pragmatic English definition, Balázs's pivotal term in this passage, 'physiognomy', refers to a much disparaged essentialist psychology that claims the capacity to read human character from facial features. In Balázs, the term is used quite differently, as the hinge that attaches his phenomenological epistemology to a hermeneutics of film. 'Physiognomy', that is, links theory in Balázs to a practice of film 'reading' understood not

as the extraction of meaning from the film text, but as a refined poetics of film reception. Two elements distinguish Balázs's conception of physiognomy from its common reduction in the Anglophone context to a characterology of face. The first is his application of the term to the entirety of the diegetic, and indeed the object world. In his anthropomorphic vision, even 'mute objects' (p. 23) have 'vitality and significance'. 'Every child knows,' he continues,

> that things have a face, and he walks with a beating heart through the half-darkened room where tables, cupboards and sofas pull strange faces at him and try to say something to him with their curious expressions. Even grown-ups may still glimpse strange shapes in the clouds …. But things may also have pleasant and lovable faces. How often are we as cheered by the sight of simple objects as we are by the sight of a friend. For the most part we do not know why this is. It springs not from any decorative beauty, but *rather from the living physiognomy that all things possess*. (p. 46, author's emphasis)

Both *Visible Man* and *The Spirit of Film* are peppered with further allusions to what Balázs terms the 'face of things'. His discussion in *Visible Man* of the use of long shot to reveal 'large entities' that have hitherto escaped individual human beings' more restricted visual field includes comments on films of the mass or crowd that reveal the 'shapes and physiognomies of human society': social groupings as they 'have never before been visible in the individualist arts', and whose 'class character' he will later foreground in his more explicitly political *Spirit of Film* (p. 148). Balázs writes too in *The Spirit of Film* of physiognomy on a more minute scale: what he terms 'microphysiognomy', the 'face' of inert objects and body parts revealed in close-up not as 'the face we wear, but our actual visual appearance' (p. 104).

The mass, the landscape, gestures and body parts, inert part-objects, have a status, then, in Balázs's physiognomy that equals the significance of the human face. There may be nothing immediately startling about his observation that film makes meaning through scene dissection, or through wide shots, pans and tracks that establish the space of the action, or delineate large entities within it. In Balázs's film theory, however – and this is physiognomy's second distinguishing element – what becomes apparent as film technology interacts with objects, bodies or spaces to produce filmic realities within the mise-en-scène, is what Balázs variously calls the 'mood', the 'atmosphere', the 'micropsychology' or the 'instinctive sensibility' that reveals itself in the interaction between spectator and film. Physiognomy is distinguished from realism or empiricism, then, through its status as a mode of aesthetic as opposed to crudely empirical knowing: a mode in which cognition occurs within the context of a perpetual flux of aesthetic value and affect.

The intellectual tradition that Balázs explicitly names in *Visible Man* as the point of origin for his physiognomic understanding of aesthetic

perception is eighteenth-century philosophical aesthetics. Balázs begins the section of his book on 'type and physiognomy' with a quote from Aristotle via Goethe:

> For no animal has ever existed that had the shape of one creature and the habit of another, but each creature has its own body and its own meaning. Thus every body necessarily determines its nature …. If this is true, as indeed it is eternally true, then such a thing as physiognomy must exist. (p. 27)

It is significant that Balázs quotes Goethe here, rather that the acknowledged 'father' of modern physiognomy, the Swiss writer and Protestant pastor Johann Caspar Lavater. Goethe had collaborated with Lavater on the first volume of his monumental *Physiognomische Fragmente* (*Physiognomical Fragments*, 1775–78), a four-volume exploration of that Romantic utopia of a 'penetrating inner vision' to which Balázs also would later aspire.[35] Initially enthusiastic about Lavater's 'conception of the human being as an entity in which body and soul, external and internal being, form an inherent unity', Goethe contributed articles to Lavater's first volume and allowed his portrait in profile to be used in a section of Volume III on poets of genius.[36] But Goethe distanced himself from Lavater as distinctions began to emerge around their conception of the relationship between body and character, personality or soul. Richard Gray suggests that both Goethe and Lavater strove to establish an 'identity between … inner substance and … phenomenal appearance'. But as Gray further elucidates, while Lavater understands the relation between inner and outer substance 'semiotically', such that bodily phenomena become the 'sign of a transcendental content', Goethe developed physiognomy as what Gray terms a 'syntactics' in which every bodily element 'stands in a dialectical and mutually determining relationship with a hypothetical conception of the whole'. For Goethe, the unity between body and mind, physical form and spiritual essence remained, then, in a permanent state of becoming; as Goethe himself wrote, 'Nature forms human beings, but they in turn transform themselves.'[37]

Goethe's scepticism over Lavater's ontology developed in part through studies in comparative anatomy in which he elaborated his syntactics of the body with reference to conceptions of '*Gestalt*'. Goethe arrived at an understanding of *Gestalt*, or 'form', not as the frozen sign of transcendental essence or spirit, but instead as a fleeting presence within the perpetual flux of natural or organic life. As he writes, 'if we examine all forms [*Gestalten*], especially organic ones, we find there is nothing that simply persists, nothing that is at rest or complete; rather, everything is in a state of constant flux …. If we want to introduce a type of morphology, then we must not speak of form [*Gestalt*], but rather when we use this word, we must associate it only with the idea, the concept, or with something that can be held fast, as an empirical phenomenon, only for a moment. What is formed is immediately transformed, and we must

remain just as mobile and plastic if we want to attain a living intuition [*lebende Anschauung*] of nature.'[38]

There are clear resonances here with Balázs's conception of film as a cultural technology that situates the human body in a transformed relationship with history's perpetual flux. Balázs recognized increasingly how fundamental was the transformation that the film medium effected in human perceptual faculties and sensory experience. He was fascinated, for instance, by war footage shot by dying soldiers, or films from polar expeditions in which Captain Scott or Shackleton 'as good as shoot the scene of [their] own death'. Evidenced here, claimed Balázs in *The Spirit of Film*, was

> a new form of human consciousness that has been vouchsafed to man by the camera. For as long as these men do not lose consciousness, they keep their eye to the lens and use the camera image to make of their situation a perceptible reality. Presence of mind becomes living image [and] the 'clear gaze' of inner scrutiny [which] used to involve an internal sequence of images [becomes] a roll of film loaded into a camera; it functions mechanically …. The cameraman does not shoot as long as he is conscious; he remains conscious as long as he continues to shoot. (p. 157)

This is one of many instances in which Balázs repudiates a dualistic understanding of technology versus nature, or mediated versus unmediated perception, and presents a vision instead of the film camera as a technological instrument whose movement between embodied and disembodied states (one minute it lies dormant, in the next it sees with human eyes) blurs the boundaries between body and technology, inner and outer worlds. A further example, Balázs's more general but related observation that in film, 'the camera takes my eye along with it …. I see the world from within the filmic space' (p. 99), has often been cited as a prefiguring of Christian Metz's notion of a primary form of cinematic identification in which the spectator adopts the position of the camera and identifies 'with himself as a pure act of perception'.[39] It is for Balázs, however, not only the camera, but also montage and sound that traverse the boundaries between interior and exterior. In montage, the editor's scissors may be deployed to cut together 'the series of images that arise in our minds [as an] internal montage of the conscious and the unconscious' (p. 125). In sound, similarly, the camera operator may make creative use of the microphone to 'lead our ears as [the camera] led our eyes in the silent film' (p. 185).

The Fairy-tale Close-up

In a recent study of the 'relationship of Marxist thought to the phenomena of everyday life and utopia', Michael E. Gardiner echoes Michael Löwy in linking such contemporaries of Balázs as Lukács, Simmel, Bloch and Benjamin to a philosophical tradition that is suspicious of the 'pervasive dichotomy' in modern Western thought 'between the everyday/immanent

and the utopian/transcendent'. This Central European tendency commits itself instead to an 'everyday utopianism' that seeks out as the source of social transformation 'a series of forms, tendencies and possibilities that are immanent in the here and now'.[40] Balázs's writing on the filmic body locates his film theory squarely within that tradition. We have seen how Balázs draws on contemporary phenomenology and classical aesthetics to forge a utopian vision of a cinematic body that overcomes empiricist dualism and the reification of the written word. The particularity of Balázs's contribution to utopian Marxism lies, however, in the grounding of his bodily utopia in minute accounts of the new film language, and of the dynamic interplay across and between physical bodies (the bodies of the actor, the filmmaker, the spectator, the object world), the film image, film technology, and subjective perception.

Balázs has been most enduringly remembered in the history of film theory for his contributions on the close-up; and indeed Balázs himself, in *Visible Man*, affirms the centrality of the close-up in his film theory when he terms the close-up shot 'film's true terrain' (p. 38). Often unexplored in film history, however, is the relation between Balázs's account of the close-up, and his utopian understanding of the new perceptual economy generated for the twentieth-century human subject by film.

It has become something of a habit in film studies to talk of the close-up as a moment of spectacle that arrests temporal development in narrative film. Balázs's account is quite different. For him, the close-up shifts film into a different temporality that is, importantly, also one source of the medium's utopian potential. Discussing a number of titles including Murnau's *Phantom* (1922), Griffith's *Way Down East* (1920) and *Intolerance* (1916), Balázs draws a comparison in *Visible Man* between the close-up and the lyric form. The close shot, for Balázs, is the 'lyrical essence of the entire drama' (p. 37), a technical device that locates the film image not within the linear time of narrative or epic, but in the temporality of affect and the dream.

Witness for instance Balázs discussing the face of Lilian Gish in Griffith's *Way Down East.* Describing a passage in which the *ingénue* Gish discovers that the man to whom she believes herself to be married has tricked her with a staged wedding ceremony, he writes (p. 35: emphasis Balázs):

> When the man tells her that he has deceived her…[s]he knows what he says is true, but wants to believe that he is just joking. And for five whole minutes she laughs and cries by turns, at least a dozen times.
>
> We would need many printed pages to describe the storms that pass over this tiny, pale face. … But the nature of these feelings lies precisely in the crazy rapidity with which they succeed one another. The effect of this play of facial expressions lies in *its ability to replicate the original tempo of her feelings*.
>
> That is something that words are incapable of. The description of a feeling always lasts longer than the time taken by the feeling itself. The rhythm of our inner turbulence will inevitably be lost in every literary narrative.

This is one of numerous passages where Balázs identifies the close-up as the space of a different, specifically filmic time. Though his account of the close-up has yet to be fully elaborated in *Visible Man*, he does begin to identify here the aesthetic qualities of the close shot that shift it into to the 'time-space' of poetry (p. 73). Balázs quotes Walt Whitman as his source when he identifies simultaneity as a first feature of the close-up's temporal organization. Unlike either Eisenstein,[41] or Abel Gance, whose efforts in *La Roue* (*The Wheel*, 1923) to evoke simultaneous time with rapid cross-cuts are the probable origin of comments on Gance in *Visible Man* (p. 70), Balázs insists that it is the close shot, not montage, that is the privileged site of simultaneity in film. His observations on the rapid play of emotions across the face of Gish typify Balázs's early view of the facial close-up in particular as an aesthetic space where the 'most varied emotions' are displayed '*simultaneously*, like a chord … [;] chords of feeling whose essence is in fact their simultaneity' (p. 34). The analogy with music is carried through in Balázs's comments on the 'polyphony' of the close-up, its capacity to pick out and recombine in one great 'symphony' the 'individual cells of life' that, in a montage of close-ups, can convey 'the texture and substance of life in its concrete detail' (p. 38). The close-up's simultaneous temporality does not, however, release objects in close-up from the movement of time. Instead, the close-up brings to light the movements of subjective affect – the 'tempo of the feelings', the 'rhythm of inner turbulence'– that Balázs finds so exquisitely conveyed in the play of emotions across the face of Lilian Gish.

The Balázs of *Visible Man* had broken links with Bartók and Kodály, having taken offence (somewhat naively, given the hostility of the Horthy regime, under which both composers still lived) over their hesitancy at publicly acknowledging their debt to the exiled Balázs.[42] But in his comments on the close-up, echoes remain of Balázs's early collaborations with Bartók, and of his embracing in that context of folk tales, mystery plays and fairy tales as socially transformative literary forms. Balázs's first full-length fable, *A csend* (*The Silence*), had been completed in 1910. Though never published in full during his lifetime, *The Silence* presaged what was to become an enduring commitment on Balázs's part. He continued writing fairy tales throughout his literary career, publishing his first volume, *Hét mese* (*Seven Fairy Tales*) in 1918, and continuing through a series of further works including his 1922 Oriental fantasia, *The Mantle of Dreams*, the extended fable *Das richtige Himmelblau* (*The Real Sky-Blue*, 1925), and illustrated children's stories published during his ten-year Moscow sojourn after 1931.[43]

Balázs's preoccupation with the fairy tale is perhaps most famously evident in his collaboration with Leni Riefenstahl as co-director and co-screenwriter for the visionary mountain film *Das blaue Licht* (*The Blue Light*, 1932). But his fairy-tale fascination was not limited to fictional narrative; it also begins to explain his preoccupation with the close-up in

film. The fairy tale, of course, has a long history in Central European and especially German literary culture as the focus of utopian social aspirations. The Brothers Grimm and other Romantics used folk and fairy tales to trace the contours of a future national culture in a unified Germany; but they also mobilized these archaic forms, as Jack Zipes observes, 'to comment on the philistinism of the German bourgeoisie and [its] perversion of Enlightenment ideals'.[44] Both these elements of the fairy tale – its rooting in a socially progressive popular culture, and its critique of an alienated and perverted modernity – help explain the genre's attraction for Balázs, as well as his hopes for a sublation of the fairy tale's potential in the new medium of film. The fairy tale prefigures, for instance, many features of the close-up's organization of time. Mirroring the simultaneous temporality of the close-up, the fairy tale narrative progresses not through links of cause and effect, but through magical transformations in which the present becomes the past or future by means of enchanted mirrors, magic wands or other supernatural interventions. A similar affinity is evident in the close-up's spatialization of time. In the close-up, narrative time collapses into the space of a single shot: thus Gish's expressive face in *Way Down East* encapsulates the entirety of an innocent young woman's shattered life. Analogously in the fairy tale, past, present and future co-exist in enchanted spaces – Bluebeard's castle is one – where present events are haunted by an omnipresent past, and where the future is accessed across spatial thresholds, not through developments in narrative time.

Balázs's 1910 *Bluebeard* libretto, indeed, lends itself to a reading as an allegorical prefiguring of *Visible Man*'s account of the close-up in film. In his 1924 text, Balázs will write of the close-up as a magical space in which relations of time and space are transformed and boundaries broken. His version of the castle in the Bluebeard myth is similarly enchanted. Already in the opera's spoken prologue, attention is drawn to the possibility of a fluid movement between inner and outer worlds within the space of the castle-stage: 'Now hear the song/You look, I look at you./Our eyes' curtain – the eyelashes – opens:/Where is the stage: outside or inside/Men and women?'[45] That the product of this dissolution of boundaries between individual and collective, audience and stage, will be a suffusion of the object world with subjective affect, is confirmed when the castle itself becomes a protagonist in Bluebeard's drama. The opera opens on Bluebeard's entry with his new wife Judith into the sombre half-darkness of a brooding medieval castle with seven enormous, undecorated doors. When Judith calls for the doors to be opened to flood the castle with light, it is not only Bluebeard who recoils in horror at the bloody secrets she will uncover: the three murdered ex-wives whose uncanny presence lurks behind the castle's seventh door. The castle itself becomes an animate object, sweating, weeping, moaning, sighing and bleeding to a musical score that amplifies its anguish with

minor-key motifs and, before the opening of the final door, a 'circling orchestral ostinato, saturated with the blood motif'.[46]

In his own notes on the German translation of the libretto, Balázs comments, 'I called *Bluebeard* a stage ballad, because the stage here is not simply the necessary space for the enactment of dialogue. The stage is a participant. The Hungarian *dramatis personae* named three characters: Bluebeard, Judith, and the castle …. Bluebeard allows the wife he loves entry into this castle, into his soul. And this castle (the stage) trembles and sighs and bleeds. Within its walls, what the woman walks on is living matter'.[47] We can see this animation of the castle, its dissolution of the boundaries between human and non-human worlds, as prefiguring Balázs's anthropomorphic understanding of the close-up in *Visible Man*: his vision of the facial close-up in particular as a shot that moves with the 'life', 'tempo' and 'vitality' of the living world (p. 73). *Bluebeard*'s collapsing of past and future time – the past of Bluebeard's atrocities, and the future of Judith's fate – into the simultaneous time-space of the visible present also foreshadows Balázs's observation that 'by inserting the action … into a spatial perspective that evinces no sign of a before and after', the close shot becomes a 'simultaneous representation [that] nullifies all sense of time' (p. 71).

The Close-up and Bergson

This introduction has so far highlighted aspects of the close-up's temporality that locate the shot within the tradition of the fairy tale, and thus help explain Balázs's utopian aspirations for film as the form that will realize the revolutionary dream of a culture created by and for the popular mass.[48] Yet already in *Visible Man*, Balázs hints at a second source for his thinking on the close-up, its origin not only in his early fascination with the fairy tale, but in contemporary writings on the phenomenology of time. Presaging the future direction of his writing on the close-up, Balázs writes here of close shots that do not simply collapse time into the simultaneous space of the image's present, but that transform the very substance of the image. In a passage on filmic representations of dream states, Balázs offers a distinction between 'fairy-tale images' that signal their dream status by mere changes in form, and images that reproduce 'the changed substance that is the characteristic of the dream figure' (p. 49). This 'substance' derives, he continues, from movements within the close-up (once again, the face of Lilian Gish may serve as an example) that reproduce the 'rhythm' and 'tempo' of the dream. It is a feature of film's character as *moving* image, in other words, that it can reproduce 'dream figures' identifiable as such because they 'move differently; their rhythm does not conform to the laws of motion in the physical world, but to the internal rhythms of the mental world' (p. 49).

Balázs returns to the topic in an extended section on 'The Close-up' in *The Spirit of Film*; and it is here that he explains a shift in his thinking that

has the close-up no longer necessarily inhabiting a space-time of simultaneity where past and future collapse into the present moment of the shot. More boldly, Balázs now asserts that what we may enter not only in the dream images discussed in *Visible Man*, but also in the *facial* close-up, is a new dimension of emotional experience that lies wholly outside the time-space of empirical experience. While close-ups of objects or body parts (a hand, a table) are still 'seen to exist in space' because 'a hand, even if depicted in isolation, signifies a human being; a table, likewise in isolation, signifies its function in a space', the facial close-up 'acquires expression and meaning without the addition of an imagined spatial context' (p. 100). The facial close-up, then, affords the possibility of an emotional expressivity that is detached from time and space, and exists instead in a dimension of emotional experience that Balázs describes as 'physiognomic'. His amplified understanding of physiognomy in *The Spirit of Film* locates it no longer simply as an intuitive grasp of mood or atmosphere, but as a 'dimension' that renders visible emotion in its purest state. In the facial close-up, he thus continues (pp. 100–101),

> The position of the eyes in the top half of the face, the mouth below; wrinkles now to the right, now to the left – none of this now retains its spatial significance. For what we see is merely a *single* expression. We see emotions and thoughts. We see something that does not exist in space.

In a significant move, Balázs now turns to a second source to explain his new understanding of the extraspatial dimension of the facial close-up: to Henri Bergson, and specifically, to Bergson's writing on duration and time. Balázs had personal contact with Bergson during a stay in Paris in 1911/12; he also discussed Bergson with Simmel, whose private seminar on the philosophy of art he began attending in 1906, in a period when Simmel and Bergson were engaged in ongoing dialogue on questions of space-time perception and the phenomenology of modern life.[49] Bergson's significance for Balázs is evident in his revised understanding of the temporality of the facial close-up in *The Spirit of Film*. In his *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (*Time and Free Will*, 1889), Bergson suggests that time is conventionally understood spatially by reflective consciousness. As Suzanne Guerlac explains, the 'conventional concept of time' is seen by Bergson as false, 'a "bastard concept" which results from the intrusion of an idea of space into the domain of pure consciousness'.[50] Time is reduced in human consciousness because we conceive of it as progressing through a linear development from past to present and future. If, however, we consider time not in terms of categories derived from 'reflective consciousness' (which abstracts from lived time and calculates it in terms of a spatial progression), and consider instead the alternative temporalities of immediate experience and inner states, then we arrive at a concept of what Bergson calls 'pure duration'. Duration (*durée*) is the 'form taken by the succession of our inner states of

consciousness when our self ... abstains from establishing a separation between the present state and anterior states'.[51] Paradoxically therefore, as Guerlac continues, 'to think the temporality of duration we must first be willing to give up our conceptual separation of past and present in order to conceive of temporal synthesis *per se*.'[52]

Bergson's figure for duration is melody, which achieves the temporal synthesis that duration demands by working with a 'notion of ensemble ... in which states and feelings overlap or interpenetrate one another'.[53] Balázs cites Bergson on melody in *The Spirit of Film*, in a passage that offers the facial close-up as a visual correlative of musical melody, and thus as a window on a physiognomic dimension that he locates within the fluid time of Bergsonian duration:

> Physiognomy has a relation to space comparable to that existing between melody and time. The facial muscles that make expression possible may be close to each other in space. But it is their relation to one another that creates expression. These relations have no extension and no direction in space. No more than do feelings and thoughts, ideas and associations. All these are image-like in nature and yet non-spatial. (p. 101)

This represents a progression from *Visible Man.* Here, Balázs envisages a utopian transcendence of the instrumental rationality of bourgeois time not through close-ups that situate the film image in the simultaneity of fairy-tale time. For simultaneity itself implies a spatialization of time, a juxtaposition of past and future in the present's enchanted space. The facial close-up, by contrast, has the capacity to stage an encounter with an ensemble of expressive elements – a twitch of the facial muscles, a frown, a welling eye – that together comprise 'a multiplicity ... in which states or feelings overlap or interpenetrate one another, instead of being organized into a distinct succession'.[54] The facial close-up, then, opens up within the film text a dimension in which time is released from spatial confines, and flows forth with that rhythm and tempo of pure duration which Balázs had once discovered in the face of Gish.

Marxism and Montage

Balázs himself indicates in *The Spirit of Film* that the significance of Bergson for his thinking is not confined to the close-up. As he writes, the issue of *durée* – a dimension that lies at the heart of his vision in this volume of film as 'visible spirit' – is also one that 'we shall return to in connection with the montage' (p. 101).

Balázs devotes long sections of both *Visible Man* and *The Spirit of Film* to montage, a cinematic process that he identifies in the later text as one of the three fundamental components (the others are the close-up and camera set-up) of the language of film. His further identification of the montage as the element which makes apparent 'the essential factor, namely the work's

composition' (p. 98) may in part be read as a side-swipe at Eisenstein, with whom he had clashed four years previously in a famous quarrel over montage. In 1926, Balázs was invited to Berlin by the *Klub der Kameraleute Deutschlands* (German Cameramen's Club) to deliver a lecture on photography in film. The Club's director, the virtuoso cinematographer Karl Freund, was sufficiently enthusiastic to invite Balázs to write a film scenario for Freund's production company, Fox Europa Productions. The resultant (lost) film, *The Adventures of a Ten-Mark Note* (1926) became the first of a long line of successful German productions scripted by Balázs, including Johannes Guter's *Grand Hotel* (1927); Kurt Bernhardt's *Das Mädchen mit fünf Nullen* (*The Big Win*, 1927); an early adaptation of Stefan Zweig's *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, *Narkose* (*Narcosis*, Alfred Abel, 1929), and most contentiously, G.W. Pabst's *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*, 1930), a title that would involve Balázs tangentially in the bitter legal wrangle that was the culmination of ideological and aesthetic disputes between Pabst, Brecht and Weill.

The clash with Brecht had uncomfortable echoes of Balázs's earlier dispute with Eisenstein. Balázs had moved to Berlin in 1926, and began at this point a feverish engagement in Marxist cultural production and organization that encompassed work with Willi Münzenberg's Prometheus Film preparing Soviet films for German release; activities as a member of the dramaturgical collective for Erwin Piscator's proletarian theatre, the *Piscator-Bühne*; participation alongside Pabst, Piscator, Freund and others in the *Volksverband für Filmkunst* (*People's Association for Film Art*); and, after 1929, involvement in revolutionary drama as a member of the *Bund Proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller Deutschlands* (*Association of Proletarian Revolutionary Writers in Germany*). When Eisenstein launched his public attack on Balázs in his satirical 'Béla Forgets the Scissors' (1926), it was thus not Balázs's ideological commitment that was in question, but rather the aesthetic theory underpinning his account of montage.[55]

Eisenstein's ire is roused by Balázs's naming of the cameraman in his 1926 lecture as 'the alpha and omega of film'. Taking Balázs to task as a bourgeois individualist in whose film theory both the cameraman as film artist and the individual shot play the role of 'star', Eisenstein summarizes his own alternative view of film as a medium that approaches the 'symbolism of language[, s]peech', through the 'contextual confrontation' between images effected by the montage.[56] Eisenstein identifies three tendencies in contemporary montage: 'American montage', which subordinates editing to narrative; Soviet montage, which operates through a dialectical interaction of shots to produce a new idea; and montage in German cinema, which Eisenstein sees as conceiving the shot only in isolation. Balázs, he contends, falls into the 'German' trap of conceiving film as an art of the image alone, and failing to grasp montage as the medium's fundamentally new 'opportunity [and] element'.[57]

Eisenstein's account of Balázs's film theory is to some extent inaccurate, since Balázs had by this point written extensively on montage, not least in *Visible Man.* But he is correct in identifying in Balázs the representative of a theoretical tendency that sits uneasily with Eisenstein's understanding of a montage of attractions as the source of new meanings in film. In *The Spirit of Film*, Balázs would later criticize both the 'hieroglyphic' penchant that he identifies in some Soviet film, its reduction of meaning to 'ideograms' (p. 128), and the 'intellectual film' that 'depicts neither stories nor destinies, neither private nor social fates, but only ideas' (p. 149). His critique reaches back to passages in *Visible Man* where he had begun to elaborate an alternative account which, far from subordinating montage to the image, situates both within a Bergsonian vision of film physiognomy as a window onto 'the movement of life itself' (p. 67).

In *Visible Man*, Balázs is still casting around for a terminology adequate to his understanding of the vital fluidity of montage. His term at this point is *Bilderführung*, literally, 'leading the image along', or 'image direction'.[58] This present translation uses a term more usually associated with Pudovkin, 'linkage', partly in recognition of Pudovkin's admiration for the Balázs of *Visible Man.* But the term also draws attention to the specificity of Balázs's understanding of montage as a process that builds on what is in any case the fluid and directional quality of the visual image to produce films that 'flow smoothly and in a broad stream, like the hexameter in a classical epic, or else like a ballad, flaring up breathlessly and then dying down again, like a drama, rising inexorably towards a climax, or tingling capriciously' (p. 67).

Balázs's concluding definition of linkage in this passage as film's 'living breath' (p. 67) highlights the affinity between his anthropomorphic understanding of montage, and his account of objects and figures in close-up as animated by the rhythm and tempo of a poetic inner life. In *Visible Man*, he thus attributes to linkage the same poetic qualities – simultaneism (p. 70), rhythm and tempo (p. 72) – that render movement in close-up as 'the expression of an increased intensity', and connect the close shot to the 'internal rhythms of the mental world' (p. 49). Like the close-up, montage operates in the affective temporality of poetry and the dream, rendering time as a 'mood' not an 'objective fact' (p. 68). And just as Balázs's account of the close-up developed in the seven years between his writing of *Visible Man* and *The Spirit of Film* towards a more explicitly Bergsonian account of the close shot as the site of a new experiential 'dimension', so too his work on montage shifts towards an understanding of editing as blending 'tempos and forms, movements and directions as well as emphases on elements of the action' into a 'mobile … formation' that shifts the film into a 'sixth dimension …[:] a rhythmic formation that is experienced optically, and yet is not visible' (p. 131).

Both Eisenstein and Pudovkin would later similarly emphasize the significance of rhythm as the compositional element that lends structure

and unity to film. But whereas for Eisenstein, that unity 'emerges from the content and imagery of the work', and is thus apprehended symbolically, the unity of film art is experienced for Balázs through a process of 'sensuous apperception' (p. 125) and 'induction' (p. 123) in which the 'shape' (*Gestalt*, p. 128) of film is revealed as a 'stream of relationships' flowing like 'optical music' (p. 129) across the fluid surface of the montage.[59]

The durational quality of this 'optical music' is illuminated in an eloquent passage on spectatorship in which Balázs identifies not melody, as in his account of the close-up, but dance as the source of a movement that evokes the durational flow of time. Bergson himself had used the example of dance as a form that 'lets us see the reality of flowing time'.[60] Balázs echoes his former mentor in a rhapsodic passage where he equates film spectatorship to the dance of inner life:

> [I]f … directional montage has a suggestive rhythm, then the rhythm it suggests is that of dance. Dance is the ornament of movement …. The point of view of the camera becomes the spectator's point of view. When it changes, so too does the viewpoint of the spectator. Even if he does not move an inch, he moves *inwardly* (p. 131).

The Cosmopolitan Body

If for Balázs, in sum, the montage facilitates a mode of cinematic perception that moves to the rhythm and tempo, the 'living breath' of the spectator's inner life, then this places him not, as Eisenstein suggested, on the side of the pictorialism which Eisenstein identified as characteristic of German film. Instead, Balázs assumes a place within the history of aesthetic theory that locates him, first, on Goethe's side of the physiognomic dispute with Lavater, and second, in a phenomenological tradition that stretches back through Simmel to Henri Bergson. Yet the anthropocentric emphasis in Balázs's aesthetic, his insistence that the technological-industrial dead matter of film is animated by a bodily poetics whose aesthetic qualities are those of music, lyric poetry and the dance, poses a final question for his theory of film.

There is a profoundly shocking passage in *Visible Man* that reminds the modern reader of the perils of a film theory that celebrates the culture of the physical body.

> We may say that the language of gestures has become standardized in film. It … contains the first living seeds of the standard white man who will one day emerge as the synthesis of the mix of different races and peoples. The cinematograph is a machine that in its own way will create a living, concrete internationalism: *the unique, shared psyche of the white man*. We can go further. By suggesting a uniform ideal of beauty as the universal goal of selective breeding, the film will help to produce a uniform type of the white race. (p. 14)

Balázs starkly voices here the contradiction at the heart of his account of the filmic body. On the one hand, film for Balázs, as for many of his contemporaries, represented the realization of the Enlightenment cosmopolitan dream of a 'living, concrete internationalism': a 'brotherhood' of man (and I use the male gender advisedly) united in a common language, common ethical values, and a common commitment to universal rights and freedoms. At the same time, Balázs topples headlong into the ideological trap laid by an Enlightenment universalism that seeks to embrace a common humanity, but simultaneously inscribes the 'enlightened' human subject as white, European and male.

Balázs did later shift ground from the racial essentialism of this passage. In *Theory of the Film*, he replaces *Visible Man*'s racial analysis of film's universalist potential with a Marxist account that locates cinematic internationalism as the product of film's penetration of international markets. The newly cultural relativist Balázs now concedes that film's task is not to ground a new racial hierarchy that privileges the 'universal white man', but instead to 'aid in levelling physical differences between the various races and nations', and thus to serve the 'common cause' of 'unit[ing] men within the limits of their own race and nation'.[61] Yet there are reasons to tarry briefly with the earlier Balázs, and to use the provocation of his passage on the 'standard white man' to explore potentially productive contradictions within his theory of the body in film. The early polarization of the Soviet reception of Balázs between the camps of Eisenstein and Pudovkin was typical of the ideological divisions that regularly formed around his theory of film art. Acclaimed on the one hand by leftist modernists including Pudovkin, Piscator and Freund, Balázs was later celebrated by Third Reich theorists for his insights on film rhythm as the 'moment of excitation that transmits itself like an electric current to the unconscious': an excitation that Wolfgang Liebeneiner, for instance, saw as forging a bond between the film spectator and the rhythmic movements of Nazism's militarized social totality.[62] There is no doubt that it was Balázs's early allegiance to race theory that made his work available for appropriation by Nazi film ideologues. It was certainly also his horror at the racial madness of the Nazi regime that accounted for his more orthodox Marxist reworking of the earlier passage in *Theory of the Film*. But the reengagement with Balázs's early film theory that this present volume attempts allows us to see elements already within his interwar theory of the filmic body that rendered untenable his repudiation of racial otherness.

There are outlined above ways of rereading Balázs that illuminate the very different – fluid, multiplicitous, libidinous – relation to the other that is also and simultaneously evident in his work on the body on film. That relationship resonates, moreover, with the renewed interest in twenty-first century cultural studies and cultural theory in what Mica Nava has termed a vernacular and 'visceral' cosmopolitanism: a cosmopolitanism understood

not in terms of formal political structures or institutional arrangements, but as 'part of the structure of feeling associated with 'modernity', that is to say, with a mood and historical moment which highlighted the fluidity and excitement of modern metropolitan life and culture and … signalled … a positive engagement with difference'.[63] Nava is joined by other writers from within philosophy and social theory (Kwame Anthony Appiah, Seyla Benhabib and, in different register, Zygmunt Bauman), all of whom seek to rescue the cosmopolitan tradition for our 'globalized' times. What these writers promote is far more than merely a pleasurable identification with difference; indeed, as Bauman points out, this is a mode of identification in which the other becomes an object of consumption, not a subject embraced through what he terms 'liquid love'.[64] More than this, what the 'living, concrete internationalism' (Balázs) of everyday cosmopolitanism demands is a surrender of the sovereign self to the ambivalence of intersubjectivity, a muddying of self–other boundaries of precisely the kind that Balázs's phenomenology of film promotes.

Balázs offered his *Spirit of Film* in 1930 in part as a defence of the sound film against contemporaries – Rudolf Arnheim was one – for whom the advent of sound meant the death of film art. One film released that same year (and thus not yet discussed by Balázs) can serve as a vindication of his claim that while silent film 'liberated the visible human being … from the constricted framework [of the stage] and … inserted him into the ever-present totality of his environment', the same liberation 'is now on the horizon … for auditory man' (p. 142). Augusto Genina's 1930 *Prix de Beauté* (*Miss Europe*), scripted by René Clair and featuring Louise Brooks in the last of her starring roles in European film, centres on Brooks's rise and demise as a beauty queen (she wins a Miss Europa contest, but finds only tragedy in her new life as public beauty). The film opens with a scene in a Sunday swimming pool that celebrates the same bodily dynamism that Balázs attributes to the film medium *tout court*. The scene's mobile mood is captured by the camera's swooping pans in and around the swimmers' bodies; by dissolves that sustain the rhythm of movement across and between those bodies; by accelerating montage that emphasizes the energy of the crowd; by fragmented body parts – legs, arms, hands – and repetitive patterns of movement across the shot that show individual bodies dispersing into a collective experience of physical pleasure (see Figs. 1–4). The fleeting shot of a film camera offering for sale filmed footage of this Sunday jamboree reminds the viewer meanwhile that the sensual pleasures celebrated here gain added piquancy through their instantaneous capture in and consumption through the photographic image.

The utopian cosmopolitanism that Balázs's film theory celebrates is visible from four distinct perspectives both in this sequence from *Miss Europe*, and in his theory of the filmic body. Identification with the body of the other occurs first for both Balázs and Genina through equivalences, established in particular through the use of close-up, between animate bodies and body-parts, and the inanimate world of things; thus the
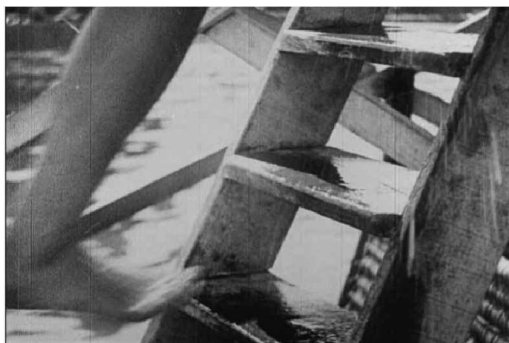
Figures 1–4: *Prix de Beauté* (*Miss Europe*, Augusto Genina, 1930).

gramophone that features in close-up amongst the Genina's teeming crowd takes on an equivalent symbolic significance to a hand, an arm, a body in motion. Gertrud Koch refers in this context to what she calls Balázs's democratization of the image under a cinematic gaze for which 'all objects assume the dignity of aesthetic perception and sublimation'.[65] Such equivalences are secondly fostered for Balázs through a montage that privileges linkage over dissonance: an editing style whose emphasis on formal repetition, shared rhythms and tempos, common directions and flows of movement illuminates the commonalities across and between animate and inanimate bodies – the gramophone, the ice-cream, the human hand – on film.

Thirdly, bodily identification occurs, paradoxically, through a dispersal and fragmentation of the human body both as representation, and as perceptual organism. In *Miss Europe*, bodies and objects are dispersed into part-objects, but reassembled as an experiential totality through mobile camera and fluid montage. But the film also illustrates a further claim from Balázs, which is that in film, the human body itself is fractured into individual perceptual organs (eye, ear) and somatic processes (the breath of life), which in turn meld with the technological apparatus (the eye with the camera, the ear with the microphone, rhythmic breath with the rhythms of the montage) to produce a human subject whose perception merges with the technological apparatus of cinema, and through this, with the perception of the viewing collectivity. This technological collectivization of perception may, as Balázs admits in *Theory of the Film*, open the way to mass manipulation by the film-industrial apparatus; but it is always also simultaneously, he continues to insist, the source of what Heide Schlüpmann will later term a 'solidarity with the perception of the other' through the medium of film.[66]

That solidarity is realized, fourthly and finally, in Balázs's understanding of both spectatorship and performance in terms of embodied identifications that flow across and between the cinematic apparatus, the body of the spectator, and bodies on film. Balázs was repeatedly preoccupied in his film writings with the body in performance. *Visible Man* ends, for instance, with a paean of praise to Asta Nielsen, a favourite of Balázs in whose film performance of Wedekind's Lulu he discerns an

> erotic charisma [that] regales us with the great and complete dictionary of the gestures of sensual love …. It now becomes clear that the erotic is film's very own theme, its essence. First, because it is always a bodily experience, at least *in part*, and is therefore visible. Secondly, it is only in erotic relationships that we find an ultimate possibility of *mute understanding* (p. 91: emphasis Balázs).

For Nielsen, the 'dictionary' of erotic gestures on which she drew in her films included a repertoire of exotic dance forms, most famously the 'Gaucho dance', an Argentine herdsmen's dance with *boleadoras* and lasso

Figures 5 & 6: *Afgrunden* (*The Abyss*, Urban Gad, 1910).

that she performed in her breakthrough title to film stardom, Urban Gad's 1910 *Afgrunden* (*The Abyss*) (Figs. 5–6). Nielsen's sinuous, writhing body as she ensnares a hapless gaucho in her lasso oscillates between a repudiation of the exotic other – a use of her own body to substitute for and repress experience of the 'Apache' woman she mimics – and 'mute understanding' (Balázs), or what Jan Campbell has called an 'embodied mimesis', a performance that, through its mimicry, also reremembers the repressed other, and brings it into representation within her performing body on film.[67] The ambivalent performance of a film artist who was for Balázs a figure 'incomparable and without peer' (p. 94) pinpoints then, finally, the challenge of Balázs for contemporary readers: the demand that, just as we engage with and work through the uncomfortable tension in Nielsen's dancing body between an embrace and a repudiation of cultural difference, so too we should confront Balázs early accounts of the audiovisual body with his own cosmopolitan ethic, and excavate from the tension between the two a more comprehensive understanding of the ambivalent ethicopolitical heritage delivered by film to 'visible man'.

Notes

1. B. Balázs. 1945. *Iskusstvo Kino*, Moscow: Goskinoizdat; 1948. *Filmkultúra: A film müvészetfilozófiája* (*Film Culture: The Aesthetic Philosophy of Film*), Budapest: Szikra. On the Soviet reception of *Iskusstvo Kino*, see J. Zsuffa. 1987. *Béla Balázs. The Man and the Artist*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 323.

2. B. Balázs. 1979 (orig. 1948). *Le cinéma, Nature et évolution d'un art nouveau*. Paris: Payot; 1949. *Der Film. Werden und Wesen einer neuen Kunst*. Vienna: Globus; 1952. *Il film: evoluzione ed essenza di un'arte nuova*. Torino: Einaudi; 1952. *Theory of the Film. Character and Growth of a New Art*, trans. E. Bone. London: Dennis Dobson.

3. Edwin Arnet, Letter to Balázs, n.d. MTA MS5021/2.

4. Dudley Andrew and James Monaco are among those who interpret Balázs's preoccupation with a grammar of film as formalist: see J. Monaco. 2000. *How to Read a Film. The World of Movies, Media, and Multimedia. Language, History, Theory* (3rd edn.). New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 403–406; J.D. Andrew. 1976. *The Major Film Theories*. London, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 76–101. Mistrust of Balázs's essentialist preoccupation with 'soul' is expressed among others by Richard Dyer in his comments on Balázs's work on the close-up (R. Dyer. 1998 (orig. 1979). *Stars* (3rd edn), London: British Film Institute, 15); and by Miriam Hansen, who comments on Balázs's 'somewhat mystical … anthropology' in her 1991 *Babel and Babylon. Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 188.

5. B. Balázs. 2001 (orig. 1924). *Der sichtbare Mensch* (ed. H. Diederichs), Frankfurt am Main: suhrkamp; 2001 (orig. 1930). *Der Geist des Films* (ed. H. Loewy), Frankfurt am Main: suhrkamp.

6. B. Balázs. 2001 (orig. 1947). *Die Jugend eines Träumers. Autobiografischer Roman*. Berlin: Das Arsenal; 2002 (orig. 1920–26). *Ein Baedeker der Seele. Und andere Feuilletons aus den Jahren 1920–1926*. Berlin: Das Arsenal; 2003 (orig. Hungarian 1908–18). *Die Geschichte von der Logodygasse, vom Frühling, vom Tod und von der Ferne. Novellen* (*The Story of Logody Alley, of Springtime, of Death and of Faraway Lands. Novellas*) (transl. M. Ochsenfeld, ed. H. Loewy). Berlin: Das Arsenal; 2004 (orig. 1921–22) *Der heilige Räuber und andere Märchen, Märchensammlung* (*The Holy Robber and other Fairy Tales. Fairy Tale Collection*). Berlin: Das Arsenal.

7. B. Balázs. 2008. *L'uomo visibile* (ed. L. Quaresima). Torino: Lindau; 2005. *A látható ember, A film szelleme*. Budapest: Palatinus Kiadó; 2007. 'Visible Man, or the Culture of Film' (transl. R. Livingstone, ed. E. Carter). *Screen* 48(1), 91–108; 2006. 'Selected Translations' (ed. M. Turvey). *October* 115, 47–60. For earlier pleas for a critical recuperation of Balázs, see Sabine Hake's excellent chapter in her 1993 *The Cinema's Third Machine. Writing on Film in Germany, 1907–1933*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press; also D. Bathrick. 1989–90. 'Mythologies from the Age of the Golden Heart: Béla Balázs on Film'. *Millenium Film Journal* 22, 16–27; G. Koch. 1987. 'Béla Balázs: The Physiognomy of Things'. *New German Critique* 40, Special Issue on Weimar Film Theory, 167–177; M. Turvey. 2006. 'Balázs: Realist or Modernist?'. *October* 115, 77–87.

8. The '*entfesselte Kamera*' (unchained camera) was most famously associated in German cinema with Karl Freund's camerawork in F.W. Murnau's *Der letzte Mann* (*The Last Laugh*), released in Germany in the year of publication of Balázs's first film-theoretical volume, *Visible Man*. It was over the coming of sound that Balázs parted company with his contemporary Rudolf Arnheim, who, famously, saw in the advent of sound the death of film as art (see his 2002 (orig. 1932) *Film als Kunst*. Frankfurt am Main: suhrkamp). Balázs, by contrast, explores in *Spirit of Film* the aesthetic possibilities of a new sound film art: see pp. 183–210 in this volume.

9. F. Casetti. 2007.'Theory, Post-Theory, Neo-theories: Changes in Discourses, Changes in Objects'. *Cinemas: Revue d'Études Cinematographiques – Journal of Film Studies* 17(2/3), 36 & 39. See also D. Bordwell and N. Carroll (eds). 1996. *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. New York: Hill and Wang.

10. L. Grieveson and H. Wasson, 'Introduction'. In idem. (eds). 2008. *Inventing Film Studies*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, xxix.

11. A. Kuhn. 2009. '*Screen* and Screen Theorizing Today'. *Screen* 50(1), 5.

12. The Bluebeard libretto exists as a typescript in the Budapest MTA in the collection *Mistériumok* (*Mysteries*), Budapest: Nyugat irodalmi és nyomdai részvénytársaság, 1912. Bartók reputedly began working on the opera in 1911, after hearing Balázs read the play at the salon of Kodály and his wife. See G. Rácz. 2006. 'Changierende Klangräume der Seele. Béla Bartók/Béla Balázs: *Herzog Blaubarts Burg*', *kakanien revisited*, http://www.kakanien.ac.at/beitr/emerg/GRacz1.pdf, 1–6: accessed 9.6.08; also H. Loewy. 2003. *Béla Balázs. Märchen, Ritual und Film*. Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 43; V. Lampert. 2008. *Folk Music in Bartók's Compositions. A Source Catalog*. Budapest: Hungarian Heritage House, Helikón Kiadó, Museum of Ethnography, Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; J. Sinor. 1982. 'Zoltan Kodály's Folk Tradition'. *Music Educators' Journal* 69(4), 33–34.

13. M. Maeterlinck. 1918 (orig. 1896–1901). *Aglavaine et Sélysette (1896), Ariane et Barbe-Bleue (1901), Soeur Béatrice (1901)*. Paris: E. Fasquelle.

14. Loewy, *Märchen*, 226 & 231.

15. K. Mannheim. 1991 (orig. 1929). *Ideology and Utopia, An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (transl. L. Wirth and E. Shils, ed. B.S. Turner). London & New York: Routledge, 139–140.

16. A. Kraszna-Krausz. 1925. 'Wie Michael Kertész und die Sascha nach Berlin gekommen sind'. *Die Filmtechnik* 10, 217.

17. The term derives from M. Ogborn. 1998. *Spaces of Modernity. London's Geographies 1680–1780*. New York: Guilford Press.

18. Karl Mannheim, letter to Balázs, 15 February 1930: MTA MS5021/283. The term 'experiential space' is Mannheim's, and it illustrates the commitment he saw himself as sharing with Balázs to a phenomenology that grounds intellectual production in historical experience. Hence his plea in this letter for Balázs to understand his recently published *Ideology and Utopia* as the product of changes in 'experiential space' (Mannheim's exile in Frankfurt-am-Main) that have made of him 'a necessarily transformed subject' – even if 'the core of "Sunday" hopefully remains … [as] intensely alive in me [as it is] perceptible to you'.

19. B. Balázs. 1923. *Férfiének*. Vienna: Európa Könyvtár; 1922. *Der Mantel der Träume: Chinesische Novellen*. Munich: Bischoff. The latter text was republished in 2005 in a new edition under the editorship of Hanno Loewy in Balázs, *Der heilige Räuber*, 7–88.

20. Letter to Alfred Polgar, n.d., probably ca. 1938: MTA MS 5018/65.

21. Letter to 'Ernst' (possibly Ernst Bloch or Fischer), n.d., probably 1936/7: MTA MS 5021/89.

22. M. Löwy. 1992. *Redemption and Utopia. Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe. A Study in Elective Affinity*. London: Athlone, 1–3, 14 and *passim*.

23. Ibid., 33.

24. Ibid., 27–28.

25. G. Lukács, 'Új magyar költök' (New Hungarian Poets). *Huszadik Század*, November 1908, 432–433. Quoted in Zsuffa, *Béla Balázs*, 32.

26. G. Lukács. 1971. *The Theory of the Novel* (trans. A. Bostock). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 97. On the relationship between Lukács, Balázs and Seidler see Loewy, *Märchen*, 84ff; and A. Heller. 1977. 'Das Zerschellen des Lebens an der Form. György Lukács und Irma Seidler'. In A. Heller et al. (eds). 1977. *Die Seele und das Leben. Studien zum frühen Lukács*. Frankfurt am Main: suhrkamp, 54–98.

27. Loewy, *Märchen*, 250–251.

28. The manuscript was published as G. Lukács. 1981. *Gelebtes Denken. Eine Autobiographie in Dialog*. Frankfurt am Main: suhrkamp. See pp. 158–159, quoted in Loewy, *Märchen*, 252.

29. Loewy, *Märchen*, 261.

30. See R. Stam. 2000. *Film Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 27.

31. See G. Simmel. 2004 (orig. 1907). *The Philosophy of Money* (ed. D. Frisby, transl. T. Bottomore and D. Frisby). 3rd edn. London: Routledge; K. Marx. 1990 (orig. 1867). *Capital*, Vol. 1 (transl. B. Fowkes. Appendix transl. R. Livingstone). Harmondsworth: Penguin, esp. Ch. 1.

32. W. James. 1983 (orig. 1899). *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 95–96. Balázs's adoption of a term from James is unlikely to have been accidental, given James's influence on Henri Bergson.

33. Gertrud Koch discusses this aversion to Balázs's phenomenological approach in the context of her discussion of clashes between Balázs and Eisenstein. Koch explores how the conflict between the two was shaped by a larger epistemological split between Eisenstein's 'structuralist approach, based on the analogy of film with verbal language', and the 'physiognomic expressive approach' adopted by Balázs. Koch, 'Béla Balázs', 175.

34. C. Metz. 1982. *The Imaginary Signifier. Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (transl. B. Brewster, C. Britton, A. Williams and A. Guzzetti). Bloomingtom, In.: Indiana University Press; see also J. Aumont, A. Bergala, M. Marie and M. Vernet. 2004. *Aesthetics of Film*, 5th edn (transl. R. Neupert). Austin: University of Texas Press, 213ff.

35. R.T. Gray. 2004. *About Face. German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, xvii; see also J.C. Lavater. 1984 (orig. 1775–78). *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe. Eine Auswahl* (ed. C. Siegrist). Stuttgart: Reclam.

36. Gray, *About Face*, liii.

37. Ibid., 143. Quote from Goethe's addendum to Lavater's 'Von der Physiognomie Überhaupt', in Lavater, *Physiognomische Fragmente*, Vol. 1, 24–25. The original German reads, 'Die Natur bildet den Menschen, er bildet sich um'. Translation from Gray, *About Face*, 145.

38. The original reads, 'Betrachten wir aber alle Gestalten, besonders die organischen, so finden wir, daß nirgends ein Bestehendes, nirgends ein Ruhendes, ein Abgeschlossenes vorkommt, sondern daß vielmehr alles in einer steten Bewegung schwankte …. Wollen wir also eine Morphologie einleiten, so dürfen wir nicht von Gestalt sprechen, sondern wenn wir das Wort brauchen, uns allenfalls dabei nur die Idee, den Begriff oder rein in der Erfahrung nur für den Augenblick Festgehaltenes denken. Das Gebildete wird sogleich wieder umgebildet, und wir haben uns, wenn wir einigermaßen zum lebendigen Anschaun der Natur gelangen wollen, selbst so beweglich und bildsam zu erhalten.' J.W. Goethe, 1966 (orig. 1807). 'Bildung und Umbildung Organischer Naturen'. In idem. *Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche* (ed. E. Beutler). Vol. 17. 2nd edn. Zürich: Artemis, 14; translation from Gray, *About Face*, 146.

39. Metz, *Imaginary Signifier*, 49.

40. M.E. Gardiner. 2006. 'Marxism and the Convergence of Utopia and the Everyday'. *History of the Human Sciences* 19(3), 2–3.

41. Eisenstein's interest in simultaneism derives from his encounter with Japanese theatre and art, which provided inspiration for his theory of montage: see S. Eisenstein. 1957 (orig. 1929). 'The Cinematic Principle and the Ideogram'. In *Film Form. Essays in Film Theory and The Film Sense* (ed. & transl. J. Leyda). New York: Meridian, 28–44.

42. Joseph Zsuffa comments that Balázs's outrage over Bartók's refusal to mention Balázs in a Bartók anniversary edition of the Viennese music journal *Musikblätter des Anbruchs* was 'not quite justified …. It was the time of the White Terror in Hungary, and both Bartók and Kodály were under surveillance'. Zsuffa, *Béla Balázs*, 98–99.

43. B. Balázs, 1985. *A csend* (*The Silence*). Budapest: Magvetö; 1918. *Hét mese* (*Seven Fairy Tales*). Gyoma: Kner (available in German as *Sieben Märchen.* 1921. Vienna, Leipzig, Berlin, Munich: Rikola); 2005 (orig. 1922). 'Der Mantel der Träume'. In Loewy (ed.), *Der heilige Räuber* (available in English as *The Mantle of Dreams* (trans. G. Leitmann). 1974. Tokyo: Kodan-sha International); 1925. *Das richtige Himmelblau. 3 Märchen.* Munich: Drei Masken Verlag (available in English as *The Real Sky-Blue.* 1936. London: J. Lane); 1939.

Heinrich beginnt den Kampf: Eine Erzählung für Kinder (*Henry Begins the Struggle: A Story for Children*). Moscow: Mezhdunarodnaia Kniga.

44. J. Zipes. (ed. & transl.). 1989. *Fairy Tales and Fables from Weimar Days*. Hanover & London: University Press of New England, 9.

45. B. Balázs. 2005. *Duke Bluebeard's Castle.* Vienna: Universal Edition AG.

46. P. Griffiths. 2005. 'Béla Bartok: Duke Bluebeard's Castle, op. 11'. In ibid. 'Notes', p. 8. *Ostinato* is a persistently repeated musical figure, here the motif of blood that is recurrent in Bartók's score.

47. B. Balázs. n.d. *Herzog Blaubart's Burg. Dramatische Szene von Béla Balázs, Musik von Béla Bartók*. MTA MS5012/2 (my translation).

48. In his role as Director of Literature in Béla Kun's Soviet Republic, Balázs had confirmed his vision of the revolutionary potential of the modern fairy tale when, with the participation among others of Anna Lesznai – a highly influential figure in Balázs's early literary formation, and an early theorist of the psychology of the fairy tale – he established a Fables Department in the Commissariat of Public Education.

49. See G. Fitzi. 2002. *Soziale Erfahrung und Lebensphilosophie. Georg Simmels Beziehung zu Henri Bergson*. Konstanz: UVK.

50. S. Guerlac. 2006. *Thinking in Time. An Introduction to Henri Bergson*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 65; H. Bergson. 2001 (orig. 1889). *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Data of Immediate Consciousness* (transl. F.L. Podgson). London: Dover.

51. Bergson, *Time*, 100.

52. Guerlac, *Thinking*, 66.

53. Ibid., 67.

54. Ibid.

55. S. Eisenstein, 'O pozitsii Bela Balasha'. *Kino*, 20 July 1926; and 'Bela zabyvaet nozhnitsy'. *Kino*, 20 August 1926; reproduced as 'Béla Forgets the Scissors'. In R. Taylor and I. Christie (eds). 1988. *The Film Factory. Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents*. London: Routledge, 145–149.

56. Ibid., 147.

57. Ibid., 149.

58. Sabine Hake uses 'image direction' in her *The Cinema's Third Machine*.

59. S. Eisenstein. 1968 (orig. 1954). 'Problems of Composition'. In J. Leyda (ed.). *Sergei Eisenstein, Film Essays*. London: Dennis Dobson, 157.

60. Guerlac, *Thinking*, 50.

61. Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, 45.

62. W. Liebeneiner. 1939. 'Die Harmonie von Bild, Wort und Musik in Film'. In O. Lehnich (ed.). *Jahrbuch der Reichsfilmkammer 1939*. Berlin: Max Hesses, 150. See also E. Carter. 2004. *Dietrich's Ghosts. The Sublime and the Beautiful in Third Reich Film*. London: BFI, 96–97.

63. M. Nava. 2007. *Visceral Cosmopolitanism. Gender, Culture and the Normalisation of Difference*. Oxford and New York: Berg, 5.

64. Z. Bauman. 2003. *Liquid Love. On the Frailty of Human Bonds*. Cambridge: Polity; K.A. Appiah. 2006. *Cosmopolitanism. Ethics in a World of Strangers*. Harmondsworth: Penguin; S. Benhabib. 2006. *Another Cosmopolitanism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

65. Koch, 'Béla Balázs', 176.

66. H. Schlüpmann. 1998. *Abendröthe der Subjektphilosophie. Eine Ästhetik des Kinos*. Stroemfeld: Roter Stern, 66.

67. J. Campbell. 2005. *Film and Cinema Spectatorship. Melodrama and Mimesis*. Cambridge: Polity, 12.

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VISIBLE MAN

or
the Culture of Film

BÉLA BALÁZS

Three Addresses by Way of a Preface

I. May We Come In?

It seems appropriate to follow an ancient custom and introduce my little book with a plea for a hearing. Your willingness to listen is not just a prerequisite but the true, desired and ultimate goal of my immodest enterprise. However, you should listen not to me, but to the subject matter itself; just as we create objects and build them from the ground up, so in this case you should make them your own by listening.

The truth is that what I have to tell you at this moment does not amount to much. However, once you have agreed to listen, once you have noticed that there is something here worthy of notice, others will come and tell you more about it. But if our speech falls on deaf ears it makes us tongue-tied.

This is why I intend to begin this essay on the *philosophy of the art of film* with a plea to the learned guardians of aesthetics and the academic study of art. What I have to say is this: for years now a new art has been standing at the gates of your noble academy, seeking permission to enter. The art of film calls for the right to be represented, to join your ranks and to speak. It looks to you to favour it at long last with a theoretical commentary; you must dedicate a chapter to it in the great aesthetic systems which find space for so many topics, from carved table legs to the art of braiding hair, but which fail even to mention film. Film stands at the portals of your aesthetic parliament like the despised and expropriated rabble at the gates of a palace, and demands the right to enter the sacred halls of theory.

And I would like to put in a good word for it, since I know full well that, far from being dismal, theory opens up the broad vistas of *freedom* for every art. It is the road map for those who roam among the arts, showing them pathways and opportunities, so that what appeared to be iron necessity stands unmasked as one random route among a hundred others. It is theory that gives us the courage to undertake Columbus-like voyages of exploration and turns every step into a freely chosen act.

Why this mistrust of theory? To inspire great works theory doesn't even have to be right. Almost all the great discoveries of mankind were based on a false hypothesis. Moreover, it is easy to do away with a theory once it has ceased to function. But the 'practical experiences' that come into being by chance become heavy, impenetrable walls, blocking our path. No art has ever grown great without theory.

By this I do not mean to say that the artist has to be 'learned' and I am also familiar with the general (all too general!) view of the value of 'unconscious creation'. Nevertheless, what counts is the level of consciousness at which a person creates 'unconsciously', for unconscious works by an impressionist composer turn out differently from the equally unconscious creations of a musician who has studied counterpoint.

However, the learned gentlemen I wish to address now may be those least in need of persuasion of the value of theory. They are more likely to need persuading that *film* is worthy of an aesthetic theory.

But are there things in existence that are not worthy of a theory? Is it not theory that endows things with the dignity of meaning in the first place, the dignity of being the vehicle of meaning? Surely you won't talk yourselves into believing that meaning is a magnanimous gift of your own? Creating meaning is our way of defending ourselves against chaos. If an elemental force becomes so powerful that we can neither withstand it nor change it, then we make haste to discover a meaning in it lest we be engulfed by it. Theoretical knowledge is the cork that keeps us afloat.

Now, I say to the philosophers, we must make haste, for time is pressing. Film has now become a fact, a fact that is producing such profound universal, social and psychic effects that we must engage with it, whether we will or no. For film is *the popular art* of our century. Not, unfortunately, in the sense that it arises from the spirit of the people, but in the sense that it is out of film that the spirit of the people arises. Admittedly, the one is influenced by the other, since nothing can spread among the people if the people refuse to accept it from the outset. The aesthetes can be as sniffy as they like; there is nothing we can do to change that. The imagination and the emotional life of the people are inspired and given shape in the cinema. It is pointless to discuss whether this is good or bad. In Vienna alone, for example, films are shown every evening in almost 200, and I mean *two hundred* cinemas, each with an average of 450 seats. They provide three or four showings a day. So if we assume that the cinemas are three-quarters full, that comes to around 300,000 *(three hundred thousand!)* people in a not very large city.

Has any art ever enjoyed such widespread popularity? Indeed, has any expression of the human mind ever had such a large public (apart perhaps from religion)? In the imagination and the emotional life of the urban population film has taken over the role formerly assumed by myth, legend and folk tales. Please spare us any lachrymose moral and aesthetic comparisons! We shall shortly address those ourselves. For the moment, we wish to dwell on this fact as a social reality and to say that, just as folk songs and folk tales, have now attracted the attention of folklore studies and cultural history, although they too have not always been deemed worthy of notice, so it will be impossible in future to write a cultural history or a national psychology without devoting a large chapter to film. And anyone among you who regards this as a great danger will be

obliged to leap in with weighty theoretical arguments. For what is at issue here is not simply a topic of discussion in the intimacy of a literary salon, but the health of the nation!

Now, you may say that cultural history may well engage with film, but that film is of no concern to aesthetics and the philosophy of art. Truth to tell, aesthetics is one of the most arrogant and aristocratic of sciences, for it is one of the most venerable and it hails from an age when every question involved ultimate questions about meaning and existence. This explains why aesthetics has always divided up the entire world in such a way that it is almost impossible to find space for new phenomena. No society is quite as exclusive as that of the Muses. And this is not unjustified. For every art signifies a special relationship between human beings and the world, a specific dimension of the soul. As long as the artist remains within these dimensions, his works may be new and even unprecedented; but the same thing cannot be said of his art. We can discover a thousand new things with telescopes and microscopes, but what is enlarged as a consequence will only ever be the range of the visual. A new art, in contrast, would be like a new sensory organ. And, though these are not exactly a common occurrence, nevertheless, I have to tell you that film is a new art and is as different from every other as music is different from painting and painting from literature. Film is a fundamentally new revelation of humanity. This is what I shall attempt to prove.

It may be new, you will object, but it is not art because it is industrialized from the outset. It cannot be an undiluted, spontaneous expression of the human mind. The decisive factors influencing it, you will say, are not the soul but commercial interests and technology.

Now, it is not self-evident that industry and technology will always be alien to human beings and hence to art. However, that is not a question I wish to comment on here. I would like only to ask: *how can you tell that a film is not art?* To make that judgement you must surely have an idea in mind of what constitutes an artistic film, a good film. My fear is that you will measure the quality of a film by a false yardstick and that you will apply to film standards appropriate to other, essentially different art forms. The aeroplane is not a bad car simply because it is useless on the roads. And, in the same way, film has different roads, roads of its own.

But, even if all the films that had been made up to now were both bad and lacking in artistic qualities, is it not precisely the task of theoreticians like yourselves to explore film's *possibilities in principle?* These would probably be worth knowing even if there were no hope of ever turning them into reality. A good, creative theory is no empirical science and would be entirely superfluous if it had to wait for art to emerge and be present in all its perfection. Theory is, if not the rudder, then at least the compass of an artistic trend. And only when you have a clear idea of the right direction can you speak of taking a wrong turn. The concept of film theory is a concept that must now be forged.

II. To Directors and All Other Fellow Practitioners

You create meaning; you don't have to understand it. You need it in your fingertips, not in your heads. And yet every profession should have a theory; it is part of its dignity. For practice has much in common with the art of the quack: the quack has no theory, experience dictates his miracle cures, and he often has greater success than the conventional doctor. *But only with cases he has previously encountered.* He is baffled by new problems. For by its nature experience can only work with phenomena that have already manifested themselves, and he lacks the technique with which to explore new situations. Film, however, is too costly for experimentation. In the realm of technology in general there is no experimenting on the off-chance. Theory begins by fixing on definite goals and calculating all their implications; only the pathways leading to those goals are then tested experimentally.

You know better than anyone that every day brings new problems in the young art of film, and that there is no one around with vast experience to offer guidance. In such situations, if a director is to succeed in turning the principles he has applied intuitively hitherto into an effective method, he must appropriate these underlying principles consciously.

Moreover, your brilliant and unconscious intuition will profit you little if you want to create something entirely new. The director who works 'unconsciously' will for the most part find himself having to deal with a company chairman who approaches his work in a highly conscious and calculating manner. Such a man will have to be persuaded of the practical value of a new idea long before he gets to see the finished product. The reality is that the director will not reach the point of making his film unless he is able to convince that company manager of his case, and to assuage the latter's concerns in principle, that is to say, on the basis of theory.

And, more broadly, you love the material you are working with. You keep on thinking about it even when you are not actually at work and enjoy playing around with it in your mind. This playing around in one's mind, however, is already theory. (It's just that the word is so ugly.) You love the material, but it will only love you back if you understand it.

III. On Creative Enjoyment

I must also address a few words of apology and explanation to the film audience, since I feel almost guilty in their presence. I feel like the serpent urging innocent children to partake of the sinful fruit of the tree of knowledge. Up to now the cinema has been the happy paradise of naivety where it was not necessary to be clever, educated and critical: a place of darkness where, as in the heady atmosphere of a den of iniquity, even the most cultivated and serious minds could strip off their educated veneer and their strict canons of taste without shame and abandon themselves to

the primitive pleasure of gazing in a state of naked, primeval innocence. Here they found respite not only from labour but also from psychological subtlety. They could laugh when someone fell on his bottom, and weep buckets (in the dark) about things that, had they encountered them in literary form, they would have felt obliged to reject with scorn. To their shame, they found themselves enjoying bad music. But the cinema, thank God, is no educational establishment! It is a simple stimulant, like alcohol. And are we now supposed to see the cinema as an art that will teach us something? Are we really supposed to become educated and to learn the difference between good and bad as man did after the Fall?

No, indeed. I have not come to spoil your enjoyment. On the contrary. I want to stimulate your senses and nerves to become capable of even greater enjoyment. An understanding of film is not incompatible with an uninhibited enjoyment of childlike pleasure. Film is a youthful and as yet unvulgarized art that works with new fundamental forms of humanity. This means that if we are to gain a proper understanding of it we have to be able to appreciate the primitive and naive. We must be able to go on weeping and laughing without having to disavow it as 'weakness'.

And, as for enjoyment, do we not have to be able to 'understand' that? Even dancing has to be learnt. Isn't the hedonist also a connoisseur and expert? Every rake and pleasure seeker will tell you: conscious enjoyment is the greatest enjoyment. (And who knows? Theory may be no more than a refinement of the art of living.)

If we distinguish between good and bad we will perhaps lose something in the process. But we shall gain the enjoyment of value. We recognize this pleasure when distinguishing between real jewels and fake ones. Film-makers are familiar with it as well, and this is why they always loudly advertise the millions they spend on period films. Their lavish expenditure has a charm of its own. However, on their own the millions point only to the cost of the film and not its value. A film has cost not only money but also talent, intelligence, taste and passion, and all these things glow and gleam in it like the fire in a genuine precious stone and for the expert they are more easily discernible than the money that has been invested.

When tasting wine the connoisseur takes a particular pleasure in identifying the grape and the vintage. He analyses it with his tongue. In the same way, aesthetic theory is nothing more than a thoughtful savouring in the attempt to feel and enjoy the hidden product of an inner life. A man who is not capable of apprehending art in this way seems to me like someone watching a race who can register only the moment when the runners cross the winning line. In reality what is exciting is all that goes on before, the struggle for victory. For the connoisseur every fact comes together in an *achievement*, every phenomenon becomes a success, every deed a victory in which we can discern the heat of battle.

Yet you will put forward the same objection as the learned aesthetes: film cannot be an art because it appeals from the outset to the uncritical

taste and requires no special insight. To state this in such general terms is to go too far. However, let us concede that there are almost as many bad films as good, and that film production is so extraordinarily expensive that its backers cannot risk a flop and are forced therefore to calculate on the basis of already current demand. But what follows from this? Only that the films you will get depend on you, on your needs. More than any other art, film is a social art, one that in a sense is created by the audience. Every other art is shaped in its essentials by the artist's taste and talent. In the case of film, the audience's taste and talent will be the decisive factors. Your great mission lies in this collaboration. The destiny of a new art, one that contains great, indeed immeasurable, potential has been placed in your hands. If you desire good films, you will have to learn something about the nature of good film art; you will have to learn to perceive their beauty for that beauty to emerge at all. And, when we have learnt to understand the art of film, we, the audience, with our ability to experience enjoyment, shall have become its maker.

VISIBLE MAN[1]

The discovery of printing has gradually rendered the human face illegible. People have been able to glean so much from reading that they could afford to neglect other forms of communication.

Victor Hugo once wrote that the printed book has taken over the role of medieval cathedrals and has become the repository of the spirit of the people. But the thousands of books fragmented the single spirit of the cathedrals into a myriad different opinions. The printed word smashed the stone to smithereens and broke up the church into a thousand books. In this way, the *visual spirit* was transformed into a legible spirit, and a *visual culture* was changed into a conceptual one. It is universally acknowledged that this change has radically altered the face of life in general.[2] But the degree of change to which the face of the individual human being has been subject – his brow, his eyes, his mouth – has been largely overlooked.

Now another device is at work, giving culture a new turn towards the visual and the human being a new face. It is the cinematograph, a technology for the multiplication and dissemination of the products of the human mind, just like the printing press, and its impact on human culture will not be less momentous.

To say nothing is by no means the same as having nothing to say. Those who remain silent can still be overflowing with things to say, which, however, can be uttered only in forms, pictures, gestures and facial expressions. For the man of visual culture is not like a deaf mute who replaces words with sign language. He does not think in words whose syllables he inscribes in the air with the dots and dashes of the Morse code. His gestures do not signify concepts at all, but are the direct expression of his own non-rational self, and whatever is expressed in his face and his movements arises from a stratum of the soul that can never be brought to the light of day by words. Here, the body becomes unmediated spirit, spirit rendered visible, wordless.

It was a golden age for the visual arts when the painter and the sculptor did more than fill empty space with abstract forms and shapes, and man

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1. See TotF, 'Der sichtbare Mensch' (pp. 40ff).
2. TotF, p. 40. BB adds, 'This of course had its social and economic causes.'

was more than just a formal problem for the artist. Artists were permitted to paint the human soul and spirit without being deemed 'literary', because soul and spirit were not tied to concepts but could utterly be made flesh. This was the happy time when paintings could have an 'idea' and a 'theme' of their own because ideas did not always manifest themselves first in concepts and words and the painter did not face the task of providing concepts and words with a subsequent illustration. The soul that became body without mediation could be painted and sculpted in its primary manifestation. But since the advent of printing the word has become the principal bridge joining human beings to one another. The soul has migrated into the word and become crystallized there. The body, however, has been stripped of soul and emptied.

The expressive surface of our bodies has been reduced to just our face. This is not simply because we cover the other parts of our bodies with clothes. Our face has now come to resemble a clumsy little semaphore of the soul, sticking up in the air and signalling as best it may. Sometimes, our hands help out a little, evoking the melancholy of mutilated limbs. The back of a headless Greek torso always reveals whether the lost face was laughing or weeping – we can still see this clearly. Venus's hips smile as expressively as her face, and casting a veil over her head would not be enough to prevent us from guessing her thoughts and feelings. For in those days man was visible in his entire body. In a culture dominated by words, however, now that the soul has become audible, it has grown almost invisible. This is what the printing press has done.[3]

Well, the situation now is that once again our culture is being given a radically new direction – this time by film. Every evening many millions of people sit and experience human destinies, characters, feelings and moods of every kind with their eyes, and without the need for words. For the intertitles that films still have are insignificant; they are partly the ephemeral rudiments of as yet undeveloped forms and partly they bear a special meaning that does not set out to assist the visual expression.[4] The whole of mankind is now busy relearning the long-forgotten language of gestures and facial expressions. This language is not the substitute for words characteristic of the sign language of the deaf and dumb, but the visual corollary of human souls immediately made flesh. *Man will become visible once again.*

Modern philologists and historians of language have established that the origins of language are to be found in *expressive movements*. By this we mean that when man began to speak he began like a child, by moving his tongue and lips in the same way as his hands and his facial muscles; in other words, uttering sounds was not his original purpose. Initially, the

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3. TotF omits the classical references, stating merely, after 'mutilated limbs', that 'In the epoch of word culture the soul learnt to speak but had grown almost invisible. Such was the effect of the printing press' (p. 41).
4. Edith Bone's translation of TotF replaces 'intertitles' with 'words' (p. 41).

movements of his tongue and lips were no more than spontaneous gestures, on a par with other bodily gestures. The fact that he uttered sounds at the same time was a secondary phenomenon, one subsequently exploited for practical purposes. The immediately visible spirit was then transformed into a mediated audible spirit and much was lost in the process, as in all translation. But the language of gestures is the true mother tongue of mankind.

We are beginning to recall this language and are poised to learn it anew. As yet, it is still clumsy and primitive, and far from able to rival the subtleties of modern verbal art.[5] But because its roots in human nature are older and deeper than the spoken language, and because it is nevertheless fundamentally new, its stammerings and stutterings often articulate ideas that the artists of the word strive in vain to express.

Is it by pure chance that recent decades have witnessed a revival of the art of dance at the same time as film became a universal cultural need? We evidently have many things to say that cannot be expressed in words. Now that the secondary and derivative modes of our culture appear to have ended up in blind alleys of different sorts, we are reverting to primordial forms of expression. The word seems to have taken men by brute force; over-rigid concepts have obliterated much, created an absence which we now feel keenly, and which music alone does not suffice to fill. The culture of words is dematerialized, abstract and over-intellectualized; it degrades the human body to the status of a biological organism. But the new language of gestures that is emerging at present arises from our painful yearning to be human beings with our entire bodies, from top to toe and not merely in our speech. We long to stop dragging our body around like an alien thing that is useful only as a practical set of tools. This new language arises from our yearning for the *embodied human* being who has fallen silent, who has been forgotten and has become invisible.

I will address later the question of why the decorative choreography of dancers shall fail to produce this new language. It is film that will have the ability to raise up and make visible once more human beings who are now buried under mountains of words and concepts. But today this visible man is in an in-between state: no longer there and not yet present. It is a law of nature that any organ that falls into disuse degenerates and atrophies. In the culture of words our bodies were not fully used and have lost their expressiveness in consequence. This is why they have become clumsy, primitive, stupid and barbaric. Have we not often observed that primitive peoples have a stock of gestures that is richer than that of a

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5. TotF here inserts an analogy with music: 'How much of human thought would remain unexpressed if we had no music! ... Although ... human experiences are not rational, conceptual contents, they are nevertheless neither vague nor blurred, but as clear and unequivocal as is music.' (p. 42). The musical analogy replaces the emphasis in *Visible Man* on the art of dance.

highly educated European with a vast vocabulary at his disposal? Once a few years have passed in which the art of film has flourished, our academics will perhaps realize that we should turn to the cinema so as to compile a lexicon of gestures and facial expressions on a par with our dictionaries of words. But the audience will not wait for this new grammar to be put together by academies of the future; they will go to the cinema and learn it themselves.

Much has been said about the modern European's neglect of his body. And the response has been an enthusiastic devotion to sport. However, while sport can make the body healthy and beautiful, it cannot make it eloquent, since it strengthens only the animal qualities. Sport cannot make of the body a sensitive medium of the soul, capable of registering its slightest motion. It is possible to have the most powerful and beautiful of voices, and yet to remain incapable of saying what one means.

This neglect of the body has not only caused its expressive powers to atrophy; it has similarly damaged the soul that the body should express. For we should take note that the soul that is expressed in words is not identical with the soul that finds expression in gestures, any more than music simply says the same thing as literature. We can dredge words up from the deep by the bucketful, but they will be very different from the gestures we can acquire by a similar process, and will bring quite different treasures to the surface. In this instance, however, if *nothing* is drawn from it, the well dries up. For our ability to express ourselves conditions our thoughts and feelings in advance. That is the nature of our mental economy; it is incapable of producing anything that cannot be used. Psychological and logical analyses have demonstrated that our words are not simply the after-images of our thoughts, but forms that determine those thoughts from the outset. Bad writers and dilettantes may have a lot to say about the ineffability of their feelings and thoughts, but it is in reality only very, very seldom that we can conceive of ideas that we are unable to express – and in such cases we do not really know what it is that we have thought. Here, as in every other sphere, the development of the human mind is dialectical. As it grows and expands, the mind grows and extends its powers of self-expression; at the same time, these expanded powers make it possible for the mind to grow in its turn.

The image of the world that is contained within the word gives rise to a seamless, meaningful system. Things that this system does not include are not simply *missing*, just as colours cannot be said to be *missing* from music, even though they are not present. Such a complete and seamless system can also be found in the image of man and the world as an immediate expressive gesture. Human culture can be conceived in the absence of language. Admittedly, it would look quite different from what we have now, but it would not necessarily be inferior. It would at any rate be less abstract and less estranged from the immediate reality of people and things.

Ruth Saint Denis, that greatest of the geniuses of dance, writes in her autobiography that she did not learn to speak until she was five.[6] She had lived a secluded life, alone with her mother, who was completely paralysed for many years and was in consequence especially sensitive to the meaning of movement. They understood each other so completely through signs and gestures that Ruth had no need of language and was very slow in learning to speak. Her body, however, became so eloquent that she became a great and wonderful poet of gesture.

Yet the expressive movements of even the greatest dancer can never amount to more than a concert-hall experience for the few; they remain a segregated form of art, separate from life. Only an applied art can be culture. Not culture in the sense of the beautiful poses of statues in art galleries, but the gait and the everyday gestures of people in the street or at their work. Culture means the penetration of the ordinary material of life by the human spirit, and a visual culture must surely provide us with new and different expressive forms for our daily intercourse with one another. The art of dance cannot do this; it is a task that will be accomplished only by film.

In general, culture appears to be taking the road from the abstract mind to the visible body. When we see a person's movements or his sensitive hands, do we not recognize the spirit of his ancestors? The fathers' thoughts become the nervous sensitivity, the taste and instinct of the children. Conscious knowledge turns into instinctive sensibility: *it is materialized as culture in the body.* The body's expressiveness is always the latest product of a cultural process. This means that however primitive and barbarous the film may be in comparison to literature as it is *today*, it nevertheless represents the future development of culture because it involves the direct transformation of spirit into body.

This path leads in two apparently opposite directions. At first glance, it appears as if the language of physiognomy can only increase and intensify the process of estrangement and alienation that started with the confusion of tongues in the Tower of Babel. This cultural path seems to point towards the isolation of the individual, to loneliness. For, after all, following the confusion of tongues in Babel, communities still survived who shared a common mastery of the words and concepts of their single mother tongue, while shared dictionaries and grammars rescued human beings from the ultimate solitariness of mutual incomprehension. But the language of gestures is far more individual and personal than the language of words. Admittedly, facial expressions have their own vocabulary of 'conventional', standard forms, so much so that we could and indeed should compile a comparative 'gesturology' on the model of comparative linguistics. However, although this language of gestures has its traditions, it is unlike grammar in that it lacks strict and binding rules,

6. Ruth Saint Denis (1879–1968) was a US dancer, choreographer, teacher and lecturer. She was a pioneer in freeing dance from the rigid rules of traditional ballet.

whose neglect would be severely punished in school. This language is still so young that it can be smoothly moulded to fit the particular nature of each individual. It is still at the stage where it can be created by the mind, rather than mind being created by it.[7]

On the other hand, the art of film seems to hold out the promise of redemption from the curse of Babel. The screens of the entire world are now starting to project the *first international language*, the language of gestures and facial expressions. This internationalism has its roots in economics, which always provides the firmest foundation. A film costs so much to produce that it can only make a profit if it has international distribution. The few intertitles required are readily translated from one language into another. But the actors' facial expressions must be comprehensible to the whole world. This sets strict limits to national characteristics. The early years of film-making witnessed a struggle for hegemony between the Anglo-Saxon and the French styles of expression – the laws of the film market had room for only one universal language of gesture, which had to be comprehensible in all of its nuances from San Francisco to Smyrna and to princesses and working girls alike. Today, film already speaks the only shared universal language. Special ethnographic features, national characteristics, may be introduced from time to time as local colour, as the ornamental aspects of a stylized milieu. But they are never more than *psychological motifs*. The gesture that decides the course and the meaning of the action must be comprehensible to the widest variety of peoples, since otherwise the film will not recoup its costs. We may say that the language of gestures has become standardized in film. It follows from this that a kind of standard psychology of the white race has now taken shape and this forms the bedrock of every film story. This explains what up to now has been the primitive, stereotyped nature of these stories; but despite their simplicity, this development is of immense importance. It contains the first living seeds of the standard white man who will one day emerge as the synthesis of the mix of different races and peoples. The cinematograph is a machine that in its own way will create a living, concrete internationalism: *the unique, shared psyche of the white man.* We can go further. By suggesting a uniform ideal of beauty as the universal goal of selective breeding, the film will help to produce a uniform type of the white race. The variety of facial expressions and

7. Balázs returns to this theme in *TotF*, where he revises his earlier call for a 'gesturology' limited to the 'standard white man', and calls instead for a 'scientific' physiognomy that would evade the ideological pitfalls of physiognomy in the form it took under European fascism (where it became a key element in 'scientific' racism). Balázs writes: 'In any case, it is difficult to say which type of face is really representative of any nation or race. Is there an undisputed, generally accepted English face? If so, what is it like? And why should that particular face be the truly typical and not some other face? As there is a science of comparative linguistics, so there should be a comparative science of gesture and mimicry, with research into these in order to find the common fundamental forms of expressive movement. The film offers the means to establish such a science' (p. 81).

bodily gestures has drawn sharper frontiers between peoples than has any customs barrier, but these will gradually be eroded by film. And, when man finally becomes visible, he will always be able to recognize himself, despite the gulf between widely differing languages.[8]

8. Balázs's later transition from the racial essentialism of this passage to a Marxist-inflected cultural determinism that sees cinematic internationalism as the product of film's penetration of international markets, is visible in the replacement in *TotF* of this passage on the 'standard white man' with the following (p. 45): 'The silent film helped people to become physically accustomed to each other and was about to create an international human type. When once a common cause will have united men within the limits of their own race and nation, then the film which makes visible man equally visible to everyone, will greatly aid in levelling physical differences between the various races and nations and will thus be one of the most useful pioneers in the development towards an international universal humanity.' Balázs's newly acquired cultural relativism – a position that allows for differing cultural 'viewpoints' – is further evident in *TotF* in a section on 'Children and savages' (*sic*) where he observes (p. 81): 'The close-up often reveals unusual gestures and mimicry: unusual, that is, from the white man's viewpoint.'

SKETCHES FOR A THEORY OF FILM

THE SUBSTANCE OF FILM

If film is to be an independent art with its own aesthetics, then it will have to distinguish itself from all other art forms. It is the specifics of a phenomenon that constitute its essence and its justification, and the specific nature of a phenomenon is best defined by what makes it different. Thus we shall attempt to differentiate between the art of film and its neighbours and so demonstrate its autonomy.

There is today an overriding tendency to regard film as a spoilt and dissolute child of theatre; film is viewed as a corrupt and disfigured variant, a cheap substitute for theatre that relates to genuine dramatic art much as a photograph relates to an original painting. In both cases, apparently, invented stories are simply presented by actors.

The Single-layered Reality of Film

True enough. But not in the same material. Both sculpture and painting depict human beings and yet they obey entirely different rules that are in turn determined by the different material with which they work. The material of film art, its basic substance, is also quite different from that of theatre.

What we see in the theatre is always a twofold reality: the drama *and* its performance. They appear to us to be independent, to stand in a free relationship to each other, as two different entities. The director of the play is given a completed drama, the stage actor receives a ready-made part. Their sole task is to emphasize the fixed, *pre-existing* meaning and to present it vividly. This means that the audience retains the possibility of critical scrutiny. For we can *hear* from the author's words what he means to say and we can *see* whether the director and the actors are presenting them accurately or not. The latter are merely the interpreters of a text to which we have access in the original – through their performance. In short, the material of the theatre has two layers.

The situation with film is different. We are unable to detect an independent play behind what we see on the screen, something that we might observe and judge independently. In a film the audience has no opportunity of judging whether the director or actors have faithfully reproduced the work of a writer or have distorted his meaning, for it is *their* work alone that the audience perceives. Whatever pleases us is their doing, and they are likewise responsible for everything that arouses our displeasure.

Film-makers as Creators

This explains why film directors are far more famous than their colleagues in the theatre. In contrast, who so much as notices the name of the author of a film (if indeed his name is even mentioned)? And a lot more fuss is made about 'film stars' than the stars of the stage. Is this an injustice to be explained only by the power of advertising? No. Even the most potent advertisement can only have a sustained effect if it grounds itself in a pre-existing interest. The fact is that the director and the actors are the true authors of the film.

When an actor utters a sentence on stage and puts on a particular facial expression, we learn what he wants to say from his words alone, while his expression is simply a kind of accompaniment. If this accompaniment rings false, this has a jarring effect upon us, above all because we are able to judge it to be false. (For it is his words that convey his meaning.)

In a film the words give us nothing to hang onto. We learn everything from the play of gestures since this is now not an accompaniment, not form and expression, but the film's *sole content*.

Needless to say, even in film we can see if the acting is bad. But bad acting here has a different meaning. It is not the false interpretation of a pre-existing character but a mistaken piece of characterization as a result of which a character fails to emerge. It is a poorly executed creative act. The mistakes do not arise from contradicting an underlying text; they are self-contradictions in the action. Even the theatre is not unfamiliar with the situation in which an actor misunderstands his part and yet falsifies his role in a successful, coherent manner. But if a film actor succeeds in doing the same thing we are not in a position to realize that a falsification has taken place. This is because in film the basic material, its poetic substance, is the visible gesture. It is out of such gestures that film is constructed.

Film and Literature

Directors and actors (who relate to one another in quite different ways in film and in the theatre) can best be compared to improvisers who have been given an idea, or perhaps a brief content summary, but who then *compose the text for themselves*. For a film text consists of its texture, of that language of images in which every group, every gesture, every perspective, every

lighting set-up has the task of conveying the poetic mood and beauty that are normally to be discovered in the words of an author. Even in a novella or poem the bare content is not the point. A writer's success depends on the power and subtlety of his writing. The artistic nature of film resides in the power and subtlety of its images and its gestural language. *This explains why film has nothing in common with literature.*

Film and Story

This is a topic I must treat at some length because it is at the root of all the misunderstandings and prejudices that render the majority of people with a literary background incapable of appreciating the art in film. Focusing exclusively on the story content, they judge it to be simplistic and crude, but ignore the way the story is shaped visually. A critic may display a highly sophisticated sensibility when it comes to books, but might well dismiss Griffith's *Way Down East* as tasteless, sentimental rubbish because it contains nothing more than a story about a girl who is seduced and abandoned and who therefore feels miserable and wretched. In the end, however, even Faust's Gretchen can be regarded as just such a seduced and abandoned girl. In both cases what matters is not the simple storyline, but the text. In *Faust* the words of a great poet have transformed a straightforward, even primitive, story, and in the film the same thing is achieved by Lillian Gish's shattering play of expressions and by the way in which, under Griffith's masterly direction, every scene culminates in a final shot of her face.

A man confesses his love to a woman: an event that can be found in the great masterpieces of literature as well as the trashiest novels. So how do they differ? Simply in the way the scene is described and what the man in question says to the woman. Now, when it comes to film, what counts are equally the images the director uses to present the scene and what the actors' faces tell us. This is where we must look for the art of a film and not in the abstract 'facts' of an abstract content.

A good film does not have 'content' as such. It is 'kernel and shell in one'.[1] It no more has content than does a painting, a piece of music or indeed – a facial expression. Film is a *surface art* and in it whatever is inside is outside. Nevertheless – and this is its fundamental difference from painting – it is a temporal art of movement and organic continuity, which in turn produce a convincing psychology or a false one, a clear or a confused meaning. This psychology and this meaning, however, are not a 'deeper meaning', residing in some 'idea' or other; they dwell entirely on the surface, as phenomena accessible to sensory perception.

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1. Balázs is quoting Goethe's poem 'True Enough: To the Physicist', where the words refer not to art of any kind but to nature itself. See Goethe. J.W. 1983, *The Collected Works*, Vol. 1 *Selected Poems*, ed. C. Middleton. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 237.

This is in fact the source of that primitive quality of the storyline in film which literary people find so infuriating. What we have of course to abandon here is any idea of pure intellectual values as well as conflicts of the soul that are fought out only in terms of ideas. In exchange, we are enabled to see things that cannot be conceived intellectually or grasped by concepts. And we are able to *see* them – an experience in itself. Painting likewise does not convey ideas to us or subtle psychological problems and is not a whit the worse for it. Nor is painting thought to be inferior simply because it only depicts a single scene.

Parallel Stories and Deeper Meaning

Even so, film seems not to want to dispense entirely with that quality of literary 'depth' which is to be found in a third, intellectual dimension: a dimension in which, *behind* the action visible on the surface, another, hidden, *meaningful action* can be guessed at. This explains the recent fashion for films with parallel plots in which two or more stories run side by side – stories from different historical periods or different social strata, with strands that make use of the same characters and types, played by the same actors. The similarity of the events depicted, the parallelism of separate lives, acquires through repetition the force of a law, a common meaning, and seems designed therefore to lay bare a deeper meaning for the entirety of the film's action.

Such attempts to create films with a world view do not seem a futile endeavour. Since the film is two-dimensional, with nothing 'behind' the image surface, and no 'hidden' meaning, it sets out to achieve the doubling of narrative depth that is created in literature through sequential organization by dissolving two storylines into two juxtaposed narratives. Since the image, unlike the word, cannot be 'looked through', the second narrative strand must also be brought to the surface and its parallel nature made visible there. It is in similarity that the law resides and the law in turn contains the deeper meaning which, like the *single* root of many branches, lies buried beneath the surface. The film has no philosophical words with which to summon this meaning forth. Instead, meaning is revealed at the points of intersection between different destinies.

Needless to say – and this risk is so great that up to now almost every film that has tried it has fallen into this trap – the parallel story should not simply amount to a repetition in a different costume or else to an allegory. For an allegory is simply an illustration, something the film is least in need of. As allegory, every story loses the weight of reality. It becomes the symbol of another story and lacks a reality of its own. It repeats meaning, rather than having meaning repeat itself in events from a new story: a parallel story that should not be similar, but *related*; it should present the other side of the same action. Unless, that is, this second story is to evoke a belief in metempsychosis, or a mystical belief in the hidden relatedness of all human destinies. Why has no one yet made any *déjà vu* films? We

have all had the strange experience, an experience whose purely visual nature exposes the deepest layers of the soul, in which a scene that has never taken place suddenly appears uncannily familiar to us. Why has no one ever made a film making use of such an event as a *leitmoti* in which the spectre of one event seems to shine through another, making the entire surrounding world transparent?

On Visual Continuity

In films that have been conceived in literary terms, the images become nothing more than a dense series of moving illustrations to a text communicated in the intertitles. Every important external and internal event is conveyed in the titles. Only after we have seen these do we see the events themselves, and even then the images do nothing to develop the action *through their own medium*. Such films are bad since they contain nothing that could be expressed only in film. Yet the justification of every art consists in its being an irreplaceable mode of expression.

Even when the directing and acting are excellent the images in such literary films have something lifeless and disjointed about them, since they lack *visual continuity*. A story conceived in words will skip many elements that cannot be omitted in the world of images. Words, concepts and thoughts are timeless. The image, however, lives only in the concrete present. Words contain memories; we can use them to refer to what is absent. An image speaks only for itself. This is why film calls for a seamless continuity of individual visual elements, particularly in the representation of emotional developments. The film must in fact be composed of the unadulterated material of pure visuality. Every attempt to bridge gaps in meaning by literary means strikes the viewer like an icy blast.

To achieve this continuity demands many metres of film. This is why a film that depicts an emotional development is restricted to a simple storyline. Given the unfortunate prohibition on films that exceed 2200 metres in length and on screenings in excess of an hour and a half, attempts made with the best of intentions to adapt some of the most wonderful stories have come to grief. The time and the film stock available were simply too limited to provide the plethora of motifs with the necessary visual continuity. We can see this from the sorry series of failed Dostoevsky adaptations. This may well mean that the current limits on performance length will ultimately be relaxed and that six-act films lasting an hour and a half will be replaced by three-act films whose two-and-a-half hour screening time will for the first time give film art the space in which to unfold. Of course, as with almost everything to do with film, all this depends on economic and social factors. Even the poorest of cinema-goers will find it easier to find double the money for a double bill than double the time within the inescapable constraints of a ten-hour working day. This cripples both art and human existence. But perhaps one day things will be different?

Atmosphere

Atmosphere is to be sure the soul of every art. It is the air and the aroma that pervade every work of art, and that lend distinctiveness to a medium and a world. This atmosphere is like the nebulous primal matter that condenses into individual shapes. It is the substance common to the most disparate works, the ultimate reality of every art. Once atmosphere is present, specific defects in individual works cannot do fundamental damage. The question of the 'origins' of this special atmosphere is thus always the question of the deep sources of every art.

There are for example American films whose plots are simple-minded and vacuous, and whose acting is insignificant (albeit potentially redeemed by the lyricism of their gestural language and of the actors' play of facial expressions). And yet these films grip us from start to finish. This is the effect of their living atmosphere, the dense, aromatic fluidity they possess of a living life that only the very greatest writers can manage on rare occasions to convey in words. We do say of some writers such things as 'When Flaubert describes a house you can really smell the rooms' or 'It makes your mouth water to read about Gogol's peasants eating.' And, lo and behold, every halfway decent American director knows how to create an atmosphere so vivid that you feel you can almost smell and taste it. The story *as a whole* may be simple-minded and may seem fake and kitschy. But its *individual moments* are so warm and full of life 'that you can really smell them'. *Why* the hero acts as he does often makes no sense at all, but *how* he acts has all the warmth of life itself. The hero's fate is devoid of meaning, but the individual moments of his story are vividly brought to life.

Take the example of one otherwise highly insignificant film about the unhappy love of a cripple. At one point, the lame bridegroom escorts his bride to the fair, and this is followed by an entire sequence of brief and ephemeral scenes that recreate the fair's teeming, animal vitality. An ebb and flow of images embody this vitality, overwhelming and crushing the poor cripple. We see a flood of details of material life that rain down on the enfeebled man, and end up killing him. It is the atmosphere the film creates that ends up stifling him.

In another scene, the girl goes to visit her intended to tell him that she cannot go through with the marriage. But the house has already been decorated for the wedding. As the wreaths and bouquets, the presents and the hundred and one little *material* signs of their love are displayed one after another, a dense fog of goodwill begins to swirl around the girl, and she loses her bearings. Where the many little scenes at the fair condensed into a fluid ebb and flow of life through which the crippled hero was unable to wade, in this scene we feel the soul lose its capacity to prevail against the sheer weight of things and facts that accrue around the wedding.

The Meaning of Visible Things

The *great importance of visible objects* is what creates the powerful atmosphere that we find in this film. In poetry, objects do not have this significance, for poetry is more attuned to abstract meaning. This is why no poetry can create this specific atmosphere, this substantial 'being' (note the trusty old verb!) of matter.

There is, however, also another reason. In the speaking world, silent objects are much more lifeless and insignificant than human beings. They acquire only a second- or third-grade life, and that only in rare moments of heightened sensitivity among the human beings who observe them. In the theatre there is a difference of degree between human individuals, who speak, and things, which are silent. The two live in different dimensions. In film, however, this difference of degree vanishes; objects are not degraded or diminished in this way, but *share with human beings a quality of silence* that makes the two almost homogeneous, and hence enhances the mute object's vitality and significance. Since it does not speak less than human beings, it says just as much. That is the riddle of the special atmosphere of film that is beyond the scope of literary endeavour.

Literary Adaptation

The essential difference between film and literature can be seen most clearly when a good novel or a good play is adapted for film. When scrutinized from within the apparatus of cinema, works of literature acquire the transparency of X-ray images. What survives on screen is the bare bones of the original storyline. What vanishes is the lovely flesh of profound ideas, the tender skin of lyrical tones. Of these beautiful charms, nothing remains but a naked skeleton, something that is no longer literature and not yet film, but simply a 'content' that does not yet embody the 'essence' of either art form. A skeleton like this needs a completely different covering of flesh, a different epidermis, if it is to acquire a visible, living shape in film.

Needless to say, there are writers who have a particularly visual imagination, and whose books seem to be made for film. Dickens, for example. Every page, even when read, provides a visual image. Nevertheless, to my knowledge no one has succeeded in making a good Dickens film, whereas I have already seen a number of bad Dickens films. They have been bad – paradoxical as it may sound, and despite competent direction and good acting – because Dickens's imagination is too vivid. To film an entire Dickens novel is technically impossible. No film has space for the sheer abundance of his vision. His works then must needs be 'cut'. This is easily achieved in other novels with a 'content' that is easily separable from their images, a scaffolding on which individual scenes are loosely suspended,. The images in a Dickens novel, in contrast, – and this

becomes very clear in the course of filming – are the living fabric of a *single* organism. If one is excised, the other is deprived of life, it withers away. A storyline that illustrates an idea can be shortened, because definitions can be made pithier and pithier. *But an image cannot be shortened.* The entire picture would have to be painted anew. Hence the very quality that makes Dickens so suitable for adaptation – his vivid imagination – is what ends up rendering him unsuitable. He would have had to make the films himself; for his works already have the inner structure of the substance of film.

Linguistic Gesture and the Language of Gestures

Can we interpret expressive movement and the visual in general as the special province of film? After all, the stage actor also speaks with his whole body and stage decor likewise exists to be looked at.

But the facial expressions and other gestures of a speaking actor are different. They express only what's left over. *Whatever has to be said*, but won't go into words, is added with the aid of the actor's facial muscles and hands.

In film, however, the play of facial expressions is not an optional extra, and this distinction means not only that gestures in film are more explicit and detailed, but that they operate on an entirely different plane. For the speaker brings to light a different stratum of the soul from the one evoked by, say, the musician or dancer. Dependent as he is on language, the gestures that accompany his words spring from the same source as them. Optically, they may seem similar to a dancer's, but they are informed by a different spirit. A speaker's gestures have the same emotional content as his words, for the dimensions of the soul cannot be mixed. It is merely that they refer to words as yet unborn.

A dancer's gestures, however, have their origins elsewhere and they have a different meaning. They are the characteristic expression of a characteristic human being and hence the characteristic material of a characteristic form of art. They are as unrelated to the gestures of a speaker as they are to his words.

I would like to clarify this with an illustration. Every language has a musical component and every word its own melody. But the music of language, although similar acoustically to actual music, possesses no inner musicality. It has the atmosphere of concepts and helps to enhance the process of rational discrimination. However, music is not just an acoustic matter; it is a separate sphere of the soul. And, indeed, facial expressions and gestures are themselves no mere optical matter.

I was speaking of dancers. But the film actor does not dance. Nevertheless, he is not dependent on words and plays no part in the rational world of concepts. There appears to be a third realm between the speaker's world of gestures and the decorative expressive movements of

the dancer, and this realm has its own form of interiority. The *gestural language* of film is as far removed from the *linguistic gestures* of theatre as it is from dance.

Visible Speech

And yet the film actor speaks, exactly as does the stage actor. There is no difference in his gestures. We just do not hear him; but we *see* him speak. That's where the great difference lies. In the theatre, where we concentrate above all on the words, we do not notice speech as expressive movement, as an expressive play of the mouth or the entire face. For the most part, indeed, there is in theatre nothing of this kind to attend to. What counts there is the sound of the words, and mouth movements are merely the means to an expression; they have no meaning of their own.

In film, however, speaking becomes immediate, visual, facial expression. To *see* speech is to learn quite different things from just hearing the words. The speaking mouth often shows more than actual words can convey.

This explains why we can understand American, French or Norwegian actors equally well in film. We know what is meant when an actor grinds out words between clenched teeth or slurs them when he is drunk or spits them out contemptuously or utters them like barbs through pursed lips. Even when the words are in Chinese, we understand these linguistic gestures.

But the moment we see a mouth shaping words, and become aware therefore of an acoustic dimension, then the performance loses its effect; for this is when we notice that we haven't heard the actor's words, and we come to see him as a deaf mute straining grotesquely to make himself understood. A good film actor thus speaks quite differently from a good stage actor. He speaks plainly to our eyes, not our ears. These two modes of plain speech seem to be irreconcilable. Just how grotesquely the art of visible speech differs from the acoustic can clearly be seen when excellent film actors produce the most ridiculous nonsense as fill-in text on set. Watching the same sequence on film, on the other hand, may be a deeply moving experience.

The Silent Art and the Art of Silence

Silence in pantomime is different. Pantomime is silent not just to the ear but also for the eye. Not a mute art, but the art of muteness: the dreamland of silence. Film, however, is merely soundless. Unlike music, which despite its sound comes from the world of silence, film does not reveal to us the soul of silence.

When a pantomime is shown in a film the distinction becomes clear. The audience sits motionless around a central stage where the pantomime dancers wildly gyrate. Yet it is the dancers who appear more detached from life and seemingly more rigid than a motionless audience, which, for all its immobility, does form part of our own world.

Only a bad director will confuse film with the pantomime and make his characters remain too silent. For silence is not just a matter of acoustics but a very concise and striking form of expression for the eye, one that always has a special significance at particular moments in film. Thus speaking belongs among the most powerful means of expressive performance that film possesses.

There is a film (*Vanina*)[2] in which Asta Nielsen wants to help her lover to escape from prison. She visits him there, the doors stand open, but only briefly. There is no time to be lost. But her lover lies on the ground overwhelmed by apathy, refusing to move. Nielsen calls to him, once, twice. He still fails to move. She then starts to speak rapidly, urgently. We do not know what she says. Evidently, she keeps repeating the same thing: he should make haste, time is slipping away. But it is the act of speaking that contains a tremulous anxiety, a delirious despair that could never be expressed in audible words. Her speech is a *sight*, as much as if she were tearing her hair out or scratching her face until it bled. She speaks for a long time. Had we heard the words, they would have bored us. Yet her gestures thrill us ever more.

The Screenplay

All this leads us to conclude that the screenplay that forms the basis of the film must never be the product of the literary imagination. It calls for a very special, naively concrete imagination that has no need of further translation into the visual. It must be the product of the director's own vision. In general, a film can really succeed only if the director 'writes' it himself and composes it from his specific material. In the same way, a musician can never compose something that has been conceived by a writer. His muses are the tonal resources of his instruments, their material and techniques. Much as a block of granite contained everything that Michelangelo needed, so too for the director the play of black and white shadows contains all the elements he must extract in the creation of his film. This suggests why he will never be satisfied with even the best screenplay. It will never contain the most essential element, because despite every effort it never contains more than words. It is, in contrast, in the material of film that the director must express his vision.

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2. *Vanina* (*Galgenhochzeit*) or *The Wedding under the Gallows* (1922), d. Arthur von Gerlach, was based on *Vanina Vanini*, a story by Stendhal. In addition to Asta Nielsen, it featured Paul Wegener and Paul Hartmann. See *TotF*, p. 69.

Type and Physiognomy

Motto: For no animal has ever existed that
had the shape of one creature and the habit of another,
but each creature has its own body and its own meaning.
Thus every body necessarily determines its nature.
In the same way, everyone acquainted
with animals judges each according to its shape.
If this is true, as indeed it is eternally true,
then such a thing as physiognomy must exist.
Aristotle in Goethe's 'Physiognomical Fragments'[1]

The film director's creativity starts with his choice of actors. This gives his figures their decisive, essential substance. In the theatre the director acquires his figures and characters ready-made in the shape of the play's text and all that remains is for him to go in search of *a performer* who fits the image corresponding to the words. On the stage the figures characterize themselves and *one another* by their words.

In film what determines character from the very first moment on is his or her *appearance*. The director's task is not to find a 'performer', but the character itself, and it is the director who creates the film's figures through his selection. As he pictures them to himself, so they will appear to the public, which has no opportunity to make comparisons or critically scrutinize his choice.

Since the film actor's outward appearance has to present both racial and individual character, the director's task will be made easier if he chooses an actor who has no need to act the character of his race, since he already possesses this and so can concentrate his efforts on the personal details of a particular role. He will have no need to exaggerate and to acquire a series of stereotypical gestures that are slightly off-key, much like a slightly ill-fitting wig. The gestures called for all come naturally, and so his acting has all the weight of habitual existence.

True theatre actors are accustomed to representing the most varied characters, and can only rarely be used in film, since film is far less tolerant of the mask than is the theatre (close-ups unmask every sign of

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1. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'Von der Physiognomik überhaupt', *Die Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche*, Vol. 17, ed. Ernst Beutler, Zurich, 1952, p. 447.

fakery!). And the majority of actors have only one 'actor's face'. They are always the same type and can be easily recognized through every mask, no matter how artful, and in every costume, like an officer in mufti.

The Perils of Succinctness

At the same time, it is important not to let any particular figure be too sharply typified lest his mere appearance 'at first sight' be enough to endow him with too inflexible or wooden a character. His anatomy must leave some scope for physiognomical interpretation, since otherwise, clad in the rigid armour of a unique and immobile character, he will be incapable of representing outward and inner transformations. (This latter is a common error among American directors, who often place especial emphasis on the selection of sharply defined types.)

On the other hand, such frozen characters can certainly have a charm of their own where a film aims at grotesque or comic effect.

Clothes and Other Symbols

It is not easy to strike a balance between the typical and the individual and to attempt to do so is one of the director's most ticklish tasks. For even clothes play a major part in defining each character. In film we judge exclusively by external appearance and because we have no words to enlighten us, every character must wear the symbols of his own nature; otherwise we cannot grasp the meaning of his actions. Since the same action may spring from both good and bad motives, we must be able to divine intentions from external appearance. In the pantomimes of old, the costumes of Pagliacci, Pantalone or Harlequin were of critical importance, as were masks in the much older theatrical traditions of the Japanese or Greeks. The same applies to film costume; its function may be more discreet, but it still defines character right from the outset.

In a naturalist milieu, this use of costume, admittedly, often appears like a grotesque prejudice. Certainly, much fun is made of the turned-up coat collar that typifies a criminal or the cigarette in a woman's mouth that signals her depravity. But we are not always right to ridicule. Every art makes use of such symbols. They frequently form part of unconscious traditions and customs of a very general nature, such as the use of black for mourning and white as a symbol of innocence. We should not be overly concerned by what are in fact no more than shorthand indicators of general information, rather than attempts at characterization.

A highly typified external appearance may, however, signify far more than membership of a particular caste. In film especially it must be made to serve as the direct expression of an individual character. As participants in an internalized verbal culture, we are reluctant to endow external appearances with such importance. But when an actor has no lines to

speak, his entire body becomes a homogeneous expressive space and every crease in his clothes takes on the same expressive significance as a wrinkle in his face. We instinctively judge him by his appearance, whether the director has intended this or not.

Goethe on Film

Perhaps I may be permitted to reprint a few lines from Goethe's *Contributions to Lavater's Physiognomical Fragments*, since he had many outstanding things to say on our topic.

> 'What is the human exterior? Certainly not a man's naked body or involuntary gestures that point to his inner energies and their actions! Status, habit, possessions, clothing – all these modify and conceal him. To penetrate all these cloaks and arrive at his innermost nature, to discover fixed points that would enable us to infer his essence even among all these factors, appears extremely difficult, almost impossible. Nevertheless, be of good cheer! The things surrounding a person, do not simply impinge on him; he also reacts to them, and, while letting himself be modified, he modifies his surroundings. A person's clothes and belongings grant us reliable knowledge as to his character. Nature shapes man, he alters it, and this process of alteration is itself natural; a man finding he has been set down in this great wide world builds himself a little hedge or wall within it, and furnishes it in his own image.'[2]

Nothing needs adding to this. Except to say that the physiognomy of a face can be varied at any moment by the play of expressions, which converts the general type into a particular character. The physiognomy of clothing and of the immediate environment is not so flexible. It calls for a very special care, a special tact (qualities that, unfortunately, are in short supply) to imprint on this stable background only those features that will not conflict with the living movement of gestures.

On Beauty

A film star has to be beautiful. This requirement, one that is never made of stage actors in so absolute and unqualified a manner, is a further feature of film that fills our writers and aesthetes with mistrust. For it demonstrates, they believe, that the cinema has no interest in the human soul and spirit, it cares nothing for significant or genuine art. What matters is the purely external, the emptily decorative.

'Be of good cheer!' says Goethe. In film there is no such thing as the *'purely'* external or 'empty' decoration. In film, everything internal becomes visible in something external; it follows that *everything external testifies to an internal reality.* This includes beauty.

2. 'Von der Physiognomik überhaupt', 439.

In film the beauty of the human face functions as physiognomical expression. Anatomical form functions as human expression. Kant's statement that 'beauty is the symbol of morality'[3] is made reality in the film. Where nothing but the eye is the judge, the beautiful stands witness. The hero is outwardly beautiful because he is inwardly beautiful as well. (Particularly uncanny, by the same token, are the effects of the Satanic beauty of evil, as well as of the Antichrist, who appears in godlike form.)

Great beauty is however also a decorative thing, an ornament in itself that can sometimes lead a life almost independent of the person who possesses it. This life is not to be found in movement. 'Je hais le mouvement, qui déplace les lignes,' as Baudelaire puts it in *La Beauté*.[4] And there are beauties (American films frequently suffer from this) whose forms drain facial expressions of meaning. The anatomy of the face is so luminous as to render its physiognomy almost invisible. It wears its beauty like an impenetrable mask. And it is likewise true that the very greatest cinema actresses, such as Asta Nielsen or Pola Negri, are anything but beautiful. In respect of beauty too, in sum, the choice of type is a tricky business.

One's Own Face

No, it is not true that our *entire* face is our own. Simply looking is not enough for us to distinguish those aspects of our face that are the common property of our family, race and class. And yet this is one of the most interesting and psychologically significant questions: how much is type and how much individuality, how much is race and how much the human personality? Many a work of literature is devoted to exploring the different proportions of each. But these proportions are far more readily visible and comprehensible in human gestures and physiognomy than in words, however subtle. In this respect film has a mission that transcends the realm of art and can provide invaluable material for both anthropology and psychology.

Alien Races

The capacity of film to show how changes in facial expressions arise from the nature not of the individual but of the race explains why films with people from other races, – Negroes, Chinese, American Indians and Eskimos – are so fascinating. Certain essential physiognomical expressions that we do not notice in our own kind strike us with fresh force when we see them in foreign races. On the other hand, the strangest and most uncanny facial expressions are those that we do not understand at first because we have never seen their like before.

3. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, §59.
4. 'I loathe all movement that displaces line,' C. Baudelaire, 1952. *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 1952. trans. R Campbell. New York: Pantheon.

I remember the indelible impression once made on me by the face of one American Indian actress. In despair, she mourned her dead child, but she kept on smiling. This smile, by the time I had realized – and it did not take long – that it was the expression of her grief, struck me with the intensity of a spontaneous gesture that was neither traditional nor schematic. It had ceased to be the sign and symbol of grief, but had become instead its sudden, naked manifestation.

But the greatest mystery here is this: how do we succeed in understanding a *facial expression* that *we have never seen before?* Like the other mysteries of physiognomy, this is one that we shall never be able to fathom as long as we remain within the bounds of a single system of physiognomy and performance. Just as philology can discover the laws of language only by recourse to comparative linguistics, so too we shall have to make use of film as the material source for a new field of comparative physiognomy.

Soul and Destiny

Both soul and destiny can be seen in the human face. In this visible relationship, in this interplay of facial expressions, we witness a struggle between the type and the personality, between inherited and acquired characteristics, between fate and the individual will, the 'id' and the 'ego'. The deepest secrets of the inner life are revealed here and to see them is as exciting as the vivisection of a heartbeat.

It is here that the image also acquires an element of depth. For at first sight a face can look different from what it is in reality. What we first see is the type. But like a translucent mask, type can gradually reveal a hidden and very different face. After all, there are wicked individuals of noble race, and vice versa. And a face discloses to us – as in a field of battle – the struggle of a human soul with its destiny, and this in a form that no literature can equal.

Resemblance and the Doppelgänger

Resemblance is the only means we ever have of discerning subtle, profound differences. Hence the attraction of depicting different characters of very similar appearance: siblings, for instance. For here we see precisely where the soul parts company with nature and individuality begins. What a challenge for an actor to play both roles! The film has great scope here technically for *Doppelgänger* poetry, one of the most important literary motifs which, through film, acquires a thrilling reality thanks to the *visible* resemblance between the two characters. No literature can compete with this.

The allure of the *Doppelgänger* motif derives from the possibility it presents of living the 'different life' of an other. The fact that one can live only *one* life at a time is a grave injustice. Imprisoned in my self, I shall

never learn how others gaze into others' eyes, how others feel when they are kissed. It is in vain that I go among strangers; for I always take myself as company and every expression of an other is directed only at me. If only I could be mistaken for someone else!

Herein lies the indescribable attraction of anonymously living the life of an other, a *Doppelgänger*. It is an opportunity for the deepest psychological insight: how to be someone else and still be myself? The answer will reveal just how much of a person's outward appearance and even his face is really *just a reflection* of his environment that has become attached to him in crystalline form, like hoar frost in the atmosphere. This is the specifically cinematic aspect of the *Doppelgänger*: as in a silhouette, it separates out the physiognomy of the most individual, innermost character from its contingent atmosphere.

THE PLAY OF FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

There was once a French film in which Suzanne Desprès played the lead even though she made no contribution to the 'plot'. The film went like this. In a short overture we see a beggar woman sitting with her dying child, beseeching fate to take pity. Death appears and tells the mother: 'I shall show you the predestined life of your child. Watch it and if you still want her to live, then so be it.' Then the actual film unfolds, the fate of the child, a mundane, insignificant story. But the mother, Suzanne Desprès, watches. In the left-hand corner of the film we see her face as she is watching the film, like us, accompanying the adventures of her child with the play of her facial expressions. We watch for an hour and a half as hope, fear, joy, emotion, sadness, courage, the white heat of conviction and the blackness of despair pass across her face. The film's real drama, its essential content, is played out on her face. The 'story' was only the pretext.

And the audience, a very primitive audience, did not tire of this play of facial expressions; it watched them for an hour and a half. Gaumont knew what it was doing to pay Suzanne Desprès such a high fee for her role. For the audience and the film business had already discovered something that our aesthetes and literati have not yet noticed. This is that *what matters in film is not the storyline but the lyrical element.*

The Narrative of Feelings

The play of expressions expresses feelings; in other words it is lyrical. It is a form of lyricism that is incomparably richer and full of nuance than literary works of whatever kind. Facial expressions are vastly more numerous than words! And looks can express every shade of feeling far more precisely than a description! And how much more personal is the expression of a face than words that others too may use! And how much more concrete and unambiguous is physiognomy than concepts, which are always abstract and general!

It is here that we see the poetry of film at its most authentic and profound. A person who judges a film by its storyline seems to me to resemble someone who says of a love poem: 'What's so special about this poem? She is beautiful and he loves her!' Films, however wonderful, frequently have little more to say. But they say it in a way that poetry cannot match.

There are two particular reasons for this. One is that the meaning of words is in part more time-bound than facial expressions; the other is that since words are uttered in sequence, no simultaneous harmony, no meaningful chords can arise. I shall explain this further.

There is a film in which Asta Nielsen is looking out of the window and sees someone coming. A mortal fear, a petrified horror, appears on her face. But she gradually realizes that she is mistaken and that the man who is approaching, far from spelling disaster, is the answer to her prayers. The expression of horror on her face is gradually modulated through the entire scale of feelings from hesitant doubt, anxious hope and cautious joy, right through to exultant happiness. We watch her face in close up for some twenty metres of film. We see every hint of expression around her eyes and mouth and watch them relax one by one and slowly change. For minutes on end we witness the organic *development of her feelings*, and nothing beyond.

Such an emotional development cannot be depicted in words, however poetic. Every word signifies a separate stage, a process that gives rise to a staccato of isolated snapshots of the feelings. The fact is that one word has to have come to an end before another one can begin. *But a facial expression need not have been completed before another one starts to infiltrate it* and gradually displace it entirely. In the *legato* of visual continuity past and future expressions merge into one another and display not just the individual states of the soul but also the mysterious process of development itself. This narrative of the feelings enables film to give us something unique.

The Chords of the Emotions [1]

In general, facial expressions are more 'polyphonic' than language. The succession of words resembles the successive notes of a melody. But a face can display the most varied emotions *simultaneously*, like a chord, and the relationships between these different emotions is what creates the rich amalgam of harmonies and modulations. These are the chords of feeling whose essence is in fact their simultaneity. Such simultaneity cannot be expressed in words.

Pola Negri once acted Carmen.[2] She flirted with the truculent José and her face expressed joy and submissiveness at the same time, since she finds some pleasure in having to humble herself a little. But at the moment when José falls at her feet and she sees his weakness and helplessness, the look on her face becomes *superior* and *sad* at the same time. Moreover, she really has just one look in which these different

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1. Similar points are made using different examples in *TotF* under the heading 'Polyphonic Play of Features' (pp. 64ff).
2. *Carmen* (*Gypsy Blood*, 1918), d. Ernst Lubitsch, was a film version not of Bizet's opera but of the story by Prosper Mérimée that had inspired it.

elements cannot be separated out; each expression rubs off on the other. It points to the painful disappointment she feels at realizing that she is the stronger. The woman has lost the battle because she has emerged as victor. But by formulating what happens in words, we just cause a *single* expression to crumble. And as soon as we begin to speak, we somehow say something different.

Or think of the death scene when José stabs her! She strokes her murderer's arms with a strangely tender mournfulness. This gesture tells us that she has long since ceased to love him. But she understands only too well why he stabbed her. It is as if she were to say, 'Don't be angry with me. We are all the wretched, harassed slaves of love. I have destroyed you, you have killed me. Who could have helped it? Now we shall finally have some peace….' But expanded into words and sentences, it all becomes banal, while as an expression, a look, it had bottomless depths.

The Tempo of the Emotions[3]

In *Way Down East*,[4] Lilian Gish plays a trusting girl who has been seduced. When the man tells her that he has deceived her and made a fool of her, she cannot believe her ears. She knows what he says is true, but wants to believe that he is just joking. And for five whole minutes she laughs and cries by turns, at least a dozen times.

We would need many printed pages to describe the storms that pass over this tiny, pale face. Reading them would also take up much time. But the nature of these feelings lies precisely in the crazy rapidity with which they succeed one another. The effect of this play of facial expressions lies *in its ability to replicate the original tempo of her feelings*.

That is something that words are incapable of. The description of a feeling always lasts longer than the time taken by the feeling itself. The rhythm of our inner turbulence will inevitably be lost in every literary narrative.

The Visible Possibilities and the Morality of Physiognomy

In *Fortune's Fool*[5] Emil Jannings plays the part of the worst kind of profiteer. Every gesture, every facial expression shows him to be a bloodsucker, a remorseless shark. And yet! Somehow or other he remains

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3. In a section on the 'tempo of mimicry' (*TotF*, pp. 72ff), Balázs later returns to *Way Down East*. Though he bemoans the loss of the virtuosity of silent performance, he remains optimistic about the possibility of replicating this in sound film. He writes (p. 73): 'There is no technical obstacle to such scenes in a sound film. But the sound films of today seem to have torn the strings from their own instruments. In their primitive banality they do not know and do not wish to know the possibilities of their own medium and squander the rich heritage of the silent film.'

4. *Way Down East* (1920), d. D.W. Griffith.

5. Also known as *All for Money* (*Alles für Geld*, 1923), d. Reinhold Schünzel.

a sympathetic character. There is something about his face that we can't help liking. It is his naivety, something childlike, that persists as a covert decency *at the same time* as his dirty looks. It makes us believe that he is capable of kindness. At the end of the film, this better self becomes visible. But the fact that we can see these signs of goodness from the very outset, even in his nastiest expressions, is a miracle of polyphonic physiognomy.

A good film actor never presents us with surprises. Since film permits of no psychological explanations, the possibility of a change in personality must be plainly written in an actor's face from the outset. What is exciting is to discover a hidden quality, in the corner of the mouth, for example, and to see how from this germ the entire new human being grows and spreads over his entire face. Hebbel's remark, 'Whatever a man is capable of becoming, he already is,' can and indeed must become physiognomical reality in the cinema.

The fact that a deeper face is both visible and hidden also provides a clue to the moral significance of physiognomy. For even in film a simple distinction between good people and bad is not enough. In literature the hidden moral qualities of a man can only be shown by loosening his mask or removing it altogether. What we find moving and also exciting in physiognomy, however, is its simultaneity, the fact that it is possible to discover goodness in the very expression of evil. Many a face surprises us with a deeper look, as if gazing out at us through the eyes of a mask.

There are many opportunities for producing tension in all this. A man may be depicted as a rogue and a scoundrel in all his actions. But his face tells us that it cannot be him. This contradiction creates a dilemma for the audience and we impatiently await its resolution. It endows a character with the vitality that only such an enigma can create.

The Drama of Facial Expressions[6]

The play of facial expressions in film is not just lyrical in its function. There are also ways of depicting the external action in purely physiognomic terms. Admittedly, this is a pinnacle that is only rarely attained in the cinema today. I shall give an example. A film by Joe May, *Die Tragödie der Liebe*,[7] contains a regular physiognomical duel. The examining magistrate sits across the bench from the accused. We do not learn what they say to each other. But both dissemble and disguise their true face behind expressions they have assumed. Each tries to discover what lies behind the other's mask. And, by using their facial expressions to attack each other and to defend themselves, each strives to provoke his interlocutor into

6. See for comparative purposes Balázs's later development of this theme in *TotF* on 'microdrama' (pp. 84ff).
7. *Die Tragödie der Liebe* (also known as *Love Tragedy* or *The Tragedy of Love*, 1923) d. Joe May. It featured Emil Jannings as well as, in a lesser role, Marlene Dietrich.

giving himself away by assuming a treacherous expression (just as one might try to induce someone to say more than he intends).

Such a duel of facial expressions is much more exciting than a verbal duel. A statement can be retracted or reinterpreted, but no statement is as utterly revealing as a facial expression.

In a truly artistic film the dramatic climax between two people will always be shown as a dialogue of facial expressions in close-up.

Close-up[8]

I am speaking here of physiognomy and the play of facial expression as if they were a speciality and even a monopoly of film, and yet they also play a pivotal role in the theatre. But it is not to be compared with their importance in film. Firstly, because we listen to the words and so fail to concentrate on the characters' faces (both we and the actors) and notice only the crudest, most schematic expressions. Secondly, the actor has to speak clearly for our ears and this impairs the spontaneous movements of the mouth and hence of the face as a whole. Thirdly, because on the stage – for obvious technical reasons – we can never observe a face for so long, in such detail and as intensively as in a film close-up.

The close-up is the technical precondition for the art of facial expression and hence of the higher art of film in general. A face has to be brought really close to us and it must be isolated from any context that might distract our attention (likewise something that is not possible on the stage); we must be able to dwell on the sight so as to be able to read it properly. The film calls for a subtlety and assurance in depicting facial expressions of which actors who just appear on the stage can only dream. In close-ups every wrinkle becomes a crucial element of character and every twitch of a muscle testifies to a pathos that signals great inner events. The close-up of a face is frequently used as the climax of an important scene; it must be the lyrical essence of the entire drama. If the sudden appearance of such an image is not to appear meaningless, we have to be able to recognize its links with the drama as a whole. The latter will be reflected in its features, just as a small lake reflects all the mountains that surround it. In the theatre, even the most important face is never more than one element in the play. In the film, however, when a face spreads over the entire screen in a close-up, this face becomes 'the whole thing' that contains the entire drama for minutes on end.

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8. In *TotF*, Balázs repeats many of his observations from *Visible Man* on the close-up: see *TotF*, pp. 52ff. In this later text, however, Balázs places greater emphasis on the place of the close-up within the montage, and emphasizes the need to sustain visual continuity between the close-up and its surrounding shots.

THE CLOSE-UP

Close-ups are film's true terrain. With the close-up the new territory of this new art opens up. It bears the name: 'The little things of life'. But even the biggest things of life consist of these 'little things', individual details and single moments, while the larger contours are mainly the result of the insensitivity and sloppiness with which we ignore the little things and blur their outlines. The abstract picture of the big things of life arises mainly from our myopia.

But the magnifying glass of the cinematograph brings us closer to the individual cells of life, it allows us to feel the texture and substance of life in its concrete detail. It shows you what your hand is doing, though normally you take no notice when it strokes someone or hits out at them. You live in it and pay no attention to it. The magnifying glass of the film camera will show you your shadow on the wall, something you live with without noticing it, and it will show you the adventures and the ultimate fate of the cigar in your unsuspecting hand and the secret – because unheeded – life of all the things that accompany you on your way and that taken together make up the events of your life. You have observed life much as a bad musician observes an orchestral piece. He hears only the leading melody and the rest of it merges into a general sound. Through its close-ups a good film will teach you to read the score of the polyphony of life, the individual voices of all things which go to make up the great symphony.

In a good film, the decisive moment of the actual storyline is never shown in long shot. For in a long shot you can never see what is really happening. When I see a finger pulling the trigger and after that see the wound breaking open, then I have seen the start and finish of an action, its birth and transformation. Everything that comes between those two events is invisible, like a bullet in flight.

The Director Guides Your Gaze

What is specific to film about these close-ups? After all, the theatre director could also carefully prepare such individual effects on the stage. The answer lies in the possibility of lifting the single image out of the whole. This enables us not only to see the minute atoms of life more clearly than anything on stage, but in addition the director uses them to guide our gaze. On the stage we always see the total picture in which these small moments dwindle into insignificance. But, if they are emphasized, they lose the mood created by their very obscurity. In film, in contrast, the director guides our gaze with the aid of close-ups and also follows up the long shot with shots showing the hidden corners in which the mute life of things retain their secret mood.

The close-up in film is the art of emphasis. It is a mute pointing to important and significant detail, while at the same time providing an interpretation of the life depicted. Two films with the same plot, the same acting and the same long shots but with different close-ups will express two different views of life.

The Naturalism of Love

Close-ups are a kind of naturalism. They amount to the sharp observation of detail. However, such observation contains an element of tenderness, and I should like to call it the naturalism of love. For what you truly love you also know well and you gaze upon its minutest details with fond attentiveness. (Needless to say, there is also a sharp observation driven by hatred, which we may likewise call naturalism.) In films with many good close-ups you often gain the impression that these shots are the product not so much of a good eye as of a good heart. They radiate warmth, a lyricism whose particular artistic significance is that it moves us without lapsing into sentimentality. It remains impersonal and objective. A tender feeling towards things is aroused without being made explicit (or described in the usual clichés).

'Inserting' Extreme Close-ups

Over and above the close-up, the tools with which to achieve emphasis include the concentration of lighting, 'effects lighting,' and middle-ground shots.[1] All of these present a director with the problem of visual linkage. It is part of the art of directing to know where to insert an extreme close-up, at what point a long shot should be interrupted by a foreground shot. For the risk of disrupting the continuity of a film by inserting individual shots is never far away.

In bad films, in particular, we frequently find ourselves losing our sense of space and no longer know when we see extreme close-ups whether they are pointing forwards or back and how they relate to one another in the total space. Then, when a long shot occurs, we are taken by surprise and have to hurry to reconstruct the situation in our minds after the event. This error arises mainly because the extreme close-up is taken from a different perspective from the preceding long shot. Frequently, too, the lighting in the long shot is not sufficient to make an effective close-up of a detail. The latter is then given its own lighting set-up and so loses continuity with the whole sequence. We are thus unable to locate it in the long shot. However, time as well as space can be dislocated by cutting in extreme close-ups. For film has a temporal perspective that must be

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1. In his early writing on film, Balázs regularly used the terms 'Premierplan' (foreground) and 'Sekundärplan' (middle-ground) shots to refer to the close-up and medium shot. See Glossary.

uniform for all the events in it, just as all the objects in a painting have to be seen from the same spatial perspective.

Now, as a film progresses, the closer it comes to our eyes, the slower it seems to move. This flatly contradicts the optical laws of nature. For, the more distant an object is from our eyes, the more slowly it appears to move. In the cinema, however, this appearance of slowness is based on a psychological fact rather than an optical one. Proximity renders details visible; apperception of them all requires time. In other words, we seem to need more time to absorb the greater quantity of observed detail. This is why we often perceive an action in medium shot as moving more slowly than the same action in long shot, and the different speed with which the objects move makes us giddy, as on a railway journey when trains pass us on both sides at different speeds.[2] One of the director's most delicate tasks is to preserve a unified temporal perspective despite the film's alternation between middle-ground and foreground shots.

This raises the question of which aspects of the plot should be shown in close-up. Modern directors mainly do not show the climax in close-up, since our attention focuses on this automatically and so it does not call for any special emphasis.

There is much to be said in favour of this. But it should not serve as an excuse for straying far from the dramatic action. For the individual elements of a plot do not always have the same mood and meaning as the whole. The uniform colour of a meadow is the product of the different colours of the flowers of which it is composed. When we examine it from nearby, one flower looks like the gentle eye of a child, the next like a miniature monster. But the particular colour that presents itself to our perception must not be permitted to contradict the colouring of the whole. One of the crudest and commonest mistakes of certain directors, for instance, is to interrupt scenes of tragedy with cutely humorous detail shots that meet their desire for 'light-hearted moments', whatever the cost to the scene as a whole.

In contrast, one of the subtlest devices practised by directors is to create a specific mood in a scene by using close-ups of minute details. For example, a long shot will show a man chatting in a relaxed and calm manner, while a close-up defines the mood of the scene as a whole by showing his fingers nervously crumbling some bread. Or again, the physiognomy of certain objects exudes a premonition of the future of which the characters in the film are as yet unaware. The close-ups of a cloud formation, a decaying wall, the dark opening of a door, create the atmosphere of anxious concern on behalf of unsuspecting people, and we see in advance the shadows of fate silently closing in.

2. Cf. Einstein's famous 'thought experiment', in which two observers, one on a moving train and one on the ground outside, see two lightning flashes. While the observer outside the train sees the two lightning bolts strike simultaneously, the person on the train sees them strike one after the other. This led Einstein to conclude that we need to revise our understanding of the nature of time.

The close-up is the deeper gaze, the director's sensibility. The close-up is the poetry of the cinema.

Close-ups and Shots of Large Entities

The pathos of the large is an effect in which the film has no equal. A raging sea, a glacier above the clouds, a storm-lashed forest or the painful expanses of a desert – in all these images we find ourselves face to face with the cosmos. Painting cannot achieve this overwhelming monumentality because its static nature enables the observer to adopt a standpoint, a firm position in relation to it. But the uncanny motion of these cosmic forces reveals the rhythm, the beat of eternity, in which the stupefied heart of mankind must perish.

The stage is even less capable of such monumental effects. The hugest objects may be painted on backdrops and flats; the human figure always stands life-size to the fore, his relative puniness concealed. Never do we see man on stage in a perspective that shows how he dissolves and disappears amid the giants of the universe.

There are films, in contrast, that do show us the face of the earth. Not idyllic landscapes or the mountain vistas beloved of yodelling tourists, but the physiognomy of a globe that, suspended amid the infinite expanse of the stars, bears on its back the human species in all its insignificance.

How unforgettable were the images of Shackleton's South Pole expedition! Man on the edge of the earth. Perched on the cap of terrestrial life, we see small, black silhouettes standing, gazing out from one star into the eternal blackness of another. These are magnitudes on a cosmic scale; they can be depicted only in film.

Mass Scenes

Great terrestrial entities – colossal buildings, mass scenes – likewise provide the film with the scope for a monumentality that is unprecedented in art. A colossal building appears as a *single* work of thousands, a mass of people as a *single* organism comprising the thousands who dissolve into its midst. We see in these objects the supra-individual creations of human society. More than the sum of the individuals who compose them, they are living creatures with a shape and a physiognomy of their own.

These shapes and physiognomies of human society have never before been visible in the individualist arts. And the fault was not merely technical. There is today a consciousness of society as such; its physiognomy is more visible, and can thus be more easily depicted in pictures. The movement of the mass is a gesture just like that of an individual. We may have participated in such gestures ourselves, but hitherto we did not do so consciously. And indeed the meaning of such

mass gestures is still a mystery to us. A good director, however, understands them intuitively.

In order to show its gestures clearly, a group cannot itself be without contours, chaotic or amorphous. In a good film crowd movements will be 'orchestrated' right down to the last detail. Often however, group formations are composed with no more than a decorative effect in mind. This can be beautiful and artistic. And why not, after all? Among other things, a film is supposed to be a feast for the eyes. But the tendency towards the decorative means that all too often a film can be *too beautiful*, the life depicted in it too prettified in an arts and crafts way. Groups that are constantly shown marshalled in impeccably arranged lines convey the impression of well-rehearsed *ballet scenes*. As a film disintegrates, however, into a series of 'live' tableaux, it runs the risk of losing the 'life' of its images.

The living physiognomy of the crowd, the play of features of the face of the mass, can be depicted by a good director only in close-ups, for only these ensure that the individual is not entirely forgotten and obliterated. The mass shown in close-up will never degenerate into something inert or dead, like fallen rock or a stream of lava. (Unless the director actually intends it, for whatever reason.) A good film will build up the crowd from a number of partial scenes that are full of life and meaning in themselves. Assembling a series of foreground and middle-ground detail shots, he will show us the individual grains of sand that go to make up the desert, so that, even when gazing at the total picture, we still remain aware of the mass of individual atoms teeming with life within it. In these close-ups we sense the warm living feelings of which the great masses are composed.

Cinematic Impressionism

However, the representation of magnitude in the cinema has its limits. They are to be found in the rectangle of the screen, the limits of our field of vision. You can project pictures of the pyramids, views of Babylon and Nineveh, images of the barbarian invasions or the New York traffic – but they can never exceed the size of the screen.

American films may have long since filled this frame, even over-filled it. But, even so, there is still room in the film medium to intensify the *impression* of size. For it is illusion alone that counts in a picture. Modern directors thus have recourse increasingly to *impressionism* as a technology of illusion in film. Developments in photography have now reached the point where the camera can hint at what cannot be shown and can stimulate our imaginations to conceive of magnitudes that no screen could encompass. The modern director no longer needs a hundred thousand extras to achieve the effect of great masses of people. A far larger human mass can seem to disappear in a cloud of smoke, for example, than can be made to appear within the confines of an

illuminated set. In the latter scene we only see hundreds of thousands, in the former we sense, we feel, millions. Large numbers do not always look impressive. There is more mass passion smouldering in the wild undergrowth of a hundred raised fists than in the expanse of a never-ending procession of demonstrators. The splintering of a timber beam can do more to generate a mood of impending catastrophe than the collapse of mighty towers at a distance.

The modern film will increasingly replace shots of large entities with close-ups of this kind. And not merely because they are much cheaper. The old-style monumental shots occupy too much space in the film. A colossal building or gigantic crowd gets shown from the left and the right, the back and the front, from at least ten different angles. And this is not just because of some demand for an appropriate number of pictures to match the vast sums invested. Rather, the colossal image simply has to be shown many times and at length because otherwise the eye simply cannot take it in; it eludes our perception. In consequence, these monumental shots distort and overload the film, so that *there is not enough room for the individualizing scenes* that make a film clear and exciting.

The Reality of Size

Of course, size can have a realistic effect that cannot be replaced by an impressionistic illusion. In Griffith's film *Intolerance*[3] there is a scene in which King Cyrus's armies advance on Babylon. At first you see nothing but an unending expanse of heath, brooding and stormy, taken from a great distance with a telephoto lens. A space without contours and limits. A cosmic landscape: the earth's surface. Wispy, dark grass seems to tremble slightly in the wind along the ground's undivided, even surface. Suddenly, the grass starts to move. The earth's surface begins to slip. The grass reveals itself as pointed lances; a dense human forest sways to and fro on an expanse of heath without limits or contours. These are the peoples of the earth. And they move towards us in eerily slow, viscous streams. Earth tremors. An earthquake of universal dimensions – and a sight, admittedly, that most certainly cannot be generated by close-ups.

There are also other giants on this earth whose overall shape is entirely different in character from their parts. The part in this case is therefore no substitute for the whole. A colossal department store, a giant factory, the railway terminal of a large city – all these must be seen in long shot before they reveal their own face.

Some directors use of the effects of such location shots in their films without compelling reason, inserting them like dance numbers in an operetta. They should be wary. Such mammoth scenes risk trampling their film to pieces. It is a kind of artistic frivolity to insert such huge

3. *Intolerance: Love's Struggle Throughout the Ages* (1916) d. D.W. Griffith.

objects artificially and irrelevantly as background features in films that might just as well have been played as cosy sitting-room idylls. A monumental milieu becomes dangerous when simply added to the storyline. It overwhelms the film.

It also shows an insulting lack of respect. Just as no one should allow Asta Nielsen to appear in an inferior role, so it seems to me that Niagara Falls or the Eiffel Tower too are stars that should not be used as mere extras.

Mood[4]

The soul of a landscape or indeed any milieu presents itself differently at different points on its surface. In human beings, too, the eyes are more expressive than the neck or shoulders, and a close-up of the eyes irradiates more soul than the entire body in long shot. The director's task is to discover the eyes of a landscape. Only in close-ups of these details will he grasp the soul of the totality: its mood.

Location shots of a town can be very beautiful and have the added charm of creating a credible reality. But we rarely find in them the eyes from which their soul shines forth. Instead, they often serve only as didactic illustrations to a geography lesson. However, the black silhouette of a bridge with a gondola rocking beneath it, a flight of steps sinking into dark water that reflects a lantern's light – such things create more of the mood of Venice – even if they have been shot in a studio – than St Mark's Square shot on location.

Like the mood of a landscape, the mood of an event can often be captured in close-ups of its smallest details. A foreground image of howling sirens (we *see* them howling in an image of rising steam), trembling fingers frantically beating against a window pane, tolling alarm bells swinging to and fro, provide a snapshot of panic that conveys a livelier sense of terror than any long shot of a stampeding crowd.

The mood of an individual human being is likewise a totality that as such cannot be grasped in a single image. But there are moments when it has the expressive look of a human gaze. A close-up of such moments makes it possible to convey a subjective image of the world and, notwithstanding the objectivity of the photographic apparatus, to depict the world as coloured by a temperament, illuminated by a feeling. This is a projected lyricism, a lyricism made objective.

A film based on Gerhart Hauptmann's novel *Phantom*[5] sets out to photograph a reality overwhelmed by dream, a world as it might appear to the over-excited imagination of a fantasist who refuses to accept objective reality. This is interspersed with dream visions, and both merge

4. In *TotF*, Balázs uses the same analysis of 'mood' in *Phantom* to elaborate the characteristics of what he terms 'subjective impressionism': see pp. 108ff.
5. *Phantom* (also known as *The Phantom*), d. F.W. Murnau (1922), featuring Alfred Abel, Grete Berger and Lil Dagover.

into one another, with no clear boundaries between the dream and a reality seen through an ecstatic haze.

The film's impressionist style derives from the absence over long stretches of any objective, logical plot structure. We see nothing but passing moods – fleeting, incoherent images as they float past the hero's clouded mind. As he sees them, so we see the world.

One scene is called 'The reeling day'. It has no narrative content whatever. Streets with ever-changing rows of houses swim past the eyes of the motionless hero. Flights of stairs rise up and fall away beneath feet which appear to remain motionless. A diamond necklace suddenly flashes in a shop window. A bouquet of flowers parts to reveal a face. A hand stretches out to clutch a glass. The pillars of a ballroom sway drunkenly. There is the sudden glare of a car's headlights. We glimpse a revolver lying on the floor.

The hero's subjective point of view only conveys to us close-ups of seconds, *not time in a long shot*. That is the nature of impressionism in film. We see *only* what makes an impression on the hero. Everything else is left out. A sense of objectivity in film, in contrast, is gained only if we are presented with the totality of time (time in long shot, as it were: the entire trajectory of the film's action), as well as the totality of space (the space of the action also 'in long shot').

THE FACE OF THINGS[1]

Every child knows that things have a face, and he walks with a beating heart through the half-darkened room where tables, cupboards and sofas pull strange faces at him and try to say something to him with their curious expressions. Even grown-ups may still glimpse strange shapes in the clouds. And the uncannily explicit gestures of the black shapes of trees in the forest at night can make the soberest philistine quake inwardly. But things may also have pleasant and lovable faces. How often are we as cheered by the sight of simple objects as we are by the sight of a friend. For the most part we do not know why this is. It springs not from any decorative beauty, but *rather from the living physiognomy that all things possess.*

Children have no difficulty understanding these physiognomies. This is because they do not yet judge things purely as tools, means to an end, useful objects not to be dwelt on. They regard each thing as an autonomous living being with a soul and face of its own. Indeed, children are like artists, who likewise want to depict objects, not make use of them.

Expressionism

The emphatic portrayal of a latent physiognomy of things that is brought explicitly into view is what is known as 'expressionism' in painting and in other performing arts.

For objects, like modest women, mostly hide their face behind a veil. The veil of our traditional, abstract way of seeing. This veil is removed by the expressionist artist. And then, of course, objects look quite different. Just as the expression of a feeling displaces the features of a face and alters its normal form, so too the facial expression of things appears to change their normal shape. The more passionate the expression, the more distorted the human face – and also the face of things.

No art is as well qualified to represent this 'face of things' as film. For film presents not just a once-and-for-all rigid physiognomy, but a mysterious play of expressions. It is quite certain that film is the true terrain, perhaps the only legitimate home, of expressionism. And this is indeed the style towards which all modern films are moving without wishing to do so, or even noticing that they are doing so.

1. See for comparison the section on 'anthropomorphous worlds', in *TotF*, p.92.

Expressionist 'distortions' of normal forms may, of course, differ widely. There is the very discreet form of expressionism as frequently practised by Jessner – a *selective* expressionism.[2] Jessner does not actually distort objects but, when he finds normal objects too anodyne, makes use of background objects that are deformed from the outset. He doesn't build crooked walls where you expect to find straight ones, but when he wants to achieve the effect of crookedness, he shoots the scene against the backdrop of the glass roof of the studio. He satisfies his desire for expressionist forms with curtains, screens and staircases that can create fantastic lines without becoming 'unnatural' or 'impossible'.

There are countless stages and transitions, countless different directors and audience preferences in the movement between this type of naturalistic expressionism and Robert Wiene's famous film *Dr Caligari* (to which he gave the cautious subtitle 'How a Madman Sees the World').[3] In *Caligari* the object world's demonic play of features was so pronounced that it lost the naturalness that attaches to lifeless objects, and acquired instead the *living naturalness* of the human sphere. Film, moreover, makes it possible to represent expressionist grimaces as they gradually evolve and by this means to preserve their 'credibility' even at the outermost limits of the plausible. It is thus indubitably the case that no director today can still tolerate a lifeless background, a neutral milieu; instead, he attempts to animate the entire screen with the same mood that animates the faces of his actors.

Dream and Vision

This is the territory in which expressionism becomes comprehensible even to the greatest philistine. For it is considered legitimate for objects to look different in dreams and visions, since these actually depict not *external* objects primarily, but *inner* states. There are here immeasurable poetic and psychological opportunities for the director, opportunities that the audience is also prepared to allow him. Herein might lie the occasion for ambitious directors to lead the audience gradually and by imperceptible degrees into that world of artistic experience in which the image of *every* object signifies an inner state. Here one can perhaps gradually blur the boundary between dream and day dream, between vision and the image of a world perceived in a heightened state of excitement. For where in fact does the boundary lie?

It is hard to grasp that even today there are still directors who fail to seize even this simple opportunity, and who frame and photograph dreams and

2. Leopold Jessner, actor and theatre director (1878–1945). Jessner turned his hand briefly to film in the 1920s, and his *Hintertreppe* (*Backstairs*, 1921) was the focus of much debate on the value of theatrical expressionism in film.
3. *Das Kabinett des Doctor Caligari*, d. Robert Wiene, with Werner Krauss, Conrad Veidt, Friedrich Feher and Lil Dagover.

visions with the same naturalism with which they photograph reality. This is senseless, unjustifiable and disturbing. In the first place, it is *untrue*, since it does not correspond to these directors' own prejudices in favour of the 'real'. For dream images do in reality look different from what is 'real'. Secondly, in films every object should be recognizable and identifiable without the need for an accompanying intertitle. After all, no one writes, 'This is a house' or 'That is a mountain'. By the same token, a dream must be recognizable as such from the image – without titles – and should not have the same values, the same colouring, the same substantial nature as images of reality. Otherwise, a dream will simply stem the flow of images, disrupt their continuity and produce confusion in the cutting process.

Of course, 'dreams' and 'visions' are often used as makeshift expedients with which to correct the faults of a poor screenplay or clumsy editing. Whenever we need to learn of some fact or other that the film has had no opportunity to explain, it is incorporated as a 'vision' at what is psychologically the most implausible moment. This amounts to an abuse and a compromising of the film's subtlest artistic methods.

Framing Narrative

The situation is different when a film character tells an extended story which appears in the film as a 'vision'. This is merely the filmic form of a literary frame narrative and it cannot have the same lyrical and expressionist character as does the atmospheric snapshot of a mood.

But, even as visions of preceding events, these strike the wrong note by destroying the film's unified temporal perspective. This is an area where literature has other options at its disposal. Every written sentence can contain overtones that refer to the story frame and prevent us from losing sight of the present situation in which events from an earlier period are narrated. But images cannot be conjugated like verbs and can exist only in the present. This explains why we frequently find ourselves scratching our heads when extended sequences from such an interpolated story are suddenly followed by the reappearance of the narrator in the room in which he first appeared. It takes a while to regain our bearings. Of course, the director could risk something that to my knowledge no one has tried up to now; he could saturate these memory images with the colours of a past mood. That would indeed be wonderful!

Dream and Dreamer

Film has a very special poetic and psychological contribution to make to the depiction of dreams and visions. For it can represent the *relation of the dream and the dreamer* to each other. The painter, certainly, can also show us his dream visions. But we do not see *his own face* at the same time. One of the most marvellous revelations of film is when we first see a sleeper's smile and subsequently recognize *the same smile* in his dream images.

Have you never had this curious dream experience? You are out walking in a landscape and recognize in it the face of one of your friends or enemies. It is nothing more nor less than a landscape. But it contains an obvious physiognomy that betrays it. For it is not only people who resemble one another. The capacity to illuminate the secret affinity between the dreamer's physiognomy and that of his dream is one of the most wonderful miracles of film art.

Dream Substance

The position with film dreams is the same as with film in general. What counts is not the story content but its appearance in the image. Untalented directors resort to introducing implausible events into dreams. *They are fairy-tale images at best, used to take the place of dream images* (but often no more than shallow allegories, ingeniously devised symbols of ideas with nothing irrational about them). The figures that make their appearance in these improbable events either look entirely natural or else *have no more than a changed form, much like in fairy tales, rather than the changed substance that is the characteristic of the dream figure.*

However, a quite ordinary living room may make its appearance unmistakably as a dream image. And this may be no more than the product of a certain lighting effect. For the strange astral effect of dreams does not arise from the form of the objects concerned, but from the dream's own, evidently quite different, materiality, which appears independent of the empirical laws of physical nature. This quality is not easily described in words, but is not so hard to show in the image, for it is familiar to us all.

Apart from the dream substance, what determines the dream character of figures and things is their *movement*. This too is frequently neglected by directors. The fact is that dream figures move differently; their rhythm does not conform to the laws of motion in the physical world, but to the internal rhythms of the mental world.

Of course, nowadays almost every director makes use of *movement as the expression of an increased intensity.* In the gaze of a hypnotist, for instance, whose eyes grow larger as the director has him approach until we are overwhelmed by his eyes alone. Alternatively, the director may rapidly magnify the lettering in an intertitle that signifies a scream, and thus convert an acoustic into a visual crescendo. But directors capable of capturing the strange movements of dream figures, movements *which are supernatural without being unnatural,* are few and far between.

A splendid example and indeed a model for this is the brilliant dream vision in Stanislavsky's film (the first Soviet production), *Polikushka.*[4] The

4. *Polikushka,* d. Aleksandr Sanin, and featuring Ivan Moskvin and Vera Pashennaya. The film was made in 1919, but, because of the confusions of the time, it was not released until 1922.

eponymous Polikushka is a poor serf who is sent to fetch money from the town for his mistress, but falls asleep in the coach on the way home and loses it. He has a dream whose contents are anything but fantastic. He dreams that he has arrived in the castle, which looks as it has always done; he is given a friendly reception by everyone he meets and is praised and rewarded by his mistress. Everyone and everything appears as in the real world; Stanislavsky does not have recourse to special lighting effects, nor does he find it necessary to use an inscription to announce, 'There now follows a dream.' That the scene was a dream was unmistakable. Its other-worldly aspect lay in the grouping and movement of the figures. An astral rhythm of the sweet reverence and kindness of a Russian peasant heaven, the supernatural music of a blissful dream. A film in which Stanislavsky grasps the essence of the dream gesture.

The Photography of Ideas

There is also a special version of 'images of visions', one that does not actually set out to represent visions in their literal optical, physiological sense, but could better be described as the *photography of ideas*. In one French adaptation of Anatole France's *Crainquebille*,[5] old Crainquebille is seen seated before his judges, who seem to be floating at an enormous height far above him. When one of these mighty men stands up to speak, he swells up into supernatural proportions before the very eyes of the simple, humble street pedlar. This is of course a clever idea and undoubtedly produces its desired effect. But such ideas are actually a threat to the stylistic purity of film. For in the main they are no more than *illustrated metaphors*. Instead of the irrational image of an irrational feeling we are given a *pictorial representation of a turn of phrase*. Where the novella tells us, for instance, 'he grew in her eyes', the director shows him actually growing in the film. Such tricks are, however, the very opposite of expressionism. Instead of finding an image with which to depict the unsayable, they point backwards to language and in particular, its most trivial turns of phrase.

Impressionism and Expressionism

The difference between these two cinematic styles, impressionism and expressionism, could be defined as follows: *impressionism* always presents a part of the whole and leaves the task of completing the picture to the imagination of the viewer. A corner is shown, instead of the entire landscape, a gesture, instead of the entire scene, and a moment in time, instead of the entire story. These segments, however, are depicted in a

5. *Crainquebille* (distributed as *Bill* in the USA), 1922, d. Jacques Feyder and featuring Maurice de Feraudy and Jean Forest.

'naturalistic' style ; they are not stylized or distorted through emphasis or the exaggeration of a latent physiognomy.

Expressionism does not operate for the most part with close-ups of segments torn from their context. It provides the total image of a milieu, but stylizes it into an expressive physiognomy rather than leaving it to the viewer to imbue the scene with his own momentary mood.

Decorative Stylization

More effective than the expressionist stylization of an entire image, a complete room, a complete street, however, is the recent tendency, visible in the latest films, to make expressive use of the middle-ground shot. Expressionism often seems forced, no longer rooted in the soul but merely an artistic or decorative manner. Its effect is ornamental, a consistent, constant style that has lost the character of spontaneous expression.

Nevertheless, even this purely decorative style must be taken much more seriously in film than on the stage, where stylistic inconsistencies rarely seem damaging. For notwithstanding the three dimensions depicted by the camera, objects in film are always reduced to a flat surface with homogeneous colouring, on which forms become compressed and more closely related to one another. They have no room in which to assert their own independence, with the result that their stylistic contradictions clash more shrilly.

'Aura'[6]

The middle-ground shot, in contrast, works through segmentation. It shows only the characters' immediate surroundings, and by drawing the image frame in more tightly it enables a character to illuminate himself, as it were, with the emanation of his own soul. His milieu becomes a visible 'aura', his physiognomy expands beyond the contours of his own body. The human play of gestures and expressions continues to prevail over that of objects and his facial expressions become an interpretation of the expression of objects. For, in the final analysis, it is only human beings that matter. And the 'expressions' of objects become significant only in so far as they relate to human expression.

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6. Balázs will later discuss aura in the sound film; see his discussion of breathing as the 'acoustic aura of a human being, something like the scent of skin or hair' (*TotF*, p. 227).

NATURE AND NATURALNESS

Everything we have said up to now about the art of film will be certain to disappoint all those who welcomed the emergence of cinema as an art that opens up the wonders of nature and instructs us in the nature of reality. In comparison to the artificial productions of the theatre, the cinema's greatest and perhaps only advantage is its 'location photography'. Yet lo and behold, developments in cinema are leading further and further from nature in its original state. Even now modern film technique avoids 'outdoor shots' as far as possible, preferring instead to construct every milieu, including gardens and public streets, indoors. In indoor studios, moreover, directors are reluctant to rely simply on a glass roof, and prefer to use artificial light. Even outdoor nature shots are rarely taken without the assistance of reflectors. Nature is not allowed a voice in its original state. Perhaps because it does not speak clearly enough?

Landscape

The fact is that the stylization of nature – whether under the aegis of impressionism or expressionism – is the *precondition* without which a film cannot be a work of art. Since film sets out to depict human destinies rather than to assist the teaching of geography, 'nature' cannot appear as a neutral reality. It is always a setting, a background for a scene, and its task is to convey, underscore and accompany its mood.

Just as painting is an art because it provides more than just a photographically accurate copy of nature, so film too has the paradoxical task of using the camera to paint images of mood. It achieves this partly through its selection of motifs (itself a subjective rearranging of objective reality), partly through its use of camera set-up and artificial lighting effects, and partly by constructing stylized versions of nature in the studio.

For what matters in a work of art is that *the entire picture* should be the product of a *single* conception and that nature, the setting, should have the *same* atmosphere as the story that is being told. For, just like the description of a landscape in a novel, nature in film is an organic component of the story, rather than something that the novelist can simply import from a geography textbook.

In a good film the view of a landscape must enable us to predict the character of the scene to follow. In general, film has up to now made far too little use of the poetic possibilities of having the landscape join in the drama as a living soul, an active participant, so to speak.

Much has been written about the painful allure of distant horizons on an infinite expanse of ocean, the magic of the open road, the mysterious call of alien shores. But to *show* the demonic power of such a landscape, a man's hypnotic stare, a beautiful woman's seductive smile: this is what is required in film.

For there is a profound, mysterious and – if I may make so bold – flirtatious relationship between man and the landscape. In films this can act as the source of a dramatic situation. It can be forged into a powerful tragic scene, just as the silhouette of a passing sailing boat on the evening horizon can captivate and seduce an observer on shore.

How Does 'Landscape' Arise?

Not every piece of land is a landscape. Objective, natural nature cannot be so termed. Landscape is a physiognomy, a face that all at once, at a particular spot, gazes out at us, as if emerging from the chaotic lines of a picture puzzle. A face of a particular place with a very definite, if also indefinable, expression of feeling, with an evident, if also incomprehensible, meaning. A face that seems to have a deep emotional relationship to human beings. A face that is directed towards human beings.

To discover, frame and emphasize this physiognomy from nature's puzzle picture is the aim of a stylizing art. The setting up of the apparatus, the choice of motifs and lighting or the use of artificial lighting is the form adopted by the intervention of human beings in objective nature to create the indispensable subjective relation to nature. For art, it is only the animation of nature by the human spirit that counts. But the only things to be animated are those that express a meaning, and a human meaning in particular.

Nature's soul is not something given *a priori* that can 'simply' be photographed. Ancient, magic cultures may perhaps have been on familiar terms with it. For us, however, the soul of nature is always our own soul reflecting itself in nature. This process of reflection can occur, but only through art.

Medieval Christian art was ignorant of the soul of nature and hence too of its beauty. Nature was no more than a lifeless backdrop, a mere setting for human action. Only with the Renaissance did human beings begin to animate nature and turn dead *regions* into living *landscapes*. (As is well known, Petrarch was the first man to conceive the idea that one might climb a high mountain as a 'tourist', without expecting to find anything there but beauty.)

Film and the Soul of Work[1]

'Work as the object of art': this is surely a topic worthy of the pen of a good Marxist, and one that would also constitute an important chapter of cultural history. Agricultural labour, for example, the life and work of the peasant in his field, has always been a popular motif. But until recently factory work, large-scale industry, was not thought a fit subject for art. Images of digging and sowing could be regarded as profound symbols of human existence as such. They were meaningful and hence soulful. But the workings of big industry were not poetic because they seemed to lack this quality of meaningful soul.

This has changed in recent decades. In Constantin Meunier's marble sculptures[2] or Frank Brangwyn's etchings,[3] images of modern industry have become living artistic themes. Modern industry has acquired a face of its own.

How has this happened? Has the factory work of capitalist enterprises gained something of a human meaning? No. But the scale of its inhuman meaninglessness has grown to such a horrifying degree that *the machine, the man-eating machine, has taken on the demonic vitality of a nightmarish monster.* In the process it has become thematic, and it is now the machine's fantastic nightmares, not the idyllic motifs of rural life that are the very theme of modern art.

Here film's mission is to become the representative art of modern life. The screen provides us with more and more examples of machinery and factory work as the menacing symbols of a smoke-blackened destiny. We see the machine *acquire a face in film*, its movements transformed into a terrifying expressiveness. We have seen more than once how the neutral 'terrain' of a factory becomes a grim 'landscape', a landscape both alive and lethal.

1. This passage reappears in *TotF* under the heading 'The worker and the physiognomy of the machine'. Balázs's Marxism is more overtly stated in the later version, where he situates his comments on work in film in the context of a 'growth of the revolutionary consciousness of the working class' that has caused 'the great human significance and dignity of industrial labour also (to be) recognized'. Balázs continues: 'in the light of the increasingly revolutionary consciousness of the workers, the workers themselves acquired a defiant dignity and a changed physiognomy. And it was their rebellious anger which lent the tormenting, exploiting, inhuman machine a hateful, diabolically animated physiognomy' (p. 98).
2. Constantin Meunier, Belgian painter and sculptor, 1831–1905. His masterpiece is reckoned to be the unfinished *Monument to Labour* in Brussels, comprising four stone reliefs: Industry, the Mine, the Harvest and Harbour.
3. Frank Brangwyn (1867–1956), artist and designer who trained in the William Morris arts and crafts movement. Now largely forgotten, at the turn of the twentieth century he was widely regarded on the Continent as the definition of modern British art.

The Landscapes of Labour

Here is an example. Karl Grune's film *Explosion*.[4] It is a story about mining. But the story is not the main point. The hero of the film is the mine itself. The coal shafts, the machinery and the workings of the mine are the protagonists and they come across with uncanny force.

This film does not present the mine as an objective fact, as 'reality' along the lines of the Urania instructional films with which we have long been familiar.[5] Karl Grune has grasped the demonic physiognomy of these things and has captured it in photographic form. The giant cage that takes the workers down to the coalface and brings them up again has an uncannily menacing *visage*, which is given additional prominence simply through 'lighting effects'. It appears as the incarnation of the iron fate that controls human life. This machine room has no less pathos than old paintings devoted to the Fates weaving the threads of our destiny. We see the cage ascend and descend and it is as if we are witnessing the heartbeat of an entire human society.

We see one scene where the colliers put on their work clothes and hang their civilian clothes on a hook. Then a close-up of these clothes hanging on hooks. A horrifying sight. Like a long row of hanged men! And while they are working, the miners' lives are indeed in a state of suspension.[6]

Then another image: a hundred workers washing themselves. A mass of gleaming wet, naked bodies. As ghastly as a human slaughterhouse. (And the whole effect is the product of set-up, lighting and the camera.)

The image of chimney stacks belching smoke stands for the dark clouds of unending misery. The steam rising from three howling sirens symbolizes the despairing screams of thousands.

In one scene, the doors of the cage close on a miner just as he notices his rival, a fellow miner he is jealous of, going off with his wife. But the iron grating has already slammed shut. The lift starts to descend and the husband glares in helpless fury at his enemy, like a wild animal in his cage. The lift becomes a powerful symbol, and yet we have been shown no more than an everyday reality. The only difference is the artistic use of camera set-up to give it a specific meaning and a soul. And the image of this one colliery lift holding the miner hostage, violating his soul and forcing him to bend his neck to the yoke of a soulless process, becomes the mighty symbol of every machine.

4. *Schlagende Wetter* (Trapped in the Mine) (1922/23), d. Karl Grune, and featuring Liane Haid and Eugen Klöpfer. Balázs discusses the same film in *TotF*, p. 99.
5. The Urania Institutes in Berlin and Vienna were public educational facilities founded in 1888 and 1897 respectively with a mission to bring scientific issues to the attention of a broader public. They were associated in the early twentieth century with educational documentaries, a genre favoured by the German cinema reformers and later lauded internationally as a speciality of the German cinema.
6. *Theory of the Film* is more explicit here: 'The picture said: "Look, here hangs the man the collier has had to discard. He has to leave this man behind. What goes down in the cage to the pit is only a machine, nothing more"' (*TotF*, p. 100).

Just as in art nature becomes 'landscape', so in such films the self-created nature of mankind, namely the industrial *terrain*, becomes a landscape that is given a soul by art.

Physiognomy as Category and Pan-symbolism

All this can be summed up by saying that objects acquire a symbolic meaning in film. We might actually just call it 'meaning'. For what is 'symbolic' may simply be said to have a second meaning over and above the original one. The decisive fact as far as film is concerned is that *all objects*, without exception, are necessarily symbolic. For, whether we are aware of it or not, all objects make a physiognomical impression upon us. All and always. Just as time and space are categories of our understanding, and can thus never be eliminated from the world of our experience, so too the physiognomical attaches to every phenomenon. It is a necessary category of our perception.

The director cannot choose, therefore, between an objective representation of objects and a physiognomical, significant representation, but only between a physiognomical representation that he has mastered and that he consciously deploys in accordance with specific intentions, and one that is left entirely to chance and hence resists him at every turn. The sounds of an object ring out whether he will or not, and he *must* turn them into meaningful music or else they will degenerate into a confusing babble of sound.

A room can signify a hidden, shy and secret happiness; equally, it can signify a dreary wasteland or a truculent, poisonous hatred, when the edges of every piece of furniture seem poised like knives to attack one another. But, like every word, every room has some meaning or another. And since the director makes use of it, he is forced to take meaningful account of it. Objects have symbolic value even without his intervention. His task is to put these symbols to work.

What marvellous opportunities this creates! Here is one example among many! In *The Flame*, a masterpiece by Lubitsch,[7] a cocotte with a pure heart falls passionately in love with a naive, innocent youth. In one scene she is shown waiting for her unsuspecting beloved to visit her. She rearranges what is clearly her prostitute's boudoir (like the make-up on her face, every piece of furniture has something aggressive and mendacious about it), transforming it into a room that is 'decent', respectable. She becomes, as it were, the director of her own milieu. As she feverishly reorders the furniture, the symbolic meaning of every piece and its position comes alive. We see not only two entirely different ways of life in the shape of two differently furnished rooms, but also her hopes and fears, and the indescribable tenderness of a tormented heart that

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7. *Die Flamme* (1922), d. Ernst Lubitsch, and featuring Pola Negri, Hilde Wörner and Alfred Abel.

dreams of a new life. All this is expressed here in the way in which she silently clears up her room and rearranges it. And we perceive it with a clarity and power that could never be matched by the stage play on which the film is based. The play's trivial dialogue is omitted in the film and replaced by Lubitsch's subtle directorial touches as well as Pola Negri's expressive facial gestures.

Allegory in the Image

This scene can be regarded as allegorical. But 'All that passes is only an allegory.' '*Only*' in life – but *also* in film. This explains why it is superfluous, false and kitschy to translate literary allegories conceived in the world of concepts into cinematic images. To introduce Father Time with a scythe into a deathbed scene, for example, or to display a broken lily to tell us that a girl has lost her virginity. And not simply because these allegories of allegories are crude and over-obvious, but also – as has already been remarked – because images have a presence of their own. In other words, objects have their own reality and a further meaning over and above that. But an image that gives its object *only* this additional meaning, and no immediate reality of its own, becomes an empty, lifeless vignette.

In the image, everything tends towards allegory. Not just forms and figures but also their lighting and positioning, as well as their relative size. We must therefore proceed with caution. For example, when an important scene of a serious, tragic nature is intended, it would be a mistake to place it in a powerful landscape or a great crowd of people, because that would detract from its tragic weight and pathos. The most powerful human gesture is reduced to a helpless, childish gesticulating if it is enacted against the background of a glacier, and the goriest individual combat will be submerged in the midst of a great surging mass. For, while words can be meaningless, there is no such thing as a meaningless image.

Miracles and Ghosts

Nature in the cinema is a problematic, even tricky matter. It can for example be distorted 'expressionistically' to an extreme degree; but it cannot be eliminated. One might also think that the technical possibilities of film make it pre-eminently suited to fairy tales and magical stories of all kinds. One might think this but in fact it is not the case.

For we only feel that an object is unnatural as long as the natural form from which it represents a deviation is still present to our minds. A dog as big as an elephant will only astound us if we can still recognize it as a dog. If we fail to do so, it simply becomes an animal of another kind. A man as tall as a tree would be horrific. But a giant? A giant as tall as a tree is not a problem.

It is marvellous and uncanny when unlikely events occur *in this world.* But in a different world, a fairy-tale world, such events are a matter of course. When the face of nature is distorted it can assume a spectral, supernatural expression. But only as long as we still recognize the face of the nature we know. If the forms of a face disintegrate, this means an end to all expression. In a word, the supernatural can only be represented by means of the nature we know. Fairy-tale images in the cinema never arouse feelings of the supernatural or mystical, but only of a different nature inhabited by unknown creatures, and they always have something friendly and reassuring about them, like nursery stories.

This is not to assert that fairy-tale films should not be made. Why not indeed? Fairy tales are beautiful and film holds out many opportunities for poetic or picturesque effects. We should simply not expect uncanny or tragic effects from fairy-tale films. A magical event in a film can never be taken seriously even though technological advances make every kind of illusion possible. Or indeed for that very reason. For the audience is *aware of the technical possibilities* in film and even the most terrifying episodes are ones we find entertaining as ingenious technical tricks.

There is also a deeper reason why it is not possible to use fairy-tale figures to depict the supernatural. It lies in the nature of an image. The appearance of an animal with *one* head does not display a greater 'naturalness' than a creature with ten heads. We simply take it for granted that no such creatures exist. If they were to make an appearance they would not seem supernatural to us, merely unnatural, like two-headed monsters.

The position with the supernatural is similar to that of dream figures. What makes objects appear transcendental and ghostly to us is not their form but their substance and physiognomy. That aside, the more naturalistic they are the more uncanny they seem. The *Caligari* film, for example, contained plenty that was blood-curdling, but its highly stylized use of the ornamental dissolved every terror, every feeling of dread, into the aesthetic harmony of the decorative, and the dream-like nature of its images kept them hovering at bay. However, when the old, familiar door of our room suddenly opens slowly and silently and no one enters, or when our curtains flutter into the room and float horizontally in empty space, or a face peers in at our window – when, in short, the natural nature around us suddenly changes its physiognomy or its behaviour, that is when we start to feel a shiver of fear.

There was once a film called *Nosferatu*,[8] which rightly called itself a 'symphony of horror'. Shivery anxiety and nightmares, shadowy forms and premonitions of death, madness and ghosts were all woven into the images of gloomy mountainous landscapes and stormy seas. There was also a ghostly coach ride through the forest which was neither supernatural nor gruesome. But the nature images were overlaid with premonitions of

8. *Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922), d. F.W. Murnau, and featuring Max Schreck, Gustav von Wangenheim, Greta Schroeder and Alexander Granach.

the supernatural. Storm clouds scurrying in front of the moon, a ruin by night, a dark, unidentifiable silhouette in the empty courtyard, a spider on a human face, the ship with black sails sailing along the canal without anyone in sight to steer it, howling wolves in the night and horses suddenly shying without our knowing why – all these images are perfectly possible in nature. But they were surrounded by an icy blast from another world.

What is certain is that no written or oral literature is able to express the ghostly, the demonic and the supernatural as well as the cinema. For man's language is the product of his rationality, and so the Orphic words of obscure magic spells may be at worst incomprehensible, but they are not 'supernatural'. That is to say, *words cannot be understood when they are incomprehensible.* This is how human intelligence defends itself. But a sight *may be clear and comprehensible even though unfathomable. And that is what makes our hair stand on end.*

American Realism

There are American films that can have a powerful effect even though they are seemingly no more than the faithful copy of unformed nature 'in itself'. Of course, we might say that the mere choice of motifs is already a process of creative shaping. Nevertheless there is in these films no organized story, no structured plot to disturb the undirected, amorphous flow of pure material. This is the situation, for example, with those American 'mother films' that have succeeded in drowning in tears every superior artistic impulse in recent years.

But not everything that produces an emotional impact is art. Even a newspaper report of a serious accident can be deeply disturbing. The films I am discussing here do not provoke the sentiments associated with art. They simply stir up already existing feelings and our own memory takes care of the rest. The speaker at a funeral does not need, after all, to be a great artist to bring tears to the eyes of a widow and orphans.

These American maternal dramas provide raw, unshaped mood material and, even as we dissolve in tears, we say that these films are not art. They are cinematic reports on family life, Urania documentaries of mother love, and, like films showing the different stages of cigarette manufacture, they depict the different situations and states of mind of a mother whose children make her sad or happy. It is because we all have, or had, a mother that her memory surfaces and tears well in our eyes.

A pre-existing natural effect is exploited here as a substitute for artistic effect. Flowers too are beautiful and have no need for painting in order to become art; arranging them in a bouquet is itself artistic. But something has to be done with them. Similarly, jewels are beautiful. But they only become art in the hands of a goldsmith. This is the nature of our European prejudice.

Of course, there is no denying that the presentation of individual scenes, the achievement of actors in presenting individual feelings, is art even in

the most European meaning of the term. Nor do we wish to deny that this American realism is capable of outstanding achievements in individual scenes. But the *films as a whole* are always bad. The talent of the director and the leading actress (Mary Carr, for example, is among the greatest[9]) often unfolds aimlessly in such films. (How often we find this in films where important actors have to perform in insignificant roles!) It is as if a good singer lets rip without having any particular tune in mind. We may perhaps still relish the material quality of her magnificent voice and long to hear it testing itself against the substantial forms of a genuine work of art.

Animals

We have noted that film – like every art – is concerned not with objective 'nature in itself' but with man's personal relation to it. Yet there are things in films whose very special charm resides in their ability to show pristine nature, nature completely uninfluenced by human beings. Animals and children, for example.

The particular pleasure we derive from watching animals on film is that they are not acting, but living. They are unaware of the camera and go about their business with an unselfconscious seriousness. Even if they are trained for film performance, we are the only ones who know that it is all just theatre. They are unaware of this and take it all completely seriously. An actor likewise intends to create the illusion that his expressions are not just 'performances' but the expression of his actual feelings at that moment. But no actor can succeed in this as well as an animal. For animals there is no question of illusion; it is all the most genuine reality. It is not art; we are eavesdropping on nature. And the natural impression made by animals on film is enhanced by the fact that since, animals do not speak, their dumb expressiveness involves a far less significant reduction of their nature than in the case of human beings.

And yet this 'eavesdropping' does involve a personal relationship, a particular attitude towards nature, one that is always associated with a certain excitement and evokes the mood of a rare adventure. For it is quite unnatural to observe nature from close to, without being noticed. Our normal situation is that we perceive the objects around us only vaguely, paying heed to them only through the fog of habitual generalizations and schematic conceptions. We look out mainly for the possible benefits they could bring or the damage they might inflict – to observe them *in themselves* happens rarely, if ever.

Now when the cameraman cranks up his projector he penetrates the foggy cataract that obscures our vision, and we suddenly find ourselves

9. Mary Carr (1873–1974) became famous for her roles as a mother in such films as *Over the Hill to the Poorhouse* (1920). This was followed by scores of films in the silent period. Her career suffered a setback with the arrival of the talkies, but she continued to make appearances, often in films directed by her son Thomas Carr.

confronted with an unaccustomed, mysterious, *unnatural* image of nature. We sometimes feel at this point that we have eavesdropped on a profound, sacred mystery, a hidden life that frequently possesses the secret charm of the forbidden.

We find it especially exciting to be able to look at alien life unobserved. For the natural thing is for us to be present when we observe something. However, one of our deepest metaphysical yearnings is to see what things are like when we are not present. The camera presents us with the opportunity to do so. *Such images of nature always contain a very special mood.* And it is this mood the camera most wishes to capture.

How fascinating are the physiognomy and the expressions of animals! And how mysterious it is that we understand them! Only by analogy, of course. But what if this is justified? Just think of the subtle effects of which a director is capable if he can exploit the affinities between human and animal physiognomies! There is a moment in Joe May's film *The Indian Tomb*[10] when, through an imperceptible movement of his mouth, Conrad Veidt, who plays an Indian maharaja, suddenly looks like a tiger. It is at moments like these that we sense the mysterious interconnections between the forces of nature and emotions whose mysteries cannot be explained in words.

Just imagine the as yet unheard-of opportunities for the poetry of animal fables implicit in such scenes! We need a Kipling of the cinema. And just think of the humour and sweet irony that lie concealed in the affinity between the human and the animal world. In the fact that animals are actually all caricatures of certain human types, while at the same time their own genuineness is not in doubt. That is the twofold pleasure we obtain from their image. The fact is that these animals have a human physiognomy and at the same time retain their own dear, honest animal faces.

Children

Babies have the same charm in film as animals: it is the sense of eavesdropping on nature. Babies too do not act, they live. But even with older children who do act it is the naturalness of their unconscious expressions and gestures that delights us more than their acting. For us grown-ups the physiognomy of children is as strange and mysterious as that of animals and it is made the more mysterious by the fact that it is not entirely alien. And to watch children who imagine themselves unobserved is like a glimpse of Paradise lost.

There are adult writers who are familiar with child psychology and know how to imitate children's language. But of course an adult can never act a child or imitate their expressions and gestures because even though he has the right words at his disposal, he does not have their little hands or innocent face.

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10. *The Indian Tomb* (*Das Indische Grabmal*, 1921) was a film in two parts (*The Mission of the Yogi* and the *Tiger of Eschnapur*), based on a scenario by Thea von Harbou and Fritz Lang and starring Conrad Veidt.

It is, moreover, a very striking fact – one that I perhaps cannot properly explain – that children have a much more prominent role in film than they do on the stage. On the stage the only important thing is their role in the play; it is there that they have to show what they can do. In film, however – as we have already seen – close-up shots bring their facial expressions and gestures so close to us that we can delight in them as a natural phenomenon, independently of their role and the play as a whole. It is much like watching a baby bird in its nest. On stage a child acting badly is extremely embarrassing. (And even if he or she acts well, we cannot quite free ourselves from a certain discomfort.) In film we may still feel that a beautiful child can be a pleasure to watch, even if he or she acts badly. One reason for this is that a child's facial expressions can never be as false as learned speech, because they are simply a development of its innate physiognomy. A child on film just makes use of its own hands; but the words it utters are not always its own. Needless to say, it always sounds a false note if we detect the influence of the director behind a child's movements, like a puppeteer pulling the strings. Uncle Director just has to learn to give the child enough scope to act on its own impulses.

A further fact, however, is that the cinema has produced a whole series of brilliant child actors. The theatre has never succeeded in producing children who were such great, and even consummate, actors as little Jackie Coogan. Nor do stage writers write significant parts for children, if only because there is no one to act them. In contrast, hardly a film is made today without the participation of at least one child actor. I am at a loss to explain why this should be. Perhaps it is that the gift of mime is more fundamental so that it pre-exists and becomes mature sooner than the ability to express oneself in language.

One factor is undoubtedly that the entire atmosphere and mentality of film provides greater scope for children. The world of film is simply more childlike. The poetry of ordinary life that constitutes the substance of good films is more easily visible from the closer perspective of little people. Children are more familiar with the secret corners of a room than adults because they can still crawl under tables and sofas. They know more about the little moments of life because they still have time to dwell on them. *Children see the world in close-up*. Adults, however, in hot pursuit of distant goals, hurry past the intimate experiences of these nooks and crannies. They may know their own minds, but they often know nothing else. Only children at play gaze pensively at minor details.

This is why children are much more at home in the atmosphere of the cinema than in that of the theatre. Cinema's more childlike mentality also explains why Americans thrive in it so readily, and why American films also contain a children's poetry that we ancient Europeans can never match. Take for instance Mark Twain's writing for children, which is based on an equality between children and adults. Or take again

Chaplin's marvellous film *The Kid*,[11] in which he and Jackie Coogan enact the friendship between a small boy and a vagabond.

Among us Europeans there is a gulf between the generations and the conflict between them is more bitterly fought out than the class struggle. Across the Atlantic, a democratic equality between the generations seems to prevail. Dostoevsky's adults may also get on well with children. But this is because in Russia, even children are earnest and more or less grown-up. Their shared childlike quality, by contrast, is the basis on which adult Americans communicate with children – in Mark Twain, *The Kid* or other films. This world of intellectual naivety excludes conceptual abstractions and recognizes only immediate, visible experience. Here, then, the child's experience increases in importance, to the point where its capacity for art is almost on a par with that of adults.

Sport

The pleasure we take in watching sporting achievements on film must also be counted as a natural rather than an artistic enjoyment. Not that any criticism is implied here. It is the pleasure of looking that brings us into the cinema, and only a spoilsport would insist that this particular delight must derive only from the legitimized arts.

Sport footage in film has the advantage over reality that it makes events much easier to see. In a sporting arena we can only be at *one* place at once so that we see from only *one* perspective. In the cinema, in contrast, we see from the front and from the back, from this side and that, so that the exciting moments (which in the real world shoot past too quickly to be properly grasped and enjoyed) can be recaptured several times, thus bringing time almost to a standstill. In this way the cinema audience can dwell on fleeting acts, can pause over sudden events and – quite unnaturally – contemplate things which by their very nature we can usually only glimpse, but never contemplate.

Motion

Sporting achievement can, however, become mobile artistic expression, The tempo of a gallop can often express far more excitement, a leap far more spontaneous passion than a facial expression or a gesture. It is in general a great enrichment of film when compared with the stage that it can exploit the potential of motion, of tempo, as a means of expression.

There is an American film in which a son discovers his unhappy and long-lost mother in a poorhouse and brings her home. After everyone has finished hugging and kissing and weeping tears of joy, the question arises of how the director can increase the tension and prevent it slackening as the

11. *The Kid* (1921) d. Charles Chaplin, staring Chaplin and Jackie Coogan.

location shifts to the final scene. He has the son put his mother into a carriage and gallop off with her to the location of the following scene. This breakneck journey becomes in the process a symbol of passionate yearning. Faster, faster! Rising tempo becomes here the expression of a growing impatience. Houses, trees, people fly past the racing carriage; the world fades away in an overwhelming delirium of happiness. And, when they finally arrive, they launch themselves into the room with all the burning intensity of an exploding shell.   This explains why horses and cars, planes and ships play such a generally prominent role in film. It is not just that they are attractions in themselves. It is always human beings who move when they move. Their movement also contains human movement; these are human gestures, only here they are greatly magnified. Through animal movement, then, the range of human expressions is massively amplified.

The Chase

Similarly, the great experience of speed can be conveyed only in film. Movement in reality is seen only as a moment, a cross-section of motion. In film, however, we accompany a runner and drive alongside the fastest car. Movement in film is not just a sporting or 'natural' fact; it can be the highest expression of an emotional or vital rhythm.

Hence the excitement of a *chase* in film, one of the cinema's most characteristic and most assured effects. No art can portray danger as successfully as film. In every other art form danger is either not yet there or else it has already arrived. But fate in action, *danger in sight*, not yet there but already present – that motif is exclusive to film. In a chase sequence, as the scene alternates from 'any second now' to 'still not', film can divide minutes of fear and hope into visible, dramatic seconds or stretch them out to depict fate not just in its impact but *as it is in itself*, in its silent passage through time.

If it is true that film is concerned exclusively with visible, that is, bodily, human actions, then it follows that sporting and acrobatic performances can be regarded as the supremely intensified expression of embodied human lives.

But herein lies also a danger for films that wish to depict not just cinematic attractions, but also the story of a human fate. The more important and interesting a sporting feat is on film, the more it detracts from the dramatic action. It ceases to be *expressive movement*, acquires an independent value and has an effect similar to that of a variety number interpolated into the drama.

When a man who is being pursued leaps over a ditch, what excites and interests us is the *chase*. But, if this leap is particularly impressive as a sporting feat, then we are interested in it as a leap, independently of the drama and its significance in it. This displaces the focus of our interest and converts the drama into a chance setting for a 'sensational' event.

Thus the physical activities of the film hero must take care not to assume a *sporting character*, even if he has to perform the most difficult stunts. For sport means movement as a goal in itself and is useless as expressive movement. On occasion, a director may find it very hard to draw the dividing line here. The character who boxes must never become 'a boxer', a running man must never become 'a sprinter'. For the film then acquires the insidious taint of the 'professional', arousing our doubts as to the authenticity of the performance, and robbing the action of its immediate truth to life.

Sensations

Sensations are sights whose attractiveness and impact lie in the illusion that they are presented to us in location shots that are authentic and faithful to nature. We are, after all, rarely present when two locomotives crash, a bridge collapses, a tower is blown up or a human being plummets from the fifth floor. We are curious to see what these things look like in reality. In that sense such attractions have nothing in common with art.

But their rarity alone is not enough to explain the attraction of sensations. There are varieties of flowers or butterflies that are at least as rare as a great conflagration, but they would not have the same impact on film.

What we especially enjoy is the *risk-free danger* of the filmed sensation. Just as we savour the pleasurable shiver that a raging tiger in a cage engenders because we know we are quite safe, so too we like watching films that show us death at close quarters. It is the pleasurable experience of an insensate, animal superiority that allows us in the cinema at last to look things in the eye that would force us to look away if we saw them in reality.

But danger also has an expressive physiognomy, and the art of the director and cameraman consists in bringing this out. For there are terrible catastrophes whose terrible consequences are simply not externally visible. There is nothing that can be done with such events on film. But there remains here a strange mystery, which is that we do nonetheless understand the play of expression of the elements. We see the anger, the ominous threat on the face of matter as well as the faces of our fellow human beings and of animals. It is as if we had the same sixth sense which animals evidently also possess and that enables them to detect dangers while they are still distant and unknown. A good director must have this clairvoyant insight into the expressiveness of matter.

A sensation can also be exploited artistically in the strict sense of the word to emphasize an extreme intensification, to function as an exclamation mark at the climactic point of the plot. It acts then like an accompanying drum roll or fanfare. The entire expressive surface of which human beings are capable spreads itself out over the subject matter and the splitting of beams and mighty rockfalls become the mobile symbolic expressions of human feelings.

Of course, this occurs only when the external catastrophe coincides with the internal one, when the explosion takes place simultaneously inside and out. Where that is not the case, a sensation seems to be an added extra, and what we have said about certain sporting feats applies here too, that is to say, the sensation becomes an independent event separated from the action. It becomes a focus of interest in itself and thus a disruptive factor. The greater the sensation, the greater the risk of disrupting the action's flow – as indeed we have already seen in the case of very striking sporting achievements on film.

But the effect of the drama, as well as of the sensation itself is damaged if we feel that the thrust of the entire action is towards the sensation alone. The situation is the same as with jokes. Jokes are far more effective when they arise spontaneously from conversation than if they are couched in an anecdote that has been invented expressly for their sake.

An expertly shot sensation, in contrast, can communicate to our nerves a number of seemingly pure bodily feelings that also intensify its effect. In particular, film can induce the feeling of *vertigo*. The greatest catastrophe depicted in a pictorial space that is separated from our own space will never have an impact comparable to the image that places us on the very edge of an *abyss* that opens up *before our very eyes*. The collapse of a tower in the distance is in no sense as frightening as the sight of a beam apparently falling out of the picture onto *our* heads. The director will be wise to note this effect. The momentary illusion of danger to oneself is always more effective than images of catastrophes that overwhelm others.

Set, Make-up and Illusion

Fanatical believers in film naturalism often insist that film is incompatible with painted scenery and that it calls for a much greater degree of natural authenticity than theatre. That is a fact. It is, for example, significant that a film within a film has the same charm as a play within a play. The second film confers a relative reality on the first. But theatre on film is always a disaster. This is because the *open use of greasepaint* seems to rob the film of its essence: the illusion of a reality that is suggested to us by the very fact of the photographic apparatus.

It is also both my experience and my conviction that film decor has to be absolutely authentic. My reason is not that 'the camera does not lie'. That is not the point here; what matters is that photography produces *a copy*. If it does not depict an original object then the image it produces becomes the copy of a copy, and thus loses all contact with reality. In the theatre, a set can work. But a photographed set is the reproduction of a reproduction in which manifest reality evaporates, leaving only allusive hints.

Visual Linkage

Linkage, in other words the sequence of images and their tempo corresponds to style in literature. The fact that the same story can be told in very different ways and with different effects depends on the conciseness and the rhythm of the individual sentences. In the same way, linkage will give the film its rhythmic character. It will ensure that the images will flow smoothly and in a broad stream, like the hexameter in a classical epic, or else like a ballad, flaring up breathlessly and then dying down again, like a drama, rising inexorably towards a climax, or tingling capriciously. Linkage is the living breath of film and everything depends on it.

The first problem arises from the fact that images cannot be conjugated. We can write, 'The hero *went* home and when he entered…' But an image exists only in the present and so the film can only show him *going*. Or else nothing at all. And the question is, 'What can and what should we leave out?

Directors who come to film from the theatre often bring with them the prejudice about 'concentrating on essentials' and the need to 'focus' on large, detailed and crucial set-piece scenes. This means that there is always something of a chilling vacuum in the intervening scenes. The living, warm flow of life congeals into great blocks of ice.

However, the 'essentials' in a film are located elsewhere than on the stage, in a different dimension. The novelist knows full well why he does not present his story in three great concentrated acts, why he narrates a thousand little 'incidental' happenings. It is because he is interested in knitting together the texture of the atmosphere that is always ruptured and destroyed when the meaning of the action is revealed in a spectacular scene. This meaning may be the kernel of the entire work. But a kernel does not produce a fruit's juice and aroma. Yet the words a novelist has to use are always clear-cut concepts whose sharp claws scratch an unambiguous meaning from everything, while the purely visual nature of film enables us to see that *indeterminate something* that can only ever appear between the lines even in the best of novelists.

A good director will work with a 'thin flow' of images linking in a number of subsidiary scenes in ways that will always seem surprising and new to us, like the snapshots of movements that show us quite unfamiliar positions of the body. But the movement of life itself also consists of such unfamiliar positions (positions of the soul), which are easily obliterated by a focus on 'essentials', but which are revealed to us for the first time by film.

Interpolated Images

The exclusively present nature of images means that our *experience of time* in a film is an especially problematic aspect of visual linkage. Because the original running time of an action is presented in a visually continuous sequence of images, the only way to 'let time pass' is to interrupt the scene by interpolating extra images. But the mere length of such interpolated images is not enough to enable the audience to gauge *how much* time has elapsed.

Length of time is a mood, not an objective fact to be measured by the clock. Whether we feel that one minute has passed or many hours depends on the rhythm of a scene, the space in which it is set and even the way it is lit. There are curious connections between our feelings about time and space and they deserve closer psychological investigation. For example, the fact that *the further the location of an interpolated scene is from that of the principal scene, the greater the illusion that a longer time has elapsed.* If we interrupt a scene in a room with another in the hall, however long the second scene lasts, it does not suggest much more time has passed than the time taken by the scene itself. But, if the interpolated scene leads us into a different town or even a foreign country, it will arouse the illusion of such a great shift of 'time-space' that we shall not find it easy to transport ourselves back into the original scene.

The twin necessities of interpolated scenes on the one hand and visual continuity on the other often appear to present an almost insoluble contradiction and turn visual linkage into the director's most delicate task. He has to know how to ensure that the mood of one scene continues to illuminate the mood of the following one. Just as the colour in a painting takes on a different hue depending on the colours adjacent to it, so too the mood of one scene will be influenced by the scene that precedes it. An interpolated scene, therefore, may diverge from the main action but must be related to it in mood.

This continuity of mood also helps to maintain the memory of what has gone before, as well as the general context, thus replacing the need to rely on the expedient of titles. Small motifs, objects, gestures and sometimes just the lighting can all evoke the associations of an earlier scene and, like visual leitmotivs that barely cross the threshold of consciousness, they enable us to grasp the main thrust of the plot.

Passageways[1]

It is necessary here to say something about scenes of passage. These are transitional scenes that show us only how a character moves from one

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1. In *TotF,* Balázs distinguishes between 'passage' as a mode of cinematic performance, and as a specific mode of montage. He thus describes actors' walking as a 'most expressive and quite specific cinematic gesture', and the 'passage' as an interpolated image of the actor's walk that was common in the silent film, and that acted 'as a kind of visual soliloquy' (*TotF*, p. 135).

location to another. Many directors, especially those who come to cinema from the theatre, used to be strongly prejudiced against these scenes, regarding them as dead spaces in the film, clumsy expedients.

But passageways contain a film's lyrical element. The hero's solitary comings and goings before and after his great scene are his soliloquies, and in film these are not even 'unnatural'. Thanks to its *ritardando* effect, the hero's progress to the decisive scene can produce a preparatory tension, an atmospheric springboard, and the image of passage following the dramatic climax can present its impact, the emotional result. It can achieve this far more effectively than the climactic scene itself, where the events of the external action often obscure their internal ramifications.

In these performed monologues of walking an actor can often display his art more fully than in the most turbulent dramatic scenes. The reason is that these latter scenes are full of gestures that have not merely an *inner motive* but also an *external purpose*. Such purposive gestures are not simply expressive in function; they are partly determined by the external action and hence do not provide an actor with the same opportunity to express his feelings as an image of passage. When two men walk quietly side by side, their gait will reveal the differences in their characters. If they are fighting, however, even the wildest movements will cease to express the subtle differences of character and mood between them.

I can very well imagine an impressionist cinematic style, I might also term it a Maeterlinckian style, in which the principal scenes are not shown at all, but only the presentiments and lyrical after-effects of the events concerned – moments of passage.[2]

In *The Phantom*, Alfred Abel spends a lot of time wandering alone through the streets. But nowhere else in the film do we see so clearly that here is a lost soul, a deluded man who has gone astray, a man intoxicated by dreams who is doomed to fall into the abyss. In the scenes with other people we can still entertain the belief that the danger comes from them and that he might well be spared. But, when he is alone, the way he walks tells us that the danger is in himself. He is inwardly wounded and he

2. Balázs's long-standing interest in the Belgian symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck had already been evident in his 1911 libretto for Béla Bartók's opera *Bluebeard's Castle*. Balázs's version of the Bluebeard myth took Maeterlinck's libretto for Paul Dukas's opera *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* (1907) as one of its principal sources. In *TotF,* Balázs sees the symbolist possibilities opened up by film montage as having been historically displaced by 'American' film naturalism. He writes (p. 77): 'The simplification of acting brought about by the close-up changed more than the style of acting. There was also a change in taste accompanying the change of trend, which substituted a neo-naturalistic tendency for the neo-romanticism of Rostand and Maeterlinck on the Western European stage. After the First World War and the hysterical emotional fantasies of expressionism, a 'documentary', dry, anti-romantic and anti-emotional style was the fashion in the film as in the other arts. The simplified acting demanded by the close-up conformed to the new taste for the objective and unromantic and this circumstance did much to popularize the American style of acting in Europe.'

staggers around like a man who has been shot. (And in general, the way a protagonist walks expresses the gesture governing his destiny.)

And to see Conrad Veidt's walk! It is hard to imagine a film whose main dramatic scenes could equal the intensity of Veidt's images of passage. The way he walks as the sleep-walking medium in *Caligari* is like the slow, very slow flight of an arrow bringing an ineluctable death. And in general, Veidt's gait resembles a spear cleaving the space in front of it and pointing to the direction fate intends to take.

In one film Lilian Gish plays a poor girl vainly looking for work and we see her walking along the street, exhausted and desperate. Every step she takes is like someone shutting her eyes, letting her head droop and falling under the wheels of a car.

Needless to say, passageways must not be treated as being of secondary importance. There are directors who prepare the decisive scenes with great care and ensure that they are played by the very best actors. But once the hero has left the room, the same directors may well ignore the servant who helps him into his coat or the chauffeur who opens the car door for him. Such interpolated scenes are treated as nothing more than dead linking material, as mere glue, and are not 'acted' at all. But such lifeless gaps act like a blast of cold air on the rest of the film; the audience does not notice where the cold comes from, but may feel the chill nonetheless. However, if directors keep a tight rein on even the tiniest scenes they will give the film a *continuity of illusion* that creates an atmospheric warmth that cannot be pinned down and that permeates the film as a whole.

Simultaneism and Refrain

Visual linkage in film contains the most varied stylistic possibilities. I should like to refer to just two that I believe will play a special role in modern developments. The first style, one that can already be seen here and there, I should like to call 'simultaneism', after the most modern school of lyric poetry, with Walt Whitman as its most significant representative. For it is based on the same intention, namely the wish to present not merely a single image of the world at large, but a number of *simultaneous* events, even if there is no causal relationship between these events and the principal one, or of these simultaneous events among themselves. By means of this cross-section of life as *a whole* the aim is to create a cosmic impression, an impression of the entire world, since this alone can depict the world in its reality.

Abel Gance made attempts of this sort; he strove to depict not just an action but at the same time its entire context. For example, when we follow the fate of his hero in Paris, the narrative is constantly interrupted by momentary flashes in which we see villages, people working in the fields or a girl at a window. None of these things is relevant to the plot,

but they represent a simultaneous reality. In that reality life is going on as usual and that should not be forgotten.

I believe that the theoretical hopes placed in this style cannot be fulfilled in practice. They give the film a *false dimension*, a dimension of breadth instead of depth. To convey depth film should focus not on the neglected images of remote distances, but on the neglected images of things close to us, the invisible aspects of our own experienced moments. Furthermore, by inserting the action together with a number of motifs into a spatial perspective that evinces no sign of a before and after, such a simultaneous representation of the surrounding circumstances nullifies all sense of time.

A further stylistic possibility is that of the image refrain. I have seen it fully and intentionally implemented in a film only once. That was in *Vanina*, where we see the recurrence not just of images of certain spaces and landscapes at regular intervals, as at the end of a stanza, but also the repetition of certain scenes. I sense here the possibility of a *uniform language of images* that is related to the normal flow of images as verse is to prose.

The direction of images

The technique of interpolating images means that a film has to contain two, three or even more parallel stories whose lines become interwoven. In such a highly contrapuntal film there is in fact no need for images that are *merely* interpolated and have no other function. For an image that functions as a principal scene in its own storyline becomes an interpolated image in the other plot. Thus, in such a film, images advance on a broad front and the director must develop the art of highlighting those that are of particular consequence for the further progress of the action. Each image must point us in a specific direction, guiding our curiosity. If tension is to be created, we have to know right from the outset *at what point* we are to expect something to happen.

This pointing of images in a particular direction can often be achieved by a single gesture, a silent glance, and in a good film the drama of the last act can often be hinted at in the first. In other words, the first scene poses the questions that are not answered until the denouement. Once our curiosity has been pointed in a certain direction, the images are simply threaded on in sequence. If that direction is lacking, the images fall apart like a broken string of pearls. Such direction is the only thing that points beyond them and can be utilized for the composition and the structure of the film as a whole.

This explains why surprises are far less effective in films than gradual developments – if we exclude those designed for comic effect. Tension amounts to the premonition and expectation created by the direction in which the images are pointing. The gradual onset of destiny, the *visible* approach of conflict image by image, is what generates the scary, oppressive atmosphere, which can be much more terrifying than a

sudden cataclysm. (This explains why a vampire is more frightening than a murderer.) The surprise caused by a new, unsuspected danger can never seem as uncanny as one that keeps recurring, that we continually expect, that is therefore really present all the time and that turns into a vengeful, implacable, mysterious fate.

This rule holds good for the theatre as well. A further factor in the case of film, however, is that silent images are unable to explain themselves. If they are to be noticed, therefore, either they have to be shown to us at length and in detail, and this would tend to cancel out the desired tempo of a crucial scene, or else we must *look forward to a scene expectantly and be prepared for its arrival.* Only then shall we see it in the proper light and understand it, even if it only appears for a few moments. In films every allegro has to be purchased with a ritardando.

In Griffith's films we can see an especially clever technique of visual linkage at work when the plot approaches its climax. There is a divergence between the tempo of the action and the tempo of the images. The former seems to come to a stop; the tempo of the images, in contrast, becomes increasingly excited and hurried. The images pass before our eyes more and more rapidly and briefly, and their rhythm intensifies the mood to the point of extreme excitement. But the action does not advance and this breathless wait for the final moment is often stretched out over an entire act. The axe is poised, the fuse is already alight, but first we have to watch an entire flurry of images which – like the second hand of a clock – represent a more rapid movement but not a more rapid passage of time. The accelerando of the second-long images is used to achieve a ritardando in the passing of the hours. As a director, Griffith unfolds the last second of the denouement like the panorama of a great set-piece battle.

Tempo

In general, tempo is one of the most fascinating and important secrets of film. It deserves a book of its own, and such a book would provide the psychologists with some very interesting insights. What should we seize on from among the plethora of problems?

A long take means something different from a short one. The length or brevity of a scene is not just a matter of rhythm, but rather it *determines its meaning*. (A doubtless vain reminder to distributors and cinema proprietors and all those who cut the director's work without his consent.) Every second counts. Just cut a metre of film and the scene – if it was a good one – not only is shorter but also changes its meaning. It has been given a new mood content.

Moreover, it will often have become shorter only in terms of physical length; in its mood it will have lengthened. The internal tempo of the images is entirely independent of the time required to show them in reality. There are scenes in which, by showing a large number of minor

objects in close-up, the passing of the seconds produces the effect of dramatic tempo. When these details are removed, what remains is a general image that is no more than a lifeless frame. This may well take less time to see but it is not possible to fill such a frame with tension.

We can illustrate this situation with the aid of a simile that is perhaps not quite exact: if I look at the picture of an anthill in close-up, with the detailed images of its teeming activity, such images will have tempo. But, if I shorten it by cutting out the close-ups so that I am left with the generalized picture of an ant heap, a mere geometrical shape, the act of cutting will result only in filling the film with internal *longueurs*.

In the cinema every storyline resembles such an ant heap. The closer and more detailed our view, the more life and tempo it has. But, when the events are just noted fleetingly, they are drained of all vitality. When an event just flits past, we merely *note its presence* without actually seeing it. It does not come to life before our eyes and has only the meaning of a kind of literature in hieroglyphs. Moreover, on its own even a concept, a word, can have no tempo and the brief synopsis of a novel will always be more boring than the novel itself.

There are films that produce one interesting scene after the other and yet are quite lacking in tension because scarcely have we reached one situation than the film's faulty tempo hustles us on to the next. A protracted duel makes for a more exciting scene than the lightning thrust of a dagger. It seems in general as if *the only thing that produces tempo in a scene is the mobility of the atoms of which it is composed.* This is because the spoken word can always call to mind the plot in its entirety, but it is only the momentary that enables us to see.

In *Vanina* Asta Nielsen plays the governor's daughter who frees her lover from an underground prison and leads him through endless corridors. If this passage were no more than ten metres long it would be of no importance and actually quite superfluous. In fact, their walk through these corridors turns out to be endless. They pass through corridors which lead in turn to other corridors. As the little time left to them in which to escape drains away like blood from an open wound, each new corridor opens up a mysterious and uncanny vista leading to an inscrutable fate. Already doomed, but as yet still free, overcome by hope and despair, they flee from death, which sits behind them in the saddle. The longer this lasts, the more the tension increases, until our nerves finally reach breaking point.

And, in general, the expression '*time-space*' acquires a special meaning in film. It is up to the director to decide during the cutting process whether the images have enough space in the allotted time or whether it sits too loosely around them. One metre too little and the scene loses all animation; one metre too much and it becomes tiring. This phenomenon has its own optical and psychological laws that deserve investigation. We might suppose, for example, that a great crowd scene needs more time for

exposition than the shot of a single face, but in fact the opposite is the case. When the picture of an army shoots past at a distance, we are left less dissatisfied than when the close-up of a single face fades out too quickly. This is because in fact there is more to be seen on a single face.

We must *be able to see* a movement (its character, its direction and intention) if it is to develop an appropriate tempo. This calls for both time and space. However, the nature of an emotional event is not so easily grasped as a purely material one. Nevertheless, it is only the movement of the psyche that determines whether there is tempo or not.

Titles

The captions in a film, known as 'titles', are not simply a literary affair but are problems of cutting and also elements of tempo. As to the literary dimension, the requirement for proper logic and grammar is justified. But woe to the film if the poetry missing from the images is to be supplied by the titles.

Regrettably, too many people aspire to produce 'artistic films'. These films hope to raise the level by refining and spiritualizing the style of the titles. 'Literary titles', however, are a monstrous hazard, not simply because they turn films into a refuse dump for literary garbage, and misuse the cinema screen for tasteless, stereotyped kitsch on which no publisher would waste his paper. Good literature would be at least as damaging to film because it transposes the action into a completely different sphere, one in which we lose the interconnections between images because we become attuned to their conceptual links.

Doctrinaire aesthetes call for the elimination of titles in the name of pure visuality. They back up their demands with powerful arguments. The same aesthetes also condemn opera as an impure blend of music and words, and their favourite slogan is 'pure music'. Nevertheless, I feel it would be a pity if we were to be deprived of *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, and *Tristan und Isolde* or *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* cannot be dismissed simply as artistic aberrations. Films without titles will prove to be a very interesting and valuable cinematic genre, but to grant them a monopoly would be to sacrifice much of film's expressive and effective potential.

The effect of a title depends not just on its textual message but on the point at which it is inserted into the film. In the case of dialogue, for example, it is important that we do not learn anything from the titles that we have not already been informed of by the picture. For this would mean that the action is being carried forward by literary methods, thus giving rise to a break in visual continuity, even though the title 'Twenty years later' is not very disruptive. In effect, visual continuity and storyline continuity are two different things that have nothing in common with one another.

Nevertheless, titles that stand in for events that are not shown always have a bridging function; in other words, they are clumsy makeshifts,

even if we are not necessarily disturbed by them. Lyrical titles, in contrast, or dialogue titles often bear a far greater meaning. If appositely placed, they have the same function as the point of a story and can make use of a few words to provide a climax with a final, intense twist. There are moments when we have the feeling that the image resounds. I can reply to the doctrinaire advocates of stylistic purity only by referring to the role of words in music: the literary titles accompanying Schumann's little pieces and similar works by Debussy make a real contribution to the overall poetic impact.

By making use of language as a kind of preface whereby to communicate psychological preconditions briefly, such titles often make it possible to achieve an especially subtle treatment of facial expressions.

Inserting titles is one of the film director's most sensitive and at the same time one of his most neglected tasks. There are innumerable occasions on which a good scene is spoilt by a good title's having been inserted at the most exciting moment, just before a pause in the interplay of facial expressions, so that it has to be followed up by a re-establishing shot, a new run-up in the scene that is being mimed. Moreover, the use of titles has developed its own technique with which to relate the words in the titles to a specific speaker in the absence of a voice to indicate to us where the words are coming from.

There is a particularly subtle technique – one favoured by Abel Gance – of using titles to frame images of particular significance. Scenes focusing on facial expressions are emphasized *and named* by titles, much like particular stanzas in a poem or chapter headings in a novel. They are memorable and provide emphasis, like a succinct quotation from a poem.

SUPPLEMENTARY FRAGMENTS

Films are also called '*Lichtspiele*' [literally, 'light games, plays']. In the final analysis, they are indeed no more than a play of light. Light and shadow are the materials of this art, as colour is of painting and sound of music. The play of facial expressions and gestures, soul, passion and fantasy – all that is ultimately no more than photography. And what photography cannot express the film cannot convey.

Photography

The cameraman has to be a conscious painter. First, because as an optical art, a film has primarily to be a feast for the eyes. Secondly, because every lighting effect, every colouring, has a symbolic value and expresses a specific atmosphere, whether the cameraman desires this or not. So he has to desire it. If he avoids every 'atmospheric' lighting effect and produces only clear, distinct images, he will end up creating a cold, dry, sober atmosphere that will have just as much influence on the film's emotional content as any other camera effect. No art acknowledges the existence of neutral techniques and film is no different. But equally, the vividness of film images can be brought to a pitch of intensity that surpasses mere distinctness by far. American films often possess this vividness, which seems to be bursting with the energy of people with swelling muscles and chubby cheeks. These films have such bright vitality that you feel overcome while watching them by the sense of physical well-being that you associate with standing in bright sunlight.

In general it is significant that a film's national characteristics manifest themselves most clearly in matters of photographic style. For the roots of all style lie in technique.

American style is in fact this brightly lit, naturalistic vividness. French style consists in the sober clarity with which dramatic groupings and set-up are organized. The style of Nordisk Films is especially succinct and significant.[1] There is something *neoclassical* about their camerawork (as

1. Established in Denmark in 1906, and enjoying its heyday in the early 1910s, Nordisk Film had seen its fortunes wane by the time Balázs wrote *Visible Man* in 1924. His frequent references to the studio's premier director, Carl Th. Dreyer, and to Asta Nielsen as its most memorable international star, suggest however that Balázs shared the widespread contemporary perception of the company's special significance for the early history of film.

well as their approach to directing). There is a genteel restraint in their *distingué* and deliberate rejection of all shrill effects. This confers on their consummate photographic technique a certain well-bred monotony, which can be compared to the monotony of blank verse in classical drama. This monotony guarantees Nordic films a stylistic uniformity not to be found in other national cinemas.

The German style of photography today already looks for painterly effects: but principally in the fact that it is concerned with clothing and arranging the *theme*, the motif. It is the Viennese cameraman who makes the most conscious and resolute use of his lamps and his camera as the tools of painting. Romantic picturesque is the style of the best Viennese films. A tumult of light and shade in deep focus (for the most part in the dark in the foreground and bright in the background). These effects seem to have their roots in the soft, velvety pathos of Viennese late baroque art.

Such films sometimes give the impression of being a gallery of moving pictures. That is a danger. For it is precisely their harmonious, self-sufficient composition that provides them with something inward and stable. The more striking such a photographic effect is, the more it functions as a frame, forming a self-contained image that breaks free from the flowing continuum of the whole.

Moreover, the purely technical aspect of trick photography frequently forms an important element of our aesthetic pleasure. That is not a special prerogative of cinema art. In architecture, for example, discovering the solutions to problems has a pathos of its own or at least the effect of *esprit*. A good film trick mainly achieves this last effect and it frequently excites and inspires us like the technical achievements of virtuoso musicians. It arouses pleasure in the power of technique.

Welcome to the Colour Film[2]

We may well cry 'Eureka!' for we have at least seen the sea. The sea in its eternally changing, original blue-green colours, with white foam spraying the reddish-brown reefs.

Our march to the sea in all its colours has taken longer than Xenophon's *Anabasis*; for, from the very inception of photography, colour photography has been a cherished goal. Yet the technical 'achievements' en route have done cinema more harm than good. Since hitherto only individual images appeared in colour – and only partially at that – they always seemed to be no more than a form of playful experiment. They meant surrendering the uniform style of the film while in exchange we were given not the advances of the old technology but the maladroit beginnings of a new one.

2. The first colour feature made in Hollywood was *The Toll of the Sea* (1922), directed by Chester M. Franklin and starring Anna May Wong. This was the first colour feature anywhere that did not require a special projector to be shown. For the history of the use of colour in film, see, for example, D. Parkinson. 1995. *The History of Film*, London: Thames & Hudson, p. 112ff.

Today, however, the colour film is already as good as there. My excitement on seeing my first colour film was very similar to what I felt on seeing my first aeroplane take off into the sky. I had become the witness and the contemporary of the progress of human civilization. This colour film was such a sensation from a technical point of view that it entirely displaced any artistic interest and even made it possible to overlook a number of technical defects associated with this innovation.

And, if I subsequently had reservations, they did not arise from these defects. On the contrary, it was the idea of the perfect colour film that made me anxious. For fidelity to nature is not always of benefit to art. The figures in a waxworks are often so lifelike that people say 'I beg your pardon' when they inadvertently brush up against them. But no one will claim that they are more artistic than white marble statues or reddish brown bronze figures. Art actually consists in reduction. And is it not conceivable that the homogeneous grey on grey of the ordinary film contained the secret of a true artistic style?

Of course, I know full well that such reservations will not be able to hold up technical advances in cinema. Nor should they. Despite our aesthetic scruples we can take comfort from the fact that colour paintings have not succeeded in doing away with black and white drawings and etchings. The introduction of colour has not prevented them from becoming great art. The use of colour does not yet commit artists to the unconditional, slavish imitation of nature. Once cinematography has achieved complete fidelity to the colours of nature it will become unfaithful to nature on a higher plane. This gives me no cause for concern.

Music in the Cinema

Why is music always played during film shows? Why does a film shown without musical accompaniment always feel embarrassing? Perhaps the music is there in order to fill the vacuum between the characters that is normally bridged by dialogue. Moreover, there is something uncanny about any movement that is perfectly silent. It would be even more uncanny for several hundred people to sit together in a hall in absolute silence for hours on end.

It is striking that it is only the absence of music that attracts our attention; its presence passes without notice. Music of any kind goes with any scene. We prick up our ears only when the two really belong together and for the most part that seems either ludicrous or embarrassing. If in a film a burial scene is accompanied by a funeral march, I find this brutal and somehow impertinent. For music arouses different visions and these clash with those of the film only when they come too close to one another.

For this reason – laudable though it may be to play good music in the cinema – Beethoven, Bach and Mozart are not always the most suitable accompaniment to a murder or a court case. This is not to decry the

exalted nature of cinema art. But music of this kind, particularly when it is familiar and attracts the audience's attention, transports us into a quite different sphere, one that has ceased to be connected with the film.

At any rate, music is as yet an unresolved problem in the cinema – for anyone who finds music in general problematic. Nowadays, directors have already begun to commission their own film music, a kind of programme music geared to the plot and with leitmotifs for the main characters. This makes all sorts of good effects possible. In general, however, it surrounds the characters with a kind of atmospheric appendage in which they find it awkward and difficult to move. Such effects are unattainable if only because the emotional moods created by music and movement call for very different tempos. A swift glance cannot always be captured in a correspondingly brief musical phrase. In the past the contents of a passing glance have called for a lengthy sonata.

I expect much more from the reverse procedure, one that to my knowledge has never been attempted. I am thinking of *the filming of pieces of music*. The visions, even irrational ones, that unfold before our mind's eye when we listen to music could be made to pass before us on film. Who knows, perhaps this will develop into an entirely novel branch of art?

The Grotesque in Film

Jokes that can have an explosive effect when they are *told* become unutterably boring and flat in film. If indeed they can be *shown* at all in film. The typical European joke (which is not uninfluenced by the Jewish joke) has a logical structure. It plays with concepts and calls on us to track down their hidden and surprising relations to each other. The best jokes are those that cannot be understood by primitive people, or are grasped only with difficulty. Their greatest charm lies precisely in the cunning way the point of the joke has been concealed. But logical jokes cannot be made visual; hidden allusions cannot be photographed. Moreover, the image on the screen declines to stay still until the audience has grasped its hidden meaning.

The superiority of naive American humour in film has its roots here: it grasps the visible comedy of things. There is no need to guess at a meaning since no meaning is there in the first place. There are no jokes that have first been conceived and then are depicted in the film. Instead, we find a purely visual comedy that consists in the way events are dramatized.

This comedy consists simply and solely in the absurd. However, this is capable of being intensified. In the case of the majority of American comic actors (such as Fatty Arbuckle or Harold Lloyd), the way in which their actions unfold technically or mechanically is striking in its absurdity. In the case of Chaplin, however, a *psychological* dimension is added. The comic effect derives not just from *what* he does, but from *the way* he does it. The question 'What on earth was he thinking of?', makes his character seem all the livelier.

For example, if someone is chasing Harold Lloyd and he defends himself against a thousand threats that beset him from all sides (and that is the basic motif of all these American farces), the ways in which he defends himself are grotesque and comic. But they are only absurd in a technical, mechanical sense. There is never any attempt at a psychological or a spoof psychological explanation. This explains why they turn into a uniform pattern of confusions that become wearisome in time. As a pursuit of this sort goes on, a comedian like this turns gradually into a lifeless object that is shoved around and chased from pillar to post. There are indeed innumerable surprises. But they are all of the same kind and after a while they cease to surprise.

In the case of Chaplin, however, the psychological implausibility of his actions becomes more and more mysterious and it gradually takes on the half-touching, half-comic air of a melancholy that comes from being misunderstood.

WORLD VIEW

Every view of the world contains a world view. Film has arisen as the product of a large capitalist industry, and is shaped accordingly. To a far greater degree than literature. For literature is not a recent phenomenon and it was already a major force at a time when capitalism did not yet exist. For that reason it carries with it fragments of world views and ideological traditions, if not in modified form, then in their traditional garb. Because they maintain a pre-capitalist distance from the spirit of capitalism, they sometimes appear to open up the possibility of a prospect that transcends it. Film, however, is perhaps the only art to emerge as a child of capitalist industry and it embodies its spirit. However, it need not remain within the confines of capitalism.

Cinema began with the figure of the detective. The detective is the embodiment of the romanticism of capitalism. Money is the great idea that is being fought over here. Money is the buried fairy-tale treasure; it is the Holy Grail and the Blue Flower that men yearn for. For the sake of money the intrepid criminal risks his life; he is hardly ever a poor proletarian forced by poverty to steal. For the most part, he is the elegant cat burglar in evening dress and patent leather shoes who dons a mask by night not for a bite of bread but for the romantic treasure, the mystical bloom of life: for wealth untold.

The hero of these films, however, was the doughty defender of private property, the detective. He is the St George of capitalism. In the heroic sagas of olden times the knight in shining armour leapt on his charger in order to do battle for the king's daughter. Nowadays, it is the detective who pockets his Browning and leaps into his car in order to defend with his life the sacred takings from the Wertheim department stores.

What is romantic about that? Where is the element of fantasy, adventure and the marvellous that appears to transcend the bounds of the natural? Well, whatever transcends the bounds of the penal code. In the eyes of the ordinary citizen, justice and the world order are the same thing. And the symbol and representative of the world order is the policeman. If this order is disturbed the shaken citizen not only makes sure that his purse is safe, he also shudders and clutches his heart. For the police cordon is the outer limit of life; beyond that lies mystery, the miraculous, the romantic.

In recent years cinema has moved away somewhat from the romanticism of the detective. For we have now experienced robbery on a scale that dwarfs anything a mere burglar can accomplish. The popular imagination has discovered a far more glorious hero in the bank director. It is also evident that compared with a king of the stock exchange a thief who steals from the till is a rank amateur. This new focus on large-scale financial adventures has acted to the detriment of films as works of art. For the conflict between the safe-cracker and the detective was *visible* and gave rise to an inexhaustible wealth of fantastic situations into which a host of psychological subtleties and poetic insights could be smuggled where they were needed.

In contrast, the essence of large-scale capitalism is that it is *abstract*, that the dominant forces in it and the conflict between them are *invisible*. A great financier may plunge into the most hazardous and fantastic adventures, but, however extravagant they may be, his exploits all take place in the mind: they are ideas, decisions, discussions with a trusted associate and, at most, a speech to the board. Even the decisive scene in which he appends his signature to a letter or a contract is not actually picturesque or dramatic enough to serve as the crucial scene of a film.

In real life it is this invisibility that is so uncanny. In a film, however, it is not uncanny at all because it is not actually present. What cannot be seen cannot be photographed.

In the cinema the capitalist milieu is very popular, partly for ornamental reasons. Fine clothes and elegant rooms make for beautiful images. However, the people who inhabit this milieu do not lead lives suitable for film dramas. Their salons may be agreeable to look at, but their gestures convey nothing to the eye. Film producers maintain that the public, especially its poorer members, has a special interest in the world of the rich. That is possible. But not everything that is interesting in life is of interest in the cinema.

Over and above such considerations, it remains true that the glossy trappings of wealth in the capitalist film have a deeper significance, one that goes beyond their purely ornamental value. The same may be said of the feudal splendour of historical costume films. The explanation is to be sought in the nature of the purely visual. The *ornamental has been converted in film to a symbol of human values*. The external has been given an inward interpretation, instead of, as good art requires, shaping the inward into significant, visible forms.

In the same way, the idyll plays a much more prominent role in these capitalist films than the ability to emanate charm. In many American films this great emphasis on the idyllic looks like conscious propaganda. In former times the mass of the poor and the underprivileged were consoled by the prospect of happiness in the world to come. Now they are to be diverted from the injustice of life and their own despair by the picture of domestic bliss in the bosom of the family.

There was also a necessary artistic development that led to the demise of the detective film. The fact is that it was psychologically primitive and undifferentiated. It was forced to work with generalized stereotypes like chess pieces. There were the recurrent figures of the rich man, the criminal and the detective. However varied their adventures were (in the same way that the most varied games of chess always operate with the same pieces), interest always focused on their interplay, the combinations generated by their conflict, and not their personalities. The detective looked only for the culprit, but not for his underlying motives. He wanted only to catch him, not to understand him.

Nevertheless, these primitive, psychologically crude thrillers had an inner strength and artistic clarity that were absent from more exalted forms of art. A completely different sense of life seemed to manifest itself not in their contents, but *in their form and their rhythm*. This arose from the analytical form of detective films, for, if they were well constructed, these always started from the end, i.e. with the crime, and the detective gradually solved the riddle by moving, step by step and from clue to clue, *back to the beginning* of the story. In these films, despite labyrinthine complications the final goal was always clearly fixed from the outset. In this world everything may have been a problem, but nothing was problematic, for, while the meaning of a thing was frequently unknown, the audience could be sure that it had but one correct, definite and unambiguous meaning. Everything was designed with this end in view. This entire universe was illuminated from a single perspective. Each moment and each image in these films were linked by tightly drawn threads to the final image of the concluding moment. Many mistakes were made in this universe, but one did not get lost. Objects frequently started out with an importance that in time turned out to be an illusion. But the principal motif of modern individualistic literature that things *really do change* in importance and value was unknown in the simple world of the detective film. Its analytical form gave it the fixed stamp of unambiguous meaning. It was like the primitive metaphor of a world which still has faith.

Film is the product of large-scale capitalist industry, something we can see in every fibre of its being. However, capitalism has previously produced many things that have been changed by a dialectical process into their exact opposites. (The workers' movement is just one example.) It was argued in the first chapter of this book that cinematography represented the transformation from a conceptual to a visual culture. Its popularity is rooted in the same yearning that has created such a need in recent years for the art of dance, pantomime and decorative art of every kind. This yearning is the painful need felt by human beings belonging to an over-intellectualized and over-abstract culture to experience an immediate, concrete reality that has not been filtered through the sieve of words and concepts. It is the same yearning that explains the struggle of modern lyric poets to discover an irrational, more immediate language.

However, the dematerialized abstractness of our culture is integral to the nature of capitalism. To be sure, we asserted in the first chapter that the invention of printing had shifted the centre of gravity of culture from the visual to the conceptual. Nevertheless, printing would never have spread so rapidly if the general progress of the spirit, itself the product of economic developments, had not already set out on its path towards increased abstraction. Printing merely accelerated the process of 'reification', the term used by Karl Marx to designate the growth of abstraction. Just as in the minds of men the intrinsic *value* of objects has been displaced by their market *price*, so too people's minds have gradually become estranged from the immediate existence of objects in general. It was this intellectual climate that enabled the book culture of later centuries to become so dominant.

The intellectual climate of capitalist culture contradicts the nature of film, which, although it has emerged under capitalism, expresses the yearning for the concrete, non-conceptual, immediate experience of things. But despite its vast popularity, film will be no more able to transform culture on its own than was printing in its day. The deepest reasons for its manifold imperfections lie in this contradiction. And it will only be able to develop into a great art commensurate with its intrinsic potential when the general development of the world around it creates an intellectual climate in tune with it.

Vienna, January 1924

TWO PORTRAITS

Chaplin, the Ordinary American

I

He waddles along dreamily on flat feet, like a swan on dry land. He is not of this world and perhaps it is only here that he appears ridiculous. Behind the comedy of his woe we sense the wistful nostalgia for a lost paradise. He is like an orphan who finds himself an outcast among unknown, alien things and who doesn't know his way around. He has a touching, perplexed smile that apologizes for his being alive. But no sooner has his clumsy helplessness entirely won us over than those flat feet turn out to belong to a fiendishly agile acrobat, his waif-like smile acquires a hint of roguishness and his naivety is overlaid with a consummate cunning. He is the weak man who refuses to knuckle under. He is the third son in the fairy tale, the youngest of all, the one everyone despises but who ends up as king. That is the riddle of the profound pleasure and satisfaction that his art induces in the peoples of every nation. He acts out the victorious revolution of the 'insulted and the injured'.[1]

II

Chaplin's art is popular art in the best sense; it is comparable to the folk tales of old. (Film has long since inherited the mantle of old folk poetry.) His jokes have a tricky technique, but no complex psychology. He acts out the naive comedy of the immediate, primitive aspects of life. For it is things that are his enemies. He is always embroiled with the most ordinary, everyday, practical objects of civilization. Doors and stairs, chairs and plates and in fact all the articles of daily use turn into baffling obstacles. He confronts them like an innocent who has come straight out of the jungle and the way he deals with them is different from that of ordinary town-dwellers. Chaplin is unpractical – and Americans find that funny. However, America is not just a continent; it is a life principle that also prevails among us Europeans. For us too nothing is more grotesque than the stranger who does not know how to use our tools and

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1. No doubt an allusion to Dostoevsky's novel with that title.

implements. But the comedy here is double-edged. Those tools and implements are likewise unmasked.

The unpractical Chaplin of modern American folk poetry is in fact the ordinary American, the little guy. The folk tales about the stupid peasants who wanted to carry sackloads of sunlight into the windowless church were the expression of agrarian peasant humour. In our own day, Chaplin plays a pawnbroker who uses a stethoscope to inspect a watch brought to him as a pledge, before opening it up with a can-opener. That is the comedy of the little guy in the modern industrial city.

However, while Chaplin may be unpractical, he is by no means inept. On the contrary. He is an acrobat fighting against the demonically mysterious, alien objects of civilization. This struggle escalates into a thrilling, heroic duel from which Chaplin always emerges the winner. And this is the most important characteristic of his art. The essential point is that he opposes a simple-minded naturalness to an artificial sophistication, nature to civilization. His difficult but victorious struggle with practical objects is rooted in a grotesque and mocking indignation about our tool-based civilization and its estrangement from nature. What strikes us as so touchingly human about his dreamy simple-mindedness is that he represents a childlike humanity in the midst of what Marx in *Capital* calls a 'reified', mechanized society. He is a flat-footed acrobat, a roguish innocent, a cunning fool, but for all his idiocy we still have the feeling that somehow, somewhere, he is still in the right.

III

Even more important than Chaplin the film actor is Chaplin the film-maker. His childlike nature gives him a view of the world that becomes poetic in films. This is the poetry of ordinary life, the inarticulate life of ordinary things, which only children and tramps with time on their hands care to linger over. It is precisely this lingering process that yields the richest film poetry.

This is what has made Chaplin the master of that specific, non-literary 'film substance' that clever European theorists dream about. He never operates with a finished, fully worked-out story that can then be filled with the detailed realities of life (as the ready-made form is filled with molten bronze). He does not begin with an idea, with a form, but with the living material of individual realities. He creates his films inductively, not deductively. He does not shape his material but lets it grow and unfold, like a living plant. He feeds it with the blood of his blood, trains it and refines it until ever deeper meanings are revealed. He is no sculptor of dead matter but an expert gardener who cultivates a living life.

Asta Nielsen: How She Loves and How She Grows Old

Just as we are tempted to despair that film can ever be capable of becoming a genuine form of art on its own, an art worthy of being represented by a tenth Muse on Mount Olympus; just as we are on the verge of accepting that film can never be more than a lame version of theatre, to which it stands in the same sort of relationship as photographic reproduction does to oil painting – it is Asta Nielsen, and she alone, who is capable of restoring our faith and our conviction.

For example, she can act love and flirtation in a film in a way that can never be the simple photographic copy of a stage play, if only because it is a film that has no content worthy of a stage performance. Jessner's film version of *Erdgeist*[2] was stripped of everything that can be called literary. It is not a drama at all. It is a magnificent ensemble of erotic gestures.

The film's only content is that Asta Nielsen ogles, flirts with, bewitches and seduces six men. The film's content is the erotic charisma of this woman who regales us with the great and complete dictionary of the gestures of sensual love. (This may even be the classical form of cinematic art, where gestures are not triggered by a 'plot' with external *purposes*, but where every gesture has only *reasons* and hence points inwards.) It now becomes clear that the erotic is film's very own theme, its essence. First, because it is always a bodily experience, at least *in part*, and is therefore visible. Secondly, it is only in erotic relationships that we find an ultimate possibility of *mute understanding*. The only dialogue between lovers in which nothing remains unspoken is one conducted exclusively with their eyes, while words would seem far too crude. Courtship and the play of facial expressions have always gone together.

The diversity of gestures, the wealth of mimed expressions of which Asta Nielsen is capable is stupefying. In the case of writers, an extensive vocabulary is a sign of greatness. It is said that Shakespeare used 15,000 words. Only when advances in cinematography enable us to assemble our first gesture lexicon will we be in a position to gauge the extent of Asta Nielsen's thesaurus of gestures.

The special merit of Asta Nielsen's erotic art lies in its spiritual quality. It's the eyes that count here above all, not the flesh. Her abstract slimness is a single twitching nerve with a twisted mouth and two glowing eyes. She is never shown unclothed; she does not show off her thighs like Anita Berber (to the point where it is difficult to distinguish between face and backside),[3] and yet that dancing personification of vice might be able to

2. *Erdgeist* (*Lulu, Earth Spirit*), d. Leopold Jessner in 1923 and with a star-studded cast including Albert Bassermann, Alexander Granach and Heinrich George, as well as Asta Nielsen.
3. Anita Berber (1899–1929) was a celebrated, even notorious, dancer who performed in variety theatres and nightclubs in Berlin in the 1920s. Famous for the erotic magnetism of her stage presence, she became a cult figure. She was struck down by tuberculosis and the consequences of drug addiction and died in 1929 surrounded by morphine syringes and statues of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary.

learn a lot from Asta Nielsen. Notwithstanding her belly dances, she is an innocent lamb by the side of Nielsen in her clothes. For Nielsen is able to *look* like an obscene revelation and she has a way of smiling that might well justify the police in confiscating the film as pornography. This spiritualized eroticism is so dangerously demonic because its effects are not diminished by clothing.

And this explains why Asta Nielsen never seems salacious. She always retains a childlike quality. But in the role of Lulu, even though she plays a whore who becomes watchful and calculating the moment she gains the upper hand, her naivety has a plant-like naturalness. She is not immoral; she is a dangerous force of nature and as innocent as a beast of prey. She does not devour men out of malevolence, and her parting kiss (she kisses the man she has just shot) is more touching than all the tears shed by young girls who have been left in the lurch. We may well say: lower the flags in her honour, she is incomparable and without peer.

Asta Nielsen's childlike nature is the key to the mystery of her screen presence, of her mimed dialogues which establish *living contact* with her partner *without words*. Even the best actors normally just mime monologues in film and these are then spliced together to create the impression of a dialogue. But the bridge supplied by words is missing and the isolation created by muteness separates the actors. For only a spoken response can teach us the extent to which one person has understood or inwardly affected another. Everyone who has ever experienced a film show without music is well aware of how much we miss the medium of words.

Moreover, even without music, Asta Nielsen's scenes do not unfold in an icy vacuum. Even in the absence of music, with its capacity for bringing people together, she is able to establish the most intimate contact with her partner. How does she manage this?

Asta Nielsen's facial expressions mime those of the person she is speaking to. In this respect she does what children do. Her face wears not only her own expression but, barely noticeably (although we always sense it), the expression of her interlocutor, which is reflected as in a mirror. Just as I can hear what the heroine hears in the theatre, so too can I see from her face what she sees. She carries the entire dialogue in her features and fuses it into a synthesis of understanding and experiencing.

She once played Hamlet[4] and, in Act IV, she appeared before the throne of Fortinbras, the King of Norway, with the immobile, apathetic mask of melancholy. Fortinbras recognizes his old friend and welcomes him with open arms. Close-up of Asta Nielsen's face. Failing to recognize him, she looks at him blankly, uncomprehendingly. Her lips mime Fortinbras's smile with a meaningless grimace as he approaches. His face can be discerned in her expression as if in a mirror. She takes up his expression; it becomes submerged in hers and returns as something she has

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4.   *Hamlet* (1921), co-directed by Sven Gade.

recognized, so that the smile, which initially had been no more than a mask superimposed from outside, is gradually warmed from within, and turns into a living expression. That is the art that she has made her own.

Lower your flags in her honour; she is incomparable and without peer. Lower your flags for through her art even the downfall of an ageing woman becomes the vehicle for the steep rise of an actress. Asta Nielsen is the consummate artist who converts her life into art so utterly that every pain and every loss becomes transformed into the joy of a new role.

She has acted that *downfall*.[5] We see a woman who for decades has compelled us to experience her youth with all its stormy passions. Now we see this woman in the autumn of life, stripped of her foliage. Asta Nielsen has now grown old publicly. For she has nothing to hide. In an artist like her, old age is no defeat, no fading away, no ruin. By acting out this fading away, this defeat, she merely turns the ageing process into a new role that, as art, is as new and fresh as any youth. Asta Nielsen takes off her youth like a costume she has grown tired of, and triumphantly clothes herself instead in old age – her latest creation.

The script of this film is of no importance. Its value is that it presents Asta Nielsen with the opportunity to act. In this respect it is outstanding because its essential content is not a story that could also be told in narrative form, but a fate whose tempests are visibly inscribed in a face. And this face becomes a stage whose world is out of joint because of the raging passions confronting it. It turns into a battlefield on which more thrilling battles are fought out than those taking place between the masses of extras and the Hindenburg-like directors. It is the face of Asta Nielsen.

The brief content of the film is that a still beautiful, still radiant singer has to tell a young lover, 'No, let us not marry, I am too old for you.' The young lover then commits murder for her sake and is sentenced to ten years in gaol. 'I shall wait for you,' she writes to him. The youth dreams about her in prison, for ten whole years, and sees her before him as radiant as when he last saw her. During those ten years, however, the woman has grown old and ugly. What is more, Asta Nielsen takes everything to extremes, like every fanatical artist. She makes herself repulsive. Sickness and poverty drag her down into a morass of rotting decay. (How Asta Nielsen acts this! The sheer fury with which she probes her wounds!) Then the great day arrives. The shabby old woman with the ravaged face stands trembling at the prison gates through which the young man must pass. He comes. He knows that his beloved will be expecting him. He gazes around him. He walks slowly, peering into each of the faces of the people waiting. He sees a shabby, old woman leaning against a tree, half-fainting – and walks on sadly. His beloved has not

5. *Absturz* (Downfall), 1923, d. Ludwig Wolff. The film depicts the love of an ageing woman for a younger man. Siegfried Kracauer echoes Balázs's view: 'No one who watched her vain attempt [to look young again] will ever forget her acting' (*From Caligari to Hitler*. p. 128).

waited for him. This is followed by over a hundred metres of close-ups of Asta Nielsen's face! A trembling hope, mortal panic, eyes shrieking for help so loudly that you feel deafened; then tears flow – visible, real tears – pouring down her emaciated cheeks, which suddenly wither before our very eyes, and we witness the death of a soul – in the foreground, in Asta Nielsen's face. We can see this clearly from close to, like the surgeon who holds a twitching heart in his hand, counting every last beat.

To convey a picture of Asta Nielsen in an essay is a hopeless enterprise. It is high time that someone wrote a good book about her. I would like to highlight just one further scene from this film. It is actually two scenes. Asta Nielsen puts on make-up twice in this film. The first time she does it as the renowned diva in her dressing room before going on stage to celebrate one more triumph. She puts the cosmetics on like an invincible hero donning his armour; and she is in the highest of spirits. Moreover, such high spirits are superfluous; she has no need of them. Then she puts on her make-up a second time, in the last act. Here she is the worn-out old woman, preparing to meet her young lover again after a lapse of ten years. This is the greatest scene I have seen on film up to now. It is a final, hopeless, desperate battle. Gone are the playful, coquettish high spirits. She gazes in the mirror with a gloomy, wan earnestness, with growing concern and inexpressible anxiety. Like a general whose army is surrounded and who pores over his maps for one last time: 'What is to be done?' And, with a trembling hand, she sets to work. She holds the brush just as Michelangelo might have held his chisel on his last night: it's a matter of life and death. She inspects the result and shrugs her shoulders. This shrug means: now I am dead. Then she takes a dirty rag and wipes the make-up off. This brisk action feels just likes someone hanging himself before our very eyes. It makes you feel ill just to see it.

Lower the flags in her honour, she is incomparable and without peer.

THE SPIRIT OF FILM

BÉLA BALÁZS

SEVEN YEARS

It is seven years since *Visible Man* appeared, the first theory of the silent film. The book was the theory of an art that had only just begun to emerge from the trashy products of the picture palace. It was an introduction to theory. Calculation, dream, prophecy and the challenge of a great opportunity that seems now to have come to a halt before it could be properly realized. The talkies have put an end to it. It is time to draw up a balance sheet and to write a theoretical epilogue.

Voyage of Columbus

Seven years ago I had to make excuses and say, 'Theory isn't grey at all. It is the map for the traveller in the realm of art: a chart that shows us all the paths and possibilities and gives us the courage to embark, like Columbus, upon voyages of discovery.'

Well, Columbus himself didn't manage to reach India. He too stuck fast in America. But the earth is round nevertheless! And film likewise has travelled a fair way beyond Hollywood.

Seven years ago I wrote in *Visible Man*: 'A genuinely new art would be like a new sensory organ.'[1] This is what film has since become. A new organ for mankind to experience the world has developed with great rapidity. This development, which was surely an important episode in human history, seems now to have been momentarily arrested, cut short by the emergence of the sound film – and it is as yet uncertain where things will go from here.

All Change!

Is this to be regretted?

There is after all now a new beginning, even if it is one that has also produced an ending. One road has been blocked off, but another is opening up. New opportunities, new developments disrupt the old. Only philistines turn up their noses and weep and wail, instead of jumping in and taking part. New theories open up new vistas for new voyages of Columbus.

No, not everything has to be carried on to completion. In the final analysis, it is not works of art but human beings that matter. Yet human

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1. See *Visible Man*, p.5

beings do not always stay on the same bus right to the terminus. They frequently get on and off again. All change, please! The sound film!

The Story of the Russian Farm Manager[2]

And, after all, something has moved on in the interim. A new human organ has developed. This is more important than the aesthetic value of the individual works made possible by that organ.

A Russian friend told me this true story. Somewhere in the Ukrainian countryside, hundreds of kilometres from the nearest railway station, there lived a man, formerly a landowner, who became a farm manager after the revolution. He had not been to a town for fifteen years. He had been part of world history, but had never seen a film. He was a highly educated intellectual, who used to subscribe to all the new books, newspapers and journals; he owned a good radio, was in constant contact with the world and was well up in all current intellectual matters. But he had never been to a cinema.

One day this man went to Kiev and for the first time he saw a film. A very straightforward, naively made Fairbanks story. He was surrounded by children enjoying themselves. But our man gazed at the screen with furrowed brow and studied concentration, trembling and gasping with the effort and the excitement. He was utterly exhausted when he came out. 'Well, how did you like it?' asked my friend. 'Very much! Utterly fascinating. But … what actually happened in this film?' He had simply failed to understand it. The *plot*, which children could follow without effort, baffled him completely. The fact was that it was an entirely new language, a language familiar to all city-dwellers but one which he, the highly educated intellectual, had not yet learned to understand.

The New Language[3]

This new technology of expression and communication has made rapid strides during this last decade and has become increasingly complex and sophisticated. Four or five years ago we would have been unable to understand parts of even the simplest films produced today.

A man runs into a station after the woman he loves. We see him rushing onto the platform. After that, we see neither building nor tracks, nor even the train. We see nothing but his face in close-up. Then light, shadow, light, shadow, passing over his face in rapid succession – alternating faster and faster. Today, we understand this instantly: the train is just leaving. Five years ago when scenes like this first began to be made, no more than a few of us were immediately 'in the picture'.

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2. See *TotF*, p. 34, where the Russian farm manager has mutated into a colonial Englishman.
3. The same examples are cited, albeit with less elaborate conclusions on 'optical associations' etc., in the section 'We Have Learned to See', in *TotF*, p. 35ff.

A man sits brooding in a dark room. (The woman associated with him is in the next room.) Now a close-up: a sudden beam of light that falls on him as he raises his head and looks hopefully into the light, now also evidently inwardly illuminated. The light on his face gradually fades. Disappointed, he lowers his head again, into darkness. What has happened? Every cinemagoer knows perfectly well. A door has opened. The woman stands on the threshold, looking at him. Then she closes the door again.

What we understand here is more than the actual situation. We understand its symbolic meaning. Six or seven years ago, few in the audience would have grasped what was happening. Today, however, there is no need to spell it out; we are all in the picture.

We no longer know how we have managed in these few years to learn how to see: how we have learned to make optical associations, draw optical inferences, to think optically, or to become so utterly familiar with optical abbreviations, optical metaphors, optical symbols and optical concepts.

Why are Old Films Comic?[4]

The speed and magnitude of this development can be gauged only by taking a look at old films. You just laugh yourself silly. It is simply impossible to believe that fifteen years ago films like this could be taken seriously.

Why? After all, other old works of art, however primitive or naive, do not usually appear ridiculous. This is because older art forms are often the spiritual expression of a bygone age. Cinema, however, has developed too quickly. We still see ourselves in film, and so we find ourselves laughing at what we were only a short while ago. Old films do not appear as if dressed in historical costume, but simply in last year's fashions. Primitive art is usually the adequate expression of a primitive world. But its effect on us here is that of grotesque clumsiness. A South Sea islander's spear does not look as ridiculous in his hands as it would in the hands of a modern soldier. An old man-of-war is likewise beautiful. But the first steam locomotives are comic. They are not something completely different but merely primitive versions of something familiar.

The very first films thus appear provincial rather than historical. Not like an ancient language or a foreign one, but like crude, uneducated babble in our own. The fact is that we ourselves have developed with extraordinary rapidity. We ourselves! Not just art itself! An advanced technology of seeing and showing has emerged literally before our very eyes, a mental technology of expression and communication accessible to us all, in short a *culture*, one of enormous importance, if only because for the first time in history this culture has not remained the monopoly of the ruling class.

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4. See TotF, p. 36. Balázs adds, 'We laugh aloud, especially at the grimmest tragedies.'

Art Isn't the Issue![5]

So it is not just a new art that has come into being, but – and this is far more important – a human faculty as the possibility and foundation of this art! Art has a history, to be sure, but not a development in the sense of a continuous growth in value. Objects can be no more than the symptoms and documents of a development. The substrate of that development is the subject, the human subject, man in his social being.

Are the pictures of the Impressionists, of Renoir or Manet, for example, aesthetically more valuable or more perfect than the old frescoes of Giotto and Cimabue? There can certainly be no question of an 'aesthetic progress' here. But the discovery of perspective and the creation of open-air atmosphere is nevertheless a great advance. An advance not of art but in seeing. It is a psychological and perhaps even a physiological advance, which is not merely documented in works of genius but is achievable today by the most ordinary bungler because it has become an integral part of the general manifestation of culture.

Culture

It is said that every educated Frenchman can write well, and that even the silliest, trashiest French book is still 'well written'. To the extent that this is true it points to a general culture of expression which, independently of the value of individual works, has far greater significance for cultural history as an indication of the level of culture, as the social manifestation of a particular class, than the lucky instances of masterpieces produced by individual geniuses. Perhaps there are grounds here to write up the history of clichés, commonplaces, routine and jargon! (Of course, in the dialectics of history, discoveries by figures of genius, and the general level of culture, interact in a mutually fruitful way, each conditioning the other.)

To all those who complain about the decline of film as an art, we should respond therefore that, despite all the kitsch that goes along with film, there has nonetheless emerged a superior culture of vision. A culture that is embedded in the wrist action of the most jaded practitioner. (It is

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5. In *TotF* (pp. 37ff), Balázs develops his comments here on the human subject as the 'substrate' of culture with more detailed observations on sensibility and its relation to historically specific modes of perception. He writes: 'Artistic *culture* has not only a history, it also has an evolution in a certain direction. Subjective human sensibility, the faculty of understanding and interpreting art, has demonstrably developed in continuous cultures, and, when we speak of a development of subjective human faculties, we do not mean the development of aesthetic values. For instance, the discovery and application of perspective in art did not in themselves imply an increase in artistic values. The rules of perspective are learned in school today by every ungifted dauber, but that does not make him a greater artist than Giotto, who knew nothing of these rules. The former will not be a greater artist but his visual sensibility, his culture will be on a higher level.'

indeed the cameraman's wrist that is the seat of culture.) The language of cinema (however misused it may have been) has been subject to a continuous process of refinement, and the perceptual capacity of audiences, however primitive, has kept pace with it.

I wish now to outline a kind of grammar of this language. A stylistics and a poetics, perhaps.

The Productive Camera[1]

What defines the specific nature of film as an expressive form? By film, I mean here the celluloid strip, the sequence of images we see on the screen. For it might be thought that the true artistic event, the original creative act in a studio or on location, actually occurs *in front of* the camera and even at a point in time before the film is completed. This is where actors act, sets are built and lighting is introduced. The scene is established or selected in the studio. Everything we can see on the screen has existed 'in reality' beforehand. The film itself is merely photographic reproduction.[2]

Why is this mistaken? What do we see in a scene on film that we cannot see in the same scene in the studio? What are the effects that arise in their primary form only in the filmstrip? What is it that the camera creates rather than just reproduces? What makes film a specific language of its own?

The close-up.

The set-up.

The montage.

Needless to say, we can never see things 'in reality' in the microscopic detail that we find in close-ups. It is *only in the image* that the director's subjective will to interpret becomes apparent, and this by virtue of the particular segment of reality we are shown, the particular angle of the camera set-up. And only in the montage, in the rhythm and the associative process that link up the image sequence, does the essential factor, namely the work's composition, appear.

These are the basic elements of the optical language that we must now analyse in detail.

We are Right in the Middle![3]

The sensation to which I am referring here is achieved entirely by the mobility and constant movement of the camera. The camera shows us not merely a constant flow of new things, but also changing distances and points of view. And this pinpoints what historically is absolutely innovative about film art.

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1. See *TotF*, pp. 46ff. 'The Creative Camera'.
2. *TotF*, p. 46. 'Or, to be exact, the reproduction of a histrionic performance.'
3. *TotF*, pp. 47ff.

There can be no doubt that film has *un*covered a new world that had been previously covered *up*. It has uncovered the visible world surrounding man and his relation to it. Space and landscape, the face of things, the rhythm of the masses, as well as the secret language of mute existence. But film has not just brought new material into view in the course of its development. It has achieved something else that is absolutely crucial. It has eliminated the spectator's position of fixed distance: a distance that hitherto has been an essential feature of the visual arts. The spectator no longer stands outside a hermetic world of art which is framed within an image or by the stage. Here the work of art is no insulated space, manifesting itself as a microcosm and metaphor and subsisting in a different space, to which there is no access.

The camera takes my eye along with it.[4] Into the very heart of the image. I see the world from within the filmic space. I am surrounded by the figures within the film and involved in the action, which I see from all sides.

What does it matter that I remain seated for a two-hour period in exactly the same way as in the theatre? The point is that I do not look at Romeo and Juliet from the stalls. Instead I look up to the balcony through Romeo's eyes, and I look through Juliet's eyes back down to Romeo. My gaze, and with it my consciousness, identifies with the characters in the film. I see what they see from their standpoint. I have no standpoint of my own. I travel with the crowd, I fly up, I dive down, I join in the ride. And if a character in a film looks another in the eyes, he gazes down from the screen into my eyes. For the camera has my eyes and identifies them with the eyes of figures within the action; they see with my gaze.

Nowadays every common-or-garden film operates with some version of this act of identification; but this is not only unprecedented in art of any kind; it is also the ultimate, critical distinction between film and theatre. (I shall return to this when discussing the question of the use of film in the theatre.) By eliminating the spectator's inner distance from the screen, a radical new ideology makes its appearance for the first time, breaking with the centuries of domination by feudal and bourgeois art. I shall return to this matter too. I wish here simply to point in general terms to the significance of camera movements.

4. *TotF*, p. 48.

THE CLOSE-UP

The possibility and the meaning of the art of film lie in the fact that each object appears as it is.

The first, radical change in distance was produced by the close-up. It was without doubt a daring stroke of genius when Griffith first severed his characters' heads and spliced them one by one, full-size, into scenes of human interaction. For this did not simply bring the characters into closer proximity within the same space; it removed them from the space altogether and transposed them into an entirely different dimension.

The New Dimension[1]

When the camera lifts a part of the body or an object from its surroundings and shows it enlarged, the object is still seen to exist in space. For a hand, even if depicted in isolation, signifies a human being; a table, likewise in isolation, signifies its function in a space. We perhaps do not see this space but we picture it to ourselves. We do this of necessity since in the absence of an external context an isolated close-up has no meaning. And therefore no expressive power.

But if we see a face isolated and enlarged, we lose our awareness of space, or of the immediate surroundings. Even if this is a face we have just glimpsed in the midst of a crowd, we now find ourselves alone with it. We may be aware of the specific space within which this face exists, but we do not imagine it for ourselves. For the face acquires expression and meaning without the addition of an imagined spatial context.

The abyss into which a figure peers no doubt *explains* his expression of terror, it does not *create* it. The expression exists even without the explanation. It is not turned into an expression by the addition of an imagined situation.

Confronted by a face, we no longer find ourselves within a space at all. A new dimension opens before our eyes: *physiognomy*. The position of the eyes in the top half of the face, the mouth below; wrinkles now to the right, now to the left – none of this now retains its spatial significance. For

1. *TotF*, pp. 60ff.

what we see is merely a *single* expression. We see emotions and thoughts. We see something that does not exist in space.

Physiognomy and Melody[2]

Henri Bergson's analysis of 'duration' (*durée*) and time can help us to gain an understanding of this novel dimension. A melody, Bergson asserts, consists of individual notes that follow one another in time, but despite this the melody has no extension in time. For from the vantage point of the first note the last one is already implicit, and on the last note the first one is still – interpretatively – present. That is what makes every note part of a melody, which latter as a form has a duration, a course to run, and yet exists as a totality from the outset, instead of gradually coming into being in time. For the melody is not just the notes but their (audible) relationship. This relationship is not temporal. It exists in a different, spiritual dimension. To make a logical deduction may similarly take time because it involves work. But its premises and conclusions do not follow one another in temporal sequence.

Physiognomy has a relation to space comparable to that existing between melody and time. The facial muscles that make expression possible may be close to each other in space. But it is their relation to one another that creates expression. These relations have no extension and no direction in space. No more than do feelings and thoughts, ideas and associations. All these are image-like in nature and yet non-spatial.

This issue of the new, curiously paradoxical dimension of film, its creation of the visible spirit, is one we shall return to in connection with the montage of associations and ideas.

Visually Performed Dialogues[3]

Close-ups have long been part of the repertoire of film, and in *Visible Man* we analysed in some detail the miracles of the play of facial expressions revealed by film. What has happened since then? What further developments has film introduced into visual performance?

As the camera has moved ever closer to the face, we have learned to catch (and to understand!) nuances of expression with such precision that modern films can include performed dialogues of the length of a detailed

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2. *TotF*, pp. 61ff. The reference to 'visible spirit' at the end of this section disappears in the later version.
3. TotF, pp. 73ff. In the later version, Balázs emphasizes more forcefully that it was in the silent film that film's capacity to explore inner life through the close-up was most developed. He writes 'the more space and time in the film was taken up by the inner drama revealed in the "microphysiognomic" close-up, the less was left of the predetermined 8,000 feet of film for the external happenings. The silent film could thus dive into the depths – it was given the possibility of presenting a passionate life-and-death struggle almost exclusively by close-ups of faces.'

conversation as a matter of routine. Nowadays, the inner action, which becomes visible only in the face, is deemed more interesting than action visible only in external movements. Just as there are conversation pieces on the stage, so in film we have visually performed dialogues with little external action in the story. The clearer a person's face becomes for us through its greater proximity, the more space is allotted in the film to this kind of internal drama, a drama that does not take place in a spatial dimension.

We already have the example of one very powerful film whose wealth of savage, passionate life-and-death struggles is portrayed using *only the face*. Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*.[4] Take for instance the film's long, often shatteringly violent scene with the Inquisition. A group of fifty people sit in the same place for the entire duration of the scene. For a thousand metres of film, nothing but heads. Heads without spatial context. But this spatial absence does not alarm us. Why should it? This is not a scene of horse-riding or boxing. It is not within space that these raging passions, thoughts, beliefs clash. In the dangerous duel played out here, it is looks that are crossed, not swords; and they generate a breathtaking tension that lasts two hours. We see every thrust and every parried blow, every feint, every rapier lunge of the mind, and we see the wounds inflicted on the soul. This film is acted out in a different dimension from Westerns or mountain films; and it is the camera's proximity that makes this possible.

Microphysiognomy[5]

So much for a film that used the face *in its entirety*, as a total effect. That still portrayed the play of facial expressions: expressions made by human beings, albeit not always consciously. Here then, the facial expression is a human production that is also within human control.

But the camera has since moved in closer. And lo and behold! *Inside* the face partial physiognomies come into view which betray qualities very different from those that could be gleaned from the overall expression. It is in vain that a figure on screen furrows his brow and flashes his eyes. The camera comes in even closer, shows just his chin, and reveals it as weak and cowardly. A sensitive smile dominates his face as a whole. But nostrils, ear lobes and neck all have their own face. And displayed in isolation, they reveal a hidden coarseness, stupidity barely masked. The 'general impression' fails to obscure what is betrayed by the detail.

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4. *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928), d. Carl Theodor Dreyer, starring Maria Falconetti.
5. *TotF*, pp. 74ff. In the later version, Balázs distinguishes between speech and the visual language of physiognomy, and claims that it is only in the latter that the play of the unconscious is visible. He writes (pp. 74–5), 'speech, that is the speech of an adult and sober human being, has no involuntary and unconscious elements. If someone wants to tell a lie and is a capable liar, his words will serve him almost to perfection. But his face has areas over which he has no control.'

How noble and beautiful is the face of the priest in close-up in Eisenstein's *The General Line*.[6] But when, just once, we see his eyes alone, the sly nastiness hidden beneath his eyelashes comes into view.[7] By the same token, the camera can also discover the barely visible marks of tenderness and kindness in an otherwise coarse and ugly face. It illuminates the many layers of the human physiognomy. It exposes the face beneath the surface. Behind the face shown to the world, it exposes the face we truly possess, the face that we can neither change nor control.

In directing its aim in close up at those minute surfaces of the face that we ourselves do not control, the camera can photograph the unconscious. From close-to, the face becomes a document as writing does to the graphologist. But graphology is a rare gift as well as a science. This microphysiognomy, on the other hand, has become common knowledge familiar to us all.

The Invisible Countenance[8]

The first close-ups showed that more can sometimes be read in a face than is written on it. For physiognomy can also express meanings 'between the lines'. 'Between the features', as it were.

An example from one otherwise simple-minded old adventure film. The Japanese actor Sessue Hayakawa is required to act out the following: he is captured by bandits, and finds himself face to face with his long-lost wife. He must not betray the fact that he knows her. Five pairs of eyes search his face as he looks at his wife and five revolvers are cocked to shoot if even a single muscle in his face betrays the deep emotion he feels at this unexpected reunion. So he restrains himself. Not the slightest expression passes over his impassive features. We have to believe that the bandits have to believe him. Nevertheless – and this is what is so marvellous – we see clearly from his expression that there is something in his face that we do not see. It is present, but cannot be pinned down. An *invisible but evident* expression.

A masterstroke in a film by Asta Nielsen many years ago.[9] Called upon to seduce a man for reasons of intrigue, she pretends to love him, and acts out the comedy very convincingly. During the scene, however, she genuinely falls in love with the man. Her gestures (which are identical to her previous gestures), her facial expressions (also identical) gradually become sincere. She behaves exactly as she had previously, and her change of heart is not perceptible; yet she makes us see it nonetheless.

6. *The General Line* (*Staroye i novoye*) (1928), d. Grigori Aleksandrov and Sergei Eisenstein, featuring Marfa Lapkina, M. Ivanin and Konstantin Vasilyev.
7. 'Like an ugly caterpillar out of a delicate flower' (*TotF*, p. 75).
8. *TotF*, pp. 75ff. Balázs here explains, 'the Japanese actor Sessue Hayakawa was a film star of the early silent film. His speciality was an iron immobility of feature and his feelings and passions did not show in his face. His acting was notable for his restraint, his failure to act.'
9. *TotF*, p. 64.

But then a further complication. She notices her accomplice watching her from behind a curtain. Now she has to persuade him that she is only pretending, just as previously she had to convince the other man of her sincerity. The double meaning of her facial expressions has become its opposite. Even now, she is still pretending; now too her expression is a sham. Yet now it is her pretending that has become a pretence. She now lies that she is lying.

And all this becomes perceptible without our being able to see how Nielsen's facial expressions have changed. She has invisibly removed a mask and donned a new one; a whole drama has played itself out on her invisible countenance, 'between its features'.

Even the earliest close-ups, then, enabled us to perceive subtleties of facial expression: nuances that cannot be detected with the naked eye and yet which use our eyes to make a decisive impact, like a bacillus that we do not notice when we inhale it, but which is lethal nonetheless.

This invisible expression that I am describing here can arise, however, only through associations triggered by the visible play of features. Just as the expression of ideas can rouse unexpressed thoughts in me. Yet this is not what is meant by the microphysiognomy of the camera close-up. My term refers instead to the face *beneath the play of expressions*. This underlying face cannot be manufactured. We have it from the outset; it has always been there and is inescapable. It may be frequently obscured by our conscious expressions. But the close-up brings it to light. It is not the face we wear, but our actual visual appearance that is decisive. For all of us appear in the end just as we are. Just as the most horrendous avalanche consists of small grains of sand in motion, so too even the grimace of overt expression is merely a summary external image. Real expression is created in the barely perceptible movements of the tiniest parts of the face. This microphysiognomy is the direct making visible of micropsychology. Overt expression, in contrast, relates to conscious feelings and conceptual thought.

Simplicity[10]

In the proximity afforded by the close-up, micro-expression appears so big that large-scale expression becomes simply unbearable. This is why, in modern films, acting has become increasingly discreet. Where the slightest trembling of an eyelid can be seen clearly, everything over and above this seems exaggerated. Genuineness is more rigorously scrutinized. Artifice and make-up are unmasked. Glycerine tears are out of bounds. Large gestures are convincing only in elemental outbursts; and here they appear as abnormalities, as ecstasy, hysteria or madness. Restraint, in contrast, has come to have the more powerful effect. In today's studios actors are constantly told 'Don't try to act! Just think and

10. *TotF*, pp. 76ff.

feel the situation. Whatever then appears "naturally" on the actor's face is good enough for the camera.' The closer the camera comes, the more acceptable is simplicity.

Technique Comes When it is Needed[11]

But simplicity is far from being merely a technical accomplishment! It also implies a thoroughgoing change in taste, a profound alteration in our very way of life. Can this then really be no more than the consequence of a camera trick? Or is it the other way around?

Even artistic innovations never arise by chance or from the whim of a genius. They fall due only in circumstances of economic or ideological need. (Needs of which the innovator himself may not necessarily be conscious.) The current general trend towards simplicity comes from the present generation's sceptical view of the traditional forms of expression of the feudal and old bourgeois mentality (a scepticism that extends both to architectonic and physiognomical forms.) At present, that scepticism is purely negative, though of great ideological importance nonetheless. It has found its clearest expression in the modern film. Film has brought the camera closer to the face, and the camera for its part has shown that simplicity is less simple than it may at first appear.

The Unromantic Face[12]

These developments also explain why our ideal of beauty has changed so much in recent years. The decorative, romantic face has gone out of fashion. What is popular today is the star with the everyday face. Particularly discredited is the old ideal of masculine beauty, whose overall decorative effect is felt to be a mask. As the camera has moved closer, what has become decisive are the intimate features of a face, its attractive details. (The situation is different with female types. Female beauty is an everyday need. The pretty girl is the prototype of erotic confection).

Beauty in its more elevated form is also avoided by film – though the event that is Greta Garbo does call for further discussion. This change in taste – a change of which film is a document – is a change that has occurred under the influence of film, and one of which film has also made us conscious. It signifies a transformation of the value placed on the human. And that transformation penetrates yet deeper. Even sex appeal has shifted, and with it the instincts directed towards sexual selection. It is a long way from Ramon Novarro and Conrad Veidt to Ronald Colman

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11. *TotF*, p. 77. Balázs adds, 'The simplified acting demanded by the close-up conformed to the new taste for the objective and unromantic and this circumstance did much to popularize the American style of acting in Europe.'
12. *TotF*, p. 78.

and George Bancroft – a different world. And it is the ever more proximate camera that has taken us on this journey.

The single motif that drives these changes is the increasingly widespread mistrust of all that is conscious and intentional, of the decorative and of pathos.

The Physiognomic Mosaic

Only through montage is it possible to some degree to create the illusion of an imagined action from shots of spontaneous, individual expressions of nature, of original physiognomies. Photographs 'taken from life' – here someone laughing, there someone weeping, here mistrust, there fury. Original close-ups of faces: all these are removed in the montage from their original context, with its original causation, and simply inserted into film (as with a mosaic of undressed stones). They then gain the appearance of an interrelation that changes their meaning, their emotional 'value'. And yet it is also in the montage that the original face comes across more convincingly. We have good reason to mistrust faces that are 'put on show'. The camera allows us to maintain a connection wth a face that is not put on show but is nonetheless visible.

Flight from the Actor

A self-evident consequence of the developments I am describing here has been the tendency to avoid the actor. Actors, it has been supposed, neither should 'act', nor do they need to. There is no need for them to 'represent' something for the camera to reproduce at one remove. Instead, the camera should discover something and show directly what is naturally there.[13]

This is why film-makers have sought out original types. But in feature films, this has not got them very far with the representation of anything other than utterly primitive and unique situations. For such strongly defined physiognomies cannot be altered and varied to fit the development of a complex dramatic action. Or, rather, any attempt to use them produces the most amateurish of performed grimaces. For the fact is that it takes considerable acting talent to take part in a fictional action, to feel one's way into invented characters and situations and nonetheless to communicate without 'acting'.

13. Balázs gives the following example in *TotF*: 'If they wanted a woman looking in terror into the barrel of a gun directed at her and the acting of an actress was not natural enough for their requirements, they went out and searched for a truer one in the street. A woman screamed in terror because the pram with her baby in it overturned by accident. She was photographed without her knowledge and then this really unselfconscious, naturally terrified face was cut into the picture to face the gun' (p. 79).

Nature Remains Excluded

Of what use is the soothing impression that the farmer I see in a film is a genuine farmer if his genuineness in the film makes itself felt by the fact that he never seems fully identified with his part? He remains natural, but outside the fiction. He remains real, but outside the film. Undigested raw material. The more natural and striking such types are, the more they have the same impact as natural realities: mountains, trees or animals whose physiognomies appear so essential and universally valid that it is impossible to bring them together arbitrarily in the special case of an invented fiction. No, non-acting alone is not an option here. For we know that the director plays with these, and indeed all realities. And, if his play comes to our attention, his efforts are wasted.

The greatest masterpiece of this 'art made from nature' is undoubtedly Eisenstein's *The General Line*. A marvellous cornucopia of original expressions is adopted here for a plot of which the film's actors cannot possibly have been conscious. They may have been asked to do something or other in front of the camera. But it must have been something of immediate concern to them, something quite unconnected with the intentions of the film.

In Pudovkin's book on this subject,[14] he gives a precise description of the directorial technique required to provoke a natural reaction that can then be incorporated in a work of art. But just consider the precision, the vision that is required to distinguish so accurately between natural expressions and to select them so that they respond to one another naturally in the course of a constructed dialogue! What effort is required for the eye and the camera to drill down into the human face and uncover that very nuance which the actor finds so hard to mime, however detailed the director's instructions! The actor here is satisfied with naive expression; and the director must draw on the whole range of that physiognomical education which he has acquired from the study of camera close-ups.

Of course the Russian peasants in *The General Line* are types that actors from our culture would find as impossible to play as they would a Negro or a Chinese. (Impossible particularly because the close-up penetrates both mask and mien to show the underlying face, which latter we are called upon to fathom in order to understand the reasons for the action on screen.)

Natural Actors

Primitive physiognomies, however, correspond to primitive conditions, which cannot be accommodated to the varieties of a constructed plot. Unless the peasants go in for some acting of their own. What does Marfa Lapkina, the peasant heroine of *The General Line*, do if not act? She is a genuine peasant woman who puts on a real performance for us. She does

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14. Presumably *Film Technique,* a combination of *Film Director and Film Material* (1926) and *Film Scenario and Its Theory* (1926), published in German as *Über die Filmtechnik* in 1928.

this *naturally*, but it is not *nature*. She merely employs forms of expression that are quite different from those handed down by bourgeois culture. The facial expressions and gestures of such natural actors are still fresh and not yet compromised. If a language has been used for too many lies we find it easier to accept the truth when it is uttered in a different language.

The naive, childlike acting ability to which I am referring is found more frequently among exotic races. We see it for instance in dramatized documentaries.[15] It is surprising and sometimes baffling that South Sea Islanders, for example (in *Moana* or *White Shadows in the South Sea*[16]), or Tungusians (in the Russian film *Son of the Taiga*) can act so spontaneously even in constructed scenes. This is not 'theatrical acting', but more like children at play: a kind of trance, a daydream. Now, is this art or nature? It is an intermediate state which, like hallucination and the dream, is undoubtedly closer to nature.[17]

The Face of Class[18]

It is when we are quite unconcerned about the personal fate of individuals that acting becomes most unimportant. There are films in which human types are used as an original background, a human landscape that provides a living backdrop for the action. Here, only the fundamental expression of a fundamental situation is emphasized. The camera looks behind individual, private variations and searches out the humus of expression: the supra-individual face.

The supra-individual face of different races has always been known. The great achievement of film was its discovery of the supra-individual face of different classes. Not simply the distinction between the degenerate aristocrat and the uncouth peasant, between the bloated

15. The German here is *Kulturfilm*: see Glossary entry.
16. *Moana* (1926), d. Robert J. Flaherty, the creator of *Nanook of the North* (1922), is credited with being the first docufiction in the history of cinema. It is set in Samoa and aim to capture the traditional life of the Pacific islanders on film. *White Shadows In The South Sea* (1928) was directed by W.S. Van Dyke.
17. *TotF*, pp. 80f. As elsewhere in *TotF*, Balázs here relativizes the ethnocentric standpoint he adopts in *The Spirit* when he writes, 'the close-up often reveals unusual gestures and mimicry – unusual, that is, from the white man's viewpoint' (p. 81). In a subsequent passage, Balázs also comments on the capacity of the close-up to confound racial stereotypes, and questions the notion of faces specific to nation or race: 'There was no need of close-ups to show us the typical common traits of the great coloured races, the group physiognomies recognizable as Negro, Chinese, Eskimo, etc. On the contrary these exotic faces seemed all alike to us only because we knew them so superficially. Here the close-up was needed to show us the individual differences between one Chinese and another, one Negro and another. Nor was it a discovery to see characteristic English or French, Italian or German types in the films. We had known them well enough before. The film could at most improve our knowledge of the type by showing us new varieties. In any case, it is difficult to say which type of face is really representative of any nation or race' (*TotF*, p. 81).
18. *TotF*, pp. 81ff.

financier and the penniless proletarian. Such stereotypical distinctions were also visible on the stage. The camera, in contrast, has moved up close and has discovered behind these external, decorative distinctions the hidden expression of a supra-individual, class-determined *outlook*.

For what we see at close range is *disposition*: the perspective of each and every human being on the world. It is no accident that Soviet Russian film-makers have the keenest eye for class expression and that their films help to sharpen our understanding of it. Their films do not just contain the rich and the poor. No Marxist analysis could document the nuances of class distinctions better than the magnificent typology of Russian films. Who can forget the groups and deputations that populate Eisenstein's *October?*[19] The liberal-bourgeois officials, the Menshevik intellectuals? However they may otherwise behave, all bear the marks of their identity on their faces. A deputation of middle-class democrats crosses a bridge. A Red sailor bars their way. Face confronts face, and two world views collide.

In Dovzhenko's *Arsenal*,[20] an outstanding film about the Ukrainian civil war, we are shown the tense moments before the first shot is fired. Heads cocked, listening out. The worker, the soldier, the ordinary craftsman, the small trader, the factory-owner and the rich merchant, the landowner, the peasant, the professional who works with his brain, the stay-at-home scholar, the déclassé Bohemian, the down-and-out … nothing but close-ups of all these faces, and yet we know precisely what they are. A physiognomical cross-section of social class stratification. Social distinctions and their attendant mentalities are clearly and unmistakably revealed in these faces. It is not just machine guns and fists that wage war on each other here, but faces.

Microdrama

When, as in this instance, close-ups capture and place in relation to one another the most minute and fleeting facial expressions and gestures, when they make them respond to one another, one gesture to another, one look to another, the result is a dissection of the action into its smallest components. What becomes visible at close range is the rapid to-and-fro motion that occurs within a single situation, the microdrama of the moment. The close-up enables the action, the story to develop a deeper dimension.

The Temperament of the Camera[21]

The specifically cinematic element of this microdrama is that it is produced not by acting but by the camera. On stage or in the studio, when the 'action' comes to a halt, so also do the human beings and the objects involved in it. In

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19. *October* (1928), d. Sergei Eisenstein with Grigori Aleksandrov.
20. *Arsenal* (1929), d. Alexander Dovzhenko and featuring Semyon Svashenko, Amvrosi Buchma and Georgi Khorkov.
21. *TotF*, p. 85.

film, however, while the action can reach a pause and human beings and objects remain quite still, the *images* may continue to succeed one another at the most frenetic tempo. The human beings remain immobile. But our gaze leaps from one to the other. At one moment we are quite close, at another at a distance. However motionless the scene, the camera shifts the spectator to and fro and the alternating shots lend the silence a frenzied rhythm. In the open casing of the machinery of life we obtain a glimpse of the very smallest cogs. Decisive twists of fate are precisely localized in the twitching of an eyebrow or a stray hand gesture. And in the first tiny germ of an event.

Intensity Drives Out Extensiveness

The greater the richness of individual moments, however, the more space they must occupy in the film. The more that happens in a given situation, the fewer the situations that can be shown in a single film. Intensity drives out narrative extension, which means that stories in modern films have had to be radically simplified. Today's films no longer have room for elaborate and intricate narratives. Here too, as in physiognomy, the close-up has awakened our interest in nuance. (Or alternatively perhaps, our interest in nuance has given rise to the close-up.)

Crisis of the Manuscript[22]

The narrative imagination of novelists and short-story writers has ceased to be of positive use. What is needed today is a special cinematic imagination, one that is alive to the optical nuances of scenes that are devoid of narrative complications. Films have become unliterary in both a good and a bad sense. Adventure stories can be easily varied; but what film actually needs these days are straightforward, basic plot situations. The plot of a new film can no longer be invented; it has to be discovered. Hence the current situation in which, in general, the richer the individual scenes in a film, the more banal the film becomes as a totality. We have better and better variations on increasingly inferior themes.

Naturally enough, there have been ideological reasons for this development. The flight from reality that has always been an essential ideological component of the bourgeois film underwent a change of direction with the emergence of the new technology. Film was once an escape into the romanticism of exotic adventure. Now it is an escape into the intimacy of hidden details.

The Dramatic Situation

But microdrama also has the opposite effect and consequence. By grasping the inner turmoil within an apparent stillness, it is able to portray a *state of affairs* as

22. *TotF*, pp. 87ff.

an exciting event. What we see is not just the explosion, but also the ferment.

If tension arises, moreover, not from the elaboration of a plot, but out of a basic underlying circumstance, the subject matter of the resulting film is not merely more circumscribed, not merely confined to a particular situation, but also capable of expansion beyond the bounds of an anecdotal, self-contained storyline. Contrived intrigue is no longer necessary to render interesting the straightforward trajectory of a life.

Hence King Vidor's glorious film *The Crowd*.[23] What we see in this film is not one specific situation but a whole series of those simple circumstances that go to make up an average life. The film simply teems with events that become turbulent, exciting, even thrilling, simply by virtue of being seen in close-up!

Film Without Heroes

All of this has also made possible the film without heroes, without protagonists. For a *storyline*, an anecdote, an intrigue is tied to the destiny of individual characters. To portray *a single state of affairs*, in contrast, means dispensing with the need to follow the actions of even one single character from start to finish. Hence the absence of heroes in Eisenstein's *October*. The seething turbulence of the masses, the tremor of anxious expectation in the Czar's palace, lengthy scenes constructed from hundreds of individual images, are far more exciting than the most enthralling adventures of a 'hero'.

No, complicated 'plot' is not a prerequisite for film. In Dovzhenko's *Arsenal*, war, for instance, is represented for the duration of an entire act by one silent, abandoned village. An empty street. A solitary woman leans against a doorpost, her head drooping. Motionless. A gendarme walks slowly by. Stops in front of her. Stares in her direction. She does not move. Half-heartedly, he grabs at her breast. She does not move. He goes on his way, embarrassed, his gait becoming somehow tentative in the uncanny stillness. In the field, an old man stands before his plough, exhausted. In the parlour, a young man with no legs sits on the floor. Stares at the medal he has won for valour. Motionless. The woman shares out a piece of bread among her three children, averting her face. Turns to the cripple. Looks out of the window at the old man before his plough. Turns away and gazes blankly into space. Motionless.

And so the film goes on. There is no 'action' as such, but the atmosphere is as stifling as a still and sultry day. No action could be as thrilling, as dramatic as this single circumstance depicted in close proximity, close shot upon close shot.

23. *The Crowd* (1928), d. King Vidor, featuring James Murray and Eleanor Boardman. Vidor avoided casting big-name stars in the film to attain greater authenticity; Murray was a studio extra, and Boardman was a minor actress and Vidor's second wife (*TotF*, p. 86).

SET-UP

Whatever is not really deformed is imperceptible.
Baudelaire, Diaries[1]

So everything depends on physiognomy. But there is no such thing as physiognomy 'in itself'. There are only the physiognomies that we see. And these change according to the angle *from which* we view them. Physiognomy depends on point of view, in other words, on the camera set-up. Physiognomy is not only an objective given, it is also our relation to it. A synthesis.

Inescapable subjectivity[2]

The specific, unique form that we apprehend in every object is a construction of the mind or an experience of our sense of touch.[3] To the eye objects have only an appearance, that is to say, only the image of their form. And for that reason they comprise not one but a hundred different images taken from many different perspectives.

In the image we see both the object and our own position, that is to say, our relation to the object. This is why a repetition of the same shot more than once awakens the memory of the situation in which it was previously seen: *déjà vu*. In my film *Narcosis* (directed by Alfred Abel)[4] the hero sees a girl after an interval of many years. She looks so different that he fails to recognize her. But, at one point, the *recurrence of a shot from the same perspective* awakens a phantom memory of the same situation. Thus every image implies a camera point of view, every point of view implies a relation. And that relation is more than merely spatial. Every view of the

1. 'Ce qui n'est pas légèrement difforme a l'air insensible; d'où il suit que l'irrégularité, c'est-à-dire l'inattendu, la surprise, l'étonnement sont une partie essentielle et la caractéristique de la beauté' (*Fusées, Oeuvres Complètes*. Baudelaire (1975). Paris, Gallimard, 1975, vol. 1, p. 656. *TotF*, p. 93).
2. *TotF*, p. 91. In the later version, Balázs dispenses with his extended observations in this section on the relation between perception and subjectivity ('inner human attitude'), and compresses them instead into a single reference to the spectator's 'identification' with the image.
3. 'Form' is rendered here and elsewhere in *The Spirit* with the stronger German term *Gestalt*. For a discussion of the relation of *Gestalt* to physiognomy, see Glossary entry on *Gestalt*.
4. *Narkose* (1929), d. Alfred Abel. Balázs wrote the script.

world contains a world view. Similarly, every camera set-up points to an inner human attitude. For nothing is more subjective than objectivity. Once captured in an image, every impression becomes an expression, whether by design or not. And it is the deployment of the camera's subjective gaze which, whether consciously or intuitively, makes of photography an art.

Image in Space[5]

This subjective gaze of the camera is inserted in film today into the cinematic space, the space of the action. All objects appear to the spectator from the point of view of the figures within the action, creating the identification of the spectator with the action of which I have already spoken. It is through the shot that we share *the spatial experience and the trajectories of others* in a way that no other art can match. It is before our eyes that there opens the abyss into which the hero plunges; it is before us that the heights he must scale rise up. Our view may be foreshortened or it may be oblique. But the position adopted by each figure in the image is *our* viewpoint, as if we were constantly turning this way and that. And what is insinuated in these changing points of view is the continuous sense of mobility that we experience in film.

Space in the Image

The image is situated in space by means of the camera set-up. But by the same token, the camera set-up also enables space to be reflected in the image. In the close-up, for example, context can perhaps not be seen, but its atmosphere lies like a precipitate on each single image. For the close-up captures with concentrated force not the space itself, but its relations of light and shade. Even the shot of an isolated face should enable us to comprehend the nature of the space that face inhabits. And there should be no contradiction – though kitsch lighting effects often produce one – between lighting for close-up and light sources in long shot.

Mirror Shots[6]

There are some close-ups in which the surroundings are quite literally reflected. These mirror images are often little short of banal. Yet they are intended on occasion precisely to veil in an atmospheric mood the banality or brutality of a direct image. Take for example the image of a woman plunging into the water, a sight too trivial to do justice to the tragedy of the

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5. *TotF*, p. 90. Balázs adds in the later version, 'The true task of film art is to deepen into artistic effects the new psychological effects made possible by the technique of cinematography.'
6. Cf. *TotF*, pp.109ff, where he refers to the same technique under the heading of 'indirect set-up'.

situation. If the full horror of even the most terrible events is to be brought home to us, they must be presented in new and special ways. In the American film *The Docks of New York*,[7] we at one point see only water, and in its reflection moonlight, clouds, the shadows of the night. Then a further shadow glimpsed in the reflection of the water. The shadow of a woman as it falls upwards from the depths of the mirror towards the surface. A great splash, and the shadow disappears amidst the shadows of the night. The mirror shot here encapsulates atmosphere, and becomes poetic.

In *The End of St Petersburg*, a mirror shot similarly becomes a subtle, poetic metaphor.[8] At the opening of the film, we see St Petersburg, but only as reflected in the River Neva. Upside-down palaces and castles, shimmering tremulously, unreal. At the end, we see the same buildings, not as reflections this time, but frontally shot, their outlines sharp, solid, secure. This world now looks quite different! That is the potential of the change of set-up to which I am pointing. The city we see is no longer St Petersburg. It is Leningrad now!

There are also shots that hold up a mirror to the imagination: when, for example, an expression on a face lets us guess at its unseen cause. Jannings as the dissolute Czar in *The Patriot*[9] opens the lid of a box. From his face, we see what he sees: the picture of a woman who is herself invisible in the shot. We see that she is beautiful and that she is naked. All this in the reflection of his expression.

The Camera's Lyricism

It is not only spatially that the camera identifies us with characters in film, but also emotionally. The expression of every phenomenon presented to us by the camera set-up corresponds to the impression it makes on other figures within the film. What they hate appears ugly to us too; what they like appears beautiful; whatever frightens them appears uncanny to us too. Every characteristic invested in this or that phenomenon by emotion is brought out for the audience by the camera set-up.

Pictorial Key

Emotion in film is not limited to that of the figures represented but also the emotions of the artist, the film's creator. This is how the camera gives the work its individual style: its pictorial key (like a key in music). The set-up imbues the images with the director's attitude towards his object. His tenderness, his hatred, his pathos or his mockery. This is the root of the

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7. *The Docks of New York* (1928) d. Josef von Sternberg.
8. *The End of St. Petersburg* d. Vsevolod Pudovkin (1927), part of his revolutionary trilogy, alongside *Mother* (1926) and *Storm over Asia* (1928).
9. *The Patriot* d. Ernst Lubitsch (1928), featuring Emil Jannings, Florence Vidor and Lewis Stone.

propagandistic power of film. For it has no need to prove a particular point of view; it simply allows us to absorb it optically.

Exaggeration

Of course, interpretative camera set-ups are neither common nor 'natural'. They are optical exaggerations that overemphasize the specific forms that the director wishes to highlight. And yet any sharp observation, every comment the camera makes, is already an exaggeration. For even the merest passing observation can carve out from the drab indeterminacy of ordinary looking a form endowed with the firm outlines and the three-dimensionality that it lacks in the everyday world. 'Whatever is not really deformed is imperceptible.'

Camera set-up can also be used for an overemphasis that may border on fantastic caricature without modifying the original motif. The greatest master of camera set-up as caricature up to now has been Eisenstein in *The General Line.* The bureaucratic apparatus in that film! Typewriters, inkwells, pencil sharpeners, stamps and ledgers – all grotesquely magnified, larger than any of the seated figures they obscure! Demonic forces with a life of their own. Here the gaze becomes opinion and criticism, and the image already metaphor.

Objectivity

Is there then no objectivity in the image? Certainly there is. But it too is no more than an impression that certain shots may consciously create. Here the objective reality expressed in the image becomes also a subjective attitude on the part of the spectator.

Of course there are also purely mechanical photographs that are produced with no particular goal in mind. But even this testifies to an inner attitude, even if it be one of dull inertia or inner blindness. There is no human being at work here, but instead – and this is most often the case in commercial cinema – only a harassed cameraman forced to suppress his personality to sustain production tempo.

Images produced in this way are no fit objects of artistic analysis. The artist's gaze, in contrast, sees meaning, and his images acquire symbolic overtones, become metaphors and allegories through the camera set-up.

Why So Few German Examples?

In the following chapter, the reader will perhaps notice that I make little reference to German and American films and that I illustrate my theses for the most part with Russian and a few French examples. This implies no value judgement. All the forms of artistic expression that I wish to analyse here are also present in good German films. But they are less illustrative

because they are less striking, less intentional, less programmatic.

It is in fact remarkable that in Germany – the country renowned for its great theories – artists (and not just film-makers) theorize far less than the French and Russians. In this country there is a kind of division of labour at work. We have our specialists in aesthetics and the philosophy of art, who have nothing to do with practice, and we have our artists, who do not think.

In France and Russia it is the artists themselves who grapple with the theoretical principles of their art. They found schools and tendencies and proclaim their systems in theoretical programmes. Not only in painting and literature. Pudovkin wrote a book on montage. Eisenstein writes incessantly about the principles guiding his work. Both proceed consciously and programmatically. The artistic intentions informing Russian films are thus implemented more radically than in German films. They are more willed and more explicit. That may not always be an advantage, but it does yield the textbook illustrations that I discuss below.

Visual Metaphor

Through camera set-up, then, the image acquires symbolic meaning. But how does it acquire supra-personal significance, to the point where the shot actually eliminates the individual face? In *Battleship Potemkin*,[10] as the dead and injured lie on the Odessa steps, all we see of the soldiers are rough, heavy boots. Just boots, not men trampling others down.[11]

In Pudovkin's *The End of St Petersburg*, we similarly see a war council of generals and diplomats. The shot shows only chests covered with medals; we see no heads, only a visual metaphor that expresses a clear point of view.

How then does camera set-up transform image into symbol? In *October*, the revolutionaries fire the first shot. Then the besieged Winter Palace. But we do not see the defenders. The camera focuses instead on a giant chandelier whose thousand crystals start to tremble and then to shake with ever greater violence. We realize what is happening both inside and out. The gleaming crystal chandelier, high up in the dome, becomes the symbol of the tottering splendour of a ruling caste.

Visual Gesture[12]

Camera set-up can also condense an overall scene into a *single* gesture: a gesture which itself then indicates a metaphorical meaning. The flotilla of little sailing boats that approach the warship in *Battleship Potemkin* may be merely bringing food supplies to the sailors. But what we see in the detail shot, from one end of the frame to the other, are billowing sails. Nothing

10. *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), d. Sergei Eisenstein.
11. See *TotF*, p. 112.
12. See *TotF*, p. 113.

but a hundred little sails. Full, bulging, stretched to the limit. The same line, the same rhythm repeated throughout the image, which, taken now in its entirety, creates a *single* gesture. The gesture of ecstasy. For these are not just food supplies; instead they carry with them all the hearts which fly out to greet the sailors on the *Potemkin*. Thus, when all the sails are lowered, this may only mean in factual terms that the boats have come to a stop. But the image's gesture (a gesture that takes effect in the unconscious) is the gesture of a greeting, a ceremonial salute. The image here does not simply register a particular event; more than this, the way the image is drawn, its particular nature, *acts* to achieve a particular effect.

How, to take another instance, are the combat scenes during the mutiny on the *Potemkin* intensified? There is no escalation in the fighting itself; it maintains the same tempo, the same intensity, from the first image to the last. But if the fighting does not increase in ferocity, the *images* of violence certainly do. Initially, the scenes are photographed simply, directly; then faster and faster, in ever more distorted staccato. Sliced in half by steps and railings. Shredded: images intensified by the camera set-up into ever more savage physiognomies of rage.

The Hidden Image[13]

The shot, to elaborate further, gives the setting or the spatial image its 'composition': lines of composition that suggest a latent drawing. And this drawing delineates the shot's *other image*, its allegory, as in a picture puzzle.

In the Russian film *Fire in Kazan*, a host of insurgent peasants appears on the scene, and what we first see are the sharp silhouettes of pointed reeds and thorny branches in the distance, on the far bank of the Volga, against the evening sunset. Then suddenly new branches of the same kind seem to spring up among them. They seem to be just as much a part of nature, Mother Earth, as the reeds and bushes. But these branches are moving! And, lo, they are revealed as the spears of the peasant army. The image then becomes an evident metaphor: the peasant uprising becomes a force of nature, rooted in the earth.

Such figural metaphors have an effect even if their perception is not a fully conscious one. In the American film *Street Angel*,[14] a girl is hauled before a judge, and we see the backs of two policemen rise up like two dark, gigantic colossi hard against the camera. Between the two, as if through a narrow slit, the girl appears far below, a diminutive figure. The image signals to every viewer that the verdict on the girl has already fallen, even if the judge's pronouncement has yet to begin.

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13. See *TotF*, pp. 111ff.
14. *Street Angel* (1928), d. Frank Borzage and featuring Janet Gaynor, who won an Oscar for her performance. See *TotF*, p. 112.

The Eye Senses Something

There may be unusual camera set-ups that imply no particular meaning. Instead, the very unconventionality of the image points to the unconventional nature of its object. Objects that are strange do not always look strange. Their nondescript appearance may indeed be their most uncanny characteristic. We may sense a disguise. But then a sudden change of angle renders the most commonplace thing strange. This feels like an unmasking, suggesting the eye's ability to sense the invisible.

It is self-evident that an opium den or an underworld dive can be photographed in ways that are more lurid or fantastic than the housewife at her hearth. But is this not perhaps *too* self-evident? If we know in advance that we are about to see something out of the ordinary, any emphasis on the part of the camera often seems trite and kitschy. If, however, the shot merely arouses an initial suspicion, then the camera can begin to have a productive dramatic effect. An overt displacement of the camera can point to the misplaced nature of the film's motif. Opinion and judgement are implicit in the angle of the shot. The Soviet Russians, for example, believe that bourgeois society is in decline and full of grotesque contradictions. In their films the bourgeois milieu thus appears for the most part in baroque, distorted shots that present this world as they believe it to be. Peasants harvesting a field of grain, in contrast, are photographed simply and directly.

The Other Side

And even if there is nothing special worth signifying, it is a good idea to examine things 'from the other side' from time to time, if only to become aware of them at all. Ordinary habits of looking have rendered our surroundings invisible. We see merely the existence of things, not their true form. We do not see, we merely orient ourselves. An unaccustomed camera set-up, however, pulls the face of things out of the mists of deadened routine and enables us to perceive them. 'For whatever is not really deformed is imperceptible.' And the source of the vitality that streams from every art is that again and again it makes us see the world 'as if for the first time'.

The Human Sphere

Unusual camera set-ups have an animating effect only in so far as they remain within the sphere of possible human activity. There are automatic cameras that can take pictures from vantage points inaccessible to the naked eye. There are mechanisms to make the camera fly, or to sink it to places beyond the human imagination. What results are certainly photographs, but not of human experience. At best, these are scientific observations. Or else optical inventions, albeit inventions that represent

realities. But, as with the example of the world under the microscope, these realities are situated outside our conscious minds. The inner sympathy which a change of camera angle provokes in us fails to materialize. The image becomes abstract and art is dead.

Impressionism

Every image has as *one* of its qualities that it is subjective. But it is wrong to use anomalous camera set-ups to render the image *only* subjective. For the image should also express qualities that emanate from the filmed object itself. In fancifully impressionistic shots, objects can easily lose their proper weight. They become impressions.

There is, for example, a certain aesthetic attraction in photographing objects reflected in water. But this can also reduce house, tree and human being to undifferentiated reflected images: to the same common denominator. All become watery in character, and the distinct individuality of their existence is blurred. Unless this is the particular meaning intended, this is pure loss.

Clichéd Images[15]

In general, the subjective contents of the shot must be convincing. The picture must not have more 'atmosphere' than appears credible for the scene. Otherwise, it has the effect of banality presented with pathos. A pictorial cliché, as it were. The shot can emphasize or single out. But it cannot act as a substitute, and if it tries to, it become kitsch, like any other inappropriate style, or like a crime reported or a trivial anecdote related with lyrical effusiveness.

'Posed' Shots[16]

It is even worse when the atmosphere that obtains in the motif itself is artificially corrected. When a particular shot is unable to render that atmosphere visible, the director may titivate it with some artificial tasteful arrangement. Here, a quality that should be revealed by the camera is added cosmetically to the motif. That is kitsch; for here, the camera ceases to be creative and instead simply reproduces a preconceived artistic object. The essence of every art, however, is surely to capture objects in their chaste unintentionality. The only thing that the image of those objects should *give* to them is simply the expression they already *possess*. Not something they should give themselves.

The impression is no less jarring when we can see how expression is helped along by artistic lighting effects. Lighting set-ups in which we can detect the

15. See *TotF*, p. 114.
16. See *TotF*, pp. 114f.

reflector have the same effect as face paint or fake scenery. We see that someone is trying to foist something onto us. An ideal whose image is the product of a mere snapshot, not of a camera creatively used. A kitsch image that is also implausible. Effects produced by camera set-up seem to us entirely acceptable; but from artificial arrangements of the image we accept nothing.

There are images that appear too beautiful, too picturesque. These may also be dangerous, even if they have come into being through effective camera set-up. Their rounded composition renders them static, painterly; it gives them the absolute immutable validity of a special work of art. But it also snatches them from the dynamic flow of the action. Such images draw their own frame round themselves and in so doing, they destroy the film (Lang's *Nibelungen*).[17]

Thema con variazione[18]

This becomes problematic when a film is faced with photographing an existing work of art that already possesses an interpreted expression. In other words, where the film-maker uses not nature as raw material, but sculptures or puppets whose physiognomy has already been given a particular meaning by another artist. Here the camera must either mechanically reproduce that physiognomy and its meaning, or else it must alter them through its set-up. In the latter event, art is treated as though it were nature, raw material. Unless the camera can supply optical variations on the optical impression that raw material conveys. *Thema con variazione*, as in music, where it is possible continually to reinterpret the material of a preformed work of art.

Film Style[19]

This is also the secret of authentic style. What is the use of filming original buildings, of making a point of ensuring that every chair, every goblet is an original piece? Original rococo or original Old Indian? What matters is not the style of the object, but that *of the image*. The most exemplary baroque building may look quite un-baroque in a film shot. It is the shot that furnishes the image's style.

The image can even acquire a style that is quite different from its model. The French porcelain of the eighteenth century, which was painted in China to French designs, contains pictures of marquises and marchionesses, rococo shepherds and shepherdesses. All are dressed faithfully in accordance with Versailles fashion and yet have the aura of Chinese mandarins. The opposite example of Dresden china is also well

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17. *Die Nibelungen: Siegfrieds Tod* and *Die Nibelungen: Kriemhilds Rache* (both 1924), d. Fritz Lang.
18. See *TotF*, p. 115.
19. See *TotF*, p. 116.

known. In Dresden, original Chinese designs have acquired stolid German characteristics. For what counts is not the object depicted but the style of painting. The beautiful Japanese film *Shadows of the Yoshiwara*[20] by Kinugasa is marvellously authentic stylistically, not so much because the costumes and decor are authentic, but because in its composition and use of light and shade every shot has the lines, the 'draughtsmanship', of old Japanese woodcuts.

Every Style is Modern

The living camera will also depict historical styles as we see them today. Its approach to such styles will always reproduce the attitude of the present towards the relevant historical period. Every truly experienced historical style is modern because every generation experiences it differently. In the eyes of their admirers from the Italian Renaissance (and also in their paintings) the ancient Greeks looked different from the way they appeared to Winckelmann or Canova.

At the same time, even a modern style, such as the 'expressionism' often used in film, is no more than an object for the camera, a motif, just like any historical style. It is not enough in film for the architect and set designer to work in an expressionistic manner. The camera has to do likewise, otherwise the film will no more acquire the desired style than will a petty bourgeois who comes into a sudden fortune and decides to furnish his apartment in accordance with 'modern' taste.

Film Accelerates the Sense of Style

The set-up is the camera's means to create style in film. Not simply historical styles, or the 'modern' styles hatched by the commercial imagination. Even the true, unconscious style of our epoch, the historical style of the present age, will first make its appearance in the cinema. In the other arts, and indeed in the forms of life itself, it will remain unconscious. For every style acquires definite contours either only when viewed in historical context, or else from the perspective of the art of the camera, that remarkable art which is both productive and reproductive, both reflexive and creative. If the spirit of the age is reflected in the forms of our lives and arts, then *this reflection is itself reflected in the camera*, and hence becomes conscious. The camera does not, after all, create primary forms but discovers and experiences and interprets forms that already exist. It discovers their unified character and the laws that govern them. This explains why films sometimes seem 'historical' after a mere half-decade; for, in film, the style of an epoch becomes more quickly visible than in any other document from times past.

20. *Jujiro* (1928) Also known as *Crossroads, Crossways* and *Slums of Tokyo* (1928), d. Teinosuke Kinugasa.

MONTAGE[1]

In film even the most meaningful set-up does not suffice to give the image its full meaning. In the final analysis, meaning is determined by the position of the image between other images. The issue here is editing, a process for which it is significantly a French term, 'montage', that has come to be accepted in the technical vocabulary of film. This is the ultimate refinement of work on film.

The speck of colour in a painting, the note in a melody, the word in a sentence – all these acquire their 'value', their function, their meaning only through their context. In the case of the film image, however, the significance of context in determining meaning seems more remarkable. Neither colour nor note nor word has significance in isolation. An image, in contrast, is already a representation (a painting), and may already have a melody or possess the expressive force of a fully developed sentence.

The image of a smile, for instance, expresses something very clear to us. But then we see the sight that may have provoked it. The smile of a loved one, perhaps; or, alternatively, a revolver's hostile muzzle. In each of these contexts, the same smile will not only change in meaning, it will also look quite different.

We are by nature beings moved involuntarily to interpret. If we are ignorant of the explanatory context, the image simply slips into the series of associations that happens to be at the forefront of our minds. It is edited, as it were, into an associative chain from which it draws its meaning. That meaning is not semi-conscious – isolated colours, notes and words – but has a quite concrete and specific content. Thus, in the image of a smile, what we see – and we see it immediately – is always both a very specific psychology, and one whose nature depends on the image that precedes it.

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1. See *TotF*, pp. 118ff. Balázs comments in *TotF* on his preference for the French term: 'I … think the French expression "montage" far more adequate and expressive [than editing], for it means "assembly" and that is really what happens in editing. The shots are assembled by the editor in a predetermined order, in such a way as to produce by the very sequence of frames a certain intended effect, much as the fitter assembles the parts of a machine so as to turn these disjointed parts into a power-producing, work-performing machine.'

Latent Meaning

Images, then, are filled with the tension of a latent meaning that is released the moment one image comes into contact with another image, which may be either seen or thought. Images effect meaning, moreover, even before the concrete content of that meaning is determined. The image of a smile means something from the outset. But *what* it means will be determined by an initial association that is both involuntary and immediate.

This unstoppable process of association and meaning acquisition arises both from the proximity of images in film, and from our assumption that in a *work of art* we may assume an intention. Even in films whose editing seems entirely senseless and random, we draw some conclusion or other from the images because we assume that there must be some thought behind them. The images are much more than celluloid fragments bonded together; they are also connected in terms of content by an irresistible process of induction from a stream of relationships. This is the source of the power of montage: a power that is there whether we like it or not. The task is to make conscious use of it.

Scissors as a Poetic Device[2]

There is a pretty story that shows how cutting – the simple use of scissors – can not only create content and meaning but also change and revise it. A Scandinavian film distribution company was once keen to purchase the *Potemkin* film. The local censors, however, found it too subversive. But, since *Potemkin* was so famous and brought such good returns wherever it was shown, the company was loath to let the film slip through their fingers. They decided therefore to 'cut it about' it a little and submit it to the censor in its revised form. No change was made to the images themselves; not even new intertitles were added. All they did was to change the order of the images a little. And lo and behold …!

As is well known, the film opens with scenes of the sailors' mistreatment. The 'malcontents' are then lined up to be shot. At the last moment the crew mutinies. Uprising on the ship. Fighting in the town. Finally, the fleet appears, but allows the mutineers to escape with their ship.

So much for the scene and image sequence in the original version. When it emerged from the cutting room of the less hot-headed Scandinavians, it looked as follows.

The film starts *in medias res* with the mutiny that follows the sailors' foiled execution. From there it runs unaltered to the end. Not a single subversive revolutionary image is cut. What happened here, then, to appease the censor? No more than a minor rearrangement. The film merely no longer ended with the appearance of the fleet. Instead, the

2. See *TotF*, pp. 119ff.

opening scene of the film was cut from the original and added onto the end instead. After the mutiny, in other words, that is, after the appearance of the Czarist fleet, the mutinous sailors stand trembling to attention. Only now are the troublemakers tied up and lined up to be shot. Only now is the order to fire given … and the film is over! The mutiny is suppressed and order is restored, creating a film that the Scandinavian censor can pass without a qualm.

Images Cannot Be Conjugated[3]

Why is it that the chapters and acts of novels or plays cannot be rearranged in this way? The answer lies in the ability of language to convey both past and future. Every sentence is woven tightly into the temporal unfolding of a narrative. An image, on the other hand, cannot be conjugated like a verb. It exists only in the present. It does not affirm its own position in time. Rather, it is the position of an image in a film that determines the point in time of the action represented.

Creative Montage[4]

Already in *Visible Man*, I discussed that simple form of editing which aspires only to make the development of events comprehensible. What needs adding here is that even the simplest narrative editing involves a creative form of montage in addition to that uncreative variety which is concerned merely with ordering the image sequence.

If the images to be edited already contain all the meanings the film aspires to communicate, then the montage will add nothing to them. It simply arranges ready-made meanings in order to make the course of the action comprehensible, and makes no use of the deep power of montage to trigger associations and invite interpretations.

Montage becomes creative when we learn something that the images in isolation do not show. A trivial example: we see someone leaving a room. We next see the room in a state of disorder, with signs of a struggle. Next perhaps blood dripping from the arm of a chair. We have seen neither a struggle nor its victim, but we are in the picture. We have guessed the meaning.

Both this montage technique of implying hidden connections and the audience's skill in drawing the right inferences have made great strides. We have learned to correlate the minutest clues and to combine them together: to direct the associative process, and to hit the target with the precision of a gun.

3. See *TotF*, pp. 120ff. Balázs notes here that the sound film was less amenable than the silent film to the rearrangement of its narratives, since the talkies shared with the novel form a dependence on the word.
4. See *TotF*, p. 123.

Montage of Association[5]

Not only is montage able to awaken associations; it can also represent them. That is to say, it can depict on screen the series of images that arise in our minds, the chain of ideas that lead us from one thought to the next. The internal montage of the conscious and the unconscious.

Early films did, of course, already depict 'memory'. For the most part, however, this was no more than a trite, naive method with which to inform the audience of a given prehistory. The memory of the figure represented became here a proxy for the author's memory. This explains why it never had the character of a psychological process.

In modern films, however, memories are also shown in their form as psychological associations. (For every association is also a memory.) Psychoanalysis has provided a good foundation for the cinematic representation of internal ideas. G.W. Pabst was the first to attempt to use film to show the *Secrets of a Soul*,[6] the externalized symbolism of the unconscious. Similarly, in his *Fragment of an Empire*, Friedrich Ermler shows the clinically precise string of associations that allow an amnesiac to recover his consciousness of self.[7]

If this internal process can never be conveyed as vividly in words – whether those of a doctor or a poet – as in image montage, then this is chiefly because the rhythm of the montage is able to reproduce the original tempo of the associative process. (It takes far longer to read a description than to perceive an image.) Moreover, the conceptual nature of the word distorts the irrational, hallucinatory character of sensuous apperception.

Associative Montage[8]

In the films referred to above, association is the very subject matter of the representation. We see the associative process as it occurs within individuals on screen. But montage can also compel the viewer to make specific associations. It prompts us not only to guess at events, or at lacunae in the narrative, that is to say, concrete acts that we have not seen but might have done. Montage can also lead us to associate emotions, meanings and ideas whose interconnections become *evident* to us, even if they are not *visible*.

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5. See *TotF*, p. 123.
6. *Geheimnisse einer Seele* (1926), d. G.W. Pabst and featuring Werner Krauss and Ruth Weyher.
7. *Oblomok Imperii*, d. Fridrikh M. Ermler (1929*).* Featuring Yacov Goodkin and Feodor Nikitkin.
8. See *TotF*, p. 125.

Metaphorical Montage[9]

In one of Griffith's films a woman's good name and with it her happiness are jeopardized by a campaign in the yellow press. The vast technical resources of a newspaper with global circulation swing into action like a tank squadron on the attack. The news-sheets fly like shells off the rotary presses – a simile suggested by cut-ins of the woman's frightened face. It is, however, our own thought process that suggests this image. What is in fact a neutral technical process acquires a physiognomy of its own through a process of associative montage. Whole avalanches of newspapers now cascade from the conveyor belt … towards a woman seen in the cut-ins lying defencelessly on the floor. The montage suggests another irresistible metaphor: an avalanche that buries a human fate.

When the battleship *Potemkin* sets out for its last battle we see engines at full throttle. The montage rapidly juxtaposes close-ups of the sailors' faces with engines which, through this emphatic juxtaposition, also acquire a kind of 'face'. The juxtaposition creates the metaphor of a 'Comrade Machine' which has now joined in the struggle. The whirling of a flywheel becomes a gesture of throbbing excitement because the sailors' gestures with which it is intercut are transferred as metaphor to the machine.

As we saw above, even a single shot can confer symbolic meaning on a single image. Camera set-up here relates to the transfer of meaning between two parallel images as a metaphor does to an allegory. No object is so utterly 'dead' as to be incapable of being resurrected into a living physiognomy by associative montage.

Intangible, irrational ideas can also be brought into association through the suggestive power of montage. Sometimes a mere landscape is enough to enable us to interpret a human face. We do not know how this works, but it succeeds in conveying the essence of a character. In Pudovkin's *Mother*, melting spring waters gurgle and splash between marching demonstrators.[10] The same hopes of a new life gleam and glitter both in the waves and in the demonstrators' eyes. In his film *New Year's Eve*[11], Lupu Pick became many years ago the first director to intercut images of a storm-tossed sea with scenes from the drama to which they had no rational narrative connection. The function of the sea was to act simply as a rhythmical allegory (and the device made Lupu Pick the first pioneer of the absolute film). In Joe May's *Homecoming*, two prisoners in Siberia exchange tales of homesickness.[12] Wraiths of mist pass over the gloomy steppes.

9. See *TotF*, pp. 125ff.
10. *Mother* (1926) (*Mat*), d. Pudovkin, based on Maxim Gorki's story of the 1905 revolution. It featured Maria Baranovskaya and Nicolai Batalov.
11. *Sylvester. Tragödie einer Nacht* (1924), d. Lupu Pick, screenplay by Carl Mayer. See *TotF*, p. 127.
12. *Heimkehr* (1928), d. Joe May, based on a novel by Leonhard Frank and featuring Lars Hanson, Gustav Fröhlich and Dita Parlo.

In Eisenstein's *General Line*, a farm is divided by cutting a house in half. The saw bites into the timber, back and forth, back and forth. A woman looks on brooding, her eyes blank. The saw, huge in close-up – back and forth; the woman, huge in close-up; cutting so rapid that she seems to fall beneath the saw. Isn't the saw cutting a path right through her heart? Certainly this is the question suggested and depicted by the montage.

Intellectual Montage

It is not just atmosphere or shades of feeling, not just hints of figurative meanings that are suggested by the association of ideas in the montage. Montage also provokes thoughts, definite, unambiguous thoughts. It formulates insights, inferences, logical deductions and evaluations.

In Pudovkin's *End of St Petersburg*, we see images of war juxtaposed: stock exchange – battlefield – stock exchange – battlefield. Stocks rise – soldiers fall – stocks rise – soldiers fall … What is made visible here is a thought; the juxtaposition establishes a causal connection and creates not an irrational mood but a concrete, sociological, even Marxist insight, whose very vividness makes its impact emotional, incendiary.

In Ermler's *Fragment of an Empire*, the amnesiac protagonist sees in his memory a war in which every soldier, whether fighting or suffering, whether Russian or German, becomes himself. Two men fight with bayonets, and both have his features. The moment when they suddenly hesitate, smile and shake each other's hand becomes, then, one in which he recognizes himself in the other. Ivan here and Ivan there! The two sides that stand opposed to each other are neither strangers nor enemies … A profound, beautiful thought becomes visible simply through the image. Had this been expressed in words, it would never have been so shattering. For the thought here is no abstract formulation; no one says, 'All the men involved were like you and me.' Instead, the image itself acquires an uncannily palpable reality in an editing process that allows us to *see* Ivan attacking Ivan with his bayonet.

Montage Essays

Such intellectual montage represented the intellectual apogee of the silent film. Indeed it was consciously elevated by a group of young Russian directors to the status of a 'specific tendency', one that aspired to distance itself from everything that was either philistine or poetic and to transmit nothing but knowledge, ideas. Their aspiration was the montage essay. Thus in *Turksib*[13], for example, Turin's documentary about the building of the

13. *Turksib* (1929), d. Victor A. Turin, screenplay by Yakov Aron and Viktor Shklovsky. Documentary account of the building of a railway through central Asia, presented as a heroic triumph of Soviet progress over natural adversity. See *TotF*, pp. 166–68, where Balázs refers to his own role in editing the film for European audiences (p. 168).

Turkestan–Siberian railway, the director creates a magnificent film and a spirited visual essay on the economic problems and the trial of strength between conflicting social forces. In a similar vein Sergei Eisenstein has spoken seriously of his desire to produce a film version of Karl Marx's *Capital*.

Rhythmical Science[14]

The most remarkable feature of this tendency is that, at the level of *content*, it aims to avoid narrative, poetry and 'art' of every sort, and yet it has no desire to renounce art as far as the *form* is concerned. On the contrary, the greatest emphasis is placed on the rhythmical and purely musical, decorative effects of montage. Here, the most irrational cinematic elements become the chosen mode of expression of the most intellectual. Rhythm becomes the expression of scientific thought. And what is discarded is the intermediate element of poetic invention.

No Ideograms, Thank You![15]

The cinematic genre so brilliantly embodied in the *montage essay* does, however, contain within it one danger. Ideas have to be clear, or else they are nothing. Admittedly, not every idea can be conveyed purely by association. Yet association is precisely what is necessary if the film wishes to remain 'art', not just a dynamic representation of statistical tables and ideograms.

It is the Russians who succumb most frequently to the all too obvious danger here, which is that of the hieroglyphic film.[16] When a statue falls from its pedestal in Eisenstein's *October*, this is intended to signify the fall of Czarism. When the broken fragments are reassembled, this is supposed to signify the restoration of bourgeois power. These are signs that have a meaning, just as the cross, the section sign, or Chinese ideograms have a meaning.

But images should not *signify* ideas; they should *give shape* to and *provoke* thoughts that then arise in us as inferences, rather than being already formulated in the image as symbols or ideograms. For in the latter case the montage ceases to be productive. It degenerates into the reproduction of puzzle pictures. Images of the filmic material acquire the status of ready-made symbols that are, as it were, imported from elsewhere. And we end up with ideograms, treatises in hieroglyphics, a regression in film to the most ancient, most primitive form of script, rather than a recourse to our own modern script that is surely of far greater use.

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14. See *TotF*, p. 129.
15. See *TotF*, pp. 128ff.
16. Balázs clarifies the use of 'hieroglyphic' in *TotF*: 'Directors sometimes attempt … to use the sequences of a film for the communication of thoughts, as a sort of hieroglyphic picture-writing, in which the pictures mean something but have no content of their own' (p. 128).

Rhythm[17]

I have said that the Russian directors of the 'essay film' wished to renounce all artistic values of film except for rhythm. Even in a scholarly work, the contents may be purely scientific, but the style remains art. The style of a film, the rhythm of the image sequence has also developed into a very special art form, which is altogether wonderfully sophisticated. And this not only in the intellectual film.

The montage provides narrative breath. An action may be developed at a measured and leisurely pace, its extended scenes acted out at length. Or else scenes may succeed one another in a series of rapid cuts. In the latter case, it is optical mobility that conveys to the audience the excitement of the dramatic content. The rhythm of the images acts as a set of performed gestures, as the gesticulation of a speaker (an indicating hand). Such has always been the function of rhythm. What is interesting, however, is that it has now proved possible to accelerate the pace of rapid cuts until it becomes the swirling montage popular with Russian film-makers. The precondition of this has been our new capacity to perceive these brief images as they fly past in the fraction of a second. Ten years ago our eyes would have been unable to grasp the Russians' feverish rapid-cut montage. It would simply have passed us by in a blurred grey strip. But we have now learned to see more quickly.

Optical Music

The tempo of the montage is not just a matter of breath and emphasis; not just an expressive movement of the dramatic content. Montage rhythm can acquire an entirely independent, quasi-musical value of its own that has only a remote and irrational relation to the content of the film. Images of a landscape, of buildings or other objects with no dramatic content can acquire in the montage an optical rhythm that is no less expressive than music. Take, for example, the rhythm of Walter Ruttmann's Berlin film, with its sophisticated periods and refrains. What has this to do with the streetcars that the film depicts?[18] In Cavalcanti's *Rien que les heures*,[19] what do street scenes in Montmartre have to do with the *legatos* and *staccatos* of the cutting process? The answer is that these features are simply a medium for the rhythm; they are no longer filmed objects, but carriers of light and shadow, form and movement. The visual music of the montage is played out here in a sphere of its own that runs parallel to the conceptual nature of the content.

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17. See *TotF*, p. 129. Balázs refers in the later version to the role of fast pace in early Soviet film montage in conveying 'the feverish pace of revolutionary happenings'.

18. *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* [*Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*] (1927). See *TotF*, p. 133.

19. *Rien que les heures* (also known as *Nothing but Time*) d. Guido Cavalcanti (1926), featuring Blanche Bernis, Nina Chousvalowa and Philippe Hériat.

And yet that music is not quite unconnected, nor is it entirely haphazard. Except in the case of the absolute film, the two spheres are 'composed' contrapuntally: pure rhythm versus pure objectivity. They appear to derive a profound but irrational meaning from one another – like melody and libretto. And it is through the unconscious that a link between the two is made.

Even in scenes full of dramatic movement, the movement *inside* the images and the movement *of the images themselves* as they alternate in the montage may well, intentionally, have different rhythms whose 'only' relationship is contrapuntal. A landscape in which nothing moves may well move in the wild rhythm of the alternating shots. Here the rhythm of the montage is not an expression of the film's object but the lyrical expression of the mood of the spectator, or of the director's temperament.

In some Russian films, as well as the films of the French or German avant-garde (Walter Ruttmann, Hans Richter) this pure montage rhythm has developed into a highly conscious art with almost systematic methods. Particularly in the case of the Russians, it has also produced its own dangers. Rhythm is achieved on occasion at the expense of clarity of content; or the dramatic action is confused by an excess of visual and musical elements.

Ornamental Rhythm

Rhythm is not just created by the length of shot. (Whether an image *seems to be* long or short depends, among other things, after all, on what it represents.) Forms, trajectories, movements may also be coordinated or orchestrated to create rhythm. There are montages based on the similarity of forms or on the contrast between them. (Ruttmann once juxtaposed parallel gas pipes with women's slender legs.) Tall, narrow towers and factory chimneys may be rhythmically alternated with buildings that are broad and massive; or they aim at formal likenesses: curves paired with curves, undulation with undulation. Relationships at the level of content are not relevant here. At one point in his *General Line* Eisenstein cuts four times in a row between the close-up of a cricket and a mechanical harvester, simply because they share 'the same line'. The point of the montage here is exclusively ornamental. It shows that the world it depicts is *among other things* an ornament in motion.[20]

Directional Editing

I have already spoken of the alternating point of view in the camera set-up. This does not require a foundation in the action. It need not necessarily correspond to the space of the action, or to the position of figures within it. Images are often confidently shown from angles that are

20. See *TotF*, pp. 133ff. This later version identifies ornamental montage as a preferred technique of those whom Balázs disparagingly terms the 'formalists' of the absolute film.

'entirely unmotivated'. Houses become crooked, landscapes teeter, heads loom, and so on. The point of view here is no more than a line in three-dimensional space; it has 'only' an ornamental function in the montage. Indeed even points of view that are motivated by filmic content may be composed in such a way that they float free of the action and thus *here too* dissolve into abstract ornament.

The Spectator Dances

The point of view of the camera becomes the spectator's point of view. When it changes, so too does the viewpoint of the spectator. Even if he does not move an inch, he moves *inwardly*. And, if such directional montage has a suggestive rhythm, then the rhythm it suggests is that of dance. Dance is the ornament of movement.

Ornaments of Movement

Images of movement may also be cut together by matching scenes of equivalent or opposing tempo: fast matched to fast, or fast to slow. The resulting rhythm need not be the immediate expression of the event represented. It may have a rhythmic value, either in addition to other values, or simply on its own.

Directional movements within the scene can also be joined ornamentally in the montage to produce rhythm. These movements may proceed in the same direction, in counter-movements or diagonally crosswise. A train travels from left to right. In the next frame a man runs from left to right. In the next a river flows, in the next clouds pass in the very same direction. Alternatively, counter-movements may evoke the rhythmic interplay of call and response, even though this ornamental relationship may remain unconnected to the contents of the action.

For film is a visual art and its 'purely visual' values are among its best.

Counterpoint of Different Spheres

The peculiar feature of the rhythmic formations created by montage is that they bring together in counterpoint elements of the most dissimilar spheres. In music, melody is juxtaposed to melody: in architecture, form to form. In montage, it is tempos and forms, movements and directions as well as emphases on elements of the action that are blended and combined to produce a *single*, mobile, ornamental formation whose different elements belong to five different spheres and dimensions. What emerges in the resulting synthesis is a sixth dimension, something new and special. A rhythmic formation that is experienced optically and yet is not visible. Eisenstein calls these effects the 'overtones of montage'. Like musical fifths, they may not make a sound, but they can nonetheless sometimes be heard by sophisticated listeners.

Montage Without Cutting

Montage without cutting refers to a sequence of images that lacks sharp differentiation. The fade, for example, allows images to sink gradually into darkness or merge smoothly into each other. It is both a method which enables the transition between images, and an expressive movement – one might liken it to a speaker's diction – that enables that transition to assume a new and quite particular form: to become a particular image gesture which also means something quite specific.

Fade-out[1]

The fade-out is comparable to the slow, meditative fading of a narrator's voice. Or to the dulling of a rhythm, a pensive gaze into space. The fade-out makes us pause, as with a dash at the end of a sentence. And both of these signal a need to reflect on what one sees. The image acquires a 'deeper' meaning which it did not necessarily have previously. We might liken this to an opening of the solid frame that surrounds the image: an opening that lets the mysterious shadows of an uncertain future flood in.

The Intellectual Nature of the Fade-out

The point of the fade-out is that we should think about what we are seeing. 'Think', in other words, about what isn't in the picture. This effect of the fade-out has always been known. What interests us here is the explanation for it.

In fades in or out, the work of the camera becomes visible. The image ceases to be a naively objective representation of the object. Quite of its own accord, simply by virtue of its own mechanism, the camera projects into the image a quality that has nothing to do with the factual, natural appearance of things. Fading is a purely subjective, that is, a purely mental expression of the camera. This is why the fade elevates the image, as it were, out of natural space and the natural lapse of time, creating as it does so the effect of *something thought rather than something seen*. And it also explains why it is often memory images, or 'involuntary' visions, that are customarily faded in and out in film.

1. See *TotF*, p. 143. Balázs adds at the end of this section: 'But at all times it signifies the passing of time.'

Time[2]

This also explains why the fade can convey the passing of time. If a ship slowly disappears over the horizon, then that event has its own specific duration. If however this image is also slowly faded out, we add to it in our minds a further, much longer, unspecified time period. For two movements now become visible: the movement of the object filmed and the movement of the image. Both have their meaning: the movement of the ship and the movement of the camera diaphragm. One registers real time, the other narrative or conceptual time.[3]

Time Without Motion[4]

Indeed, generally, when time is represented through images cut together in the montage, more time appears to have elapsed when the cut-in image is static than when it is mobile. If a dramatic scene is succeeded by a similar scene with different characters and this is then followed by the reappearance of the figures from the first scene, not many years are likely to have passed in the interim. However, if the cut-in shows a motionless object – a rocky place, a tree, a building, a thing without visible life – the impression is of a far longer time lapse between the two sequences.

For every motion has its own real duration and can represent only this. A motionless object, in contrast, has no extension in time and can therefore express time of any duration. Because we see no movement that might allow us to gauge the passing of time, we have no yardstick by which to judge. The absence of duration, indeed, can suggest an eternity.[5]

Dissolves and the Passage of Time[6]

The same face, first youthful, then immediately aged. If these two faces are simply cut together, this represents an illogical leap. But if they slowly dissolve into each other, this comes to *mean* the passage of time. We *imagine* this passage of time for ourselves. The technique of the dissolve transforms a simple sequence of events into a conceptual relation. Because the dissolve projects something unreal, non-material into the image, it becomes the marker of pure subjective emphasis, the expression of inwardness, of reflection.

2. See *TotF*, p. 145.
3. In *TotF* (p. 145), Balázs refers to this conceptual time simply as 'filmic time', 'a time effect comparable, in terms of space, to perspective. The outlines in a picture show space in perspective; certain modes of movement in the shot show time, as it were, in perspective. An analysis of these effects is most instructive for both film director and psychologist.'
4. See *TotF*, pp. 145ff.
5. In *TotF*, Balázs gives the examples of a mountain or the sea, which 'awaken the association "eternity" not because they show a great many time-lapses, but because they show none at all' (p. 146).
6. See *TotF*, p. 146.

One of the most poetic representations of time occurs in Joe May's *Homecoming*.[7] The hero escapes from captivity in Siberia. Later, we see him arrive in his hometown in Germany. In between we see him walking. Not him, just his feet in close-up. They walk and walk, without pausing. A series of dissolves show his sturdy military boots disintegrate; more dissolves, and they fall apart into flimsy slippers. The same marching feet remain at the centre of the image. But in further dissolves the slippers fade into miserable rags and finally into naked, grimy, bleeding feet, which still keep on marching. The actual time taken to project this whole sequence amounts to around three minutes. Yet we feel that years have passed.

Time and the Close-up[8]

It is only in close-up that dissolves in such rapid sequence become possible. If both Joe May's protagonist and the background landscape in which he was walking had been visible, the excess of spatial reality would have made it difficult to follow his imagined transformation. If his feet had walked in what was visibly an actual space, mountains, rivers and forests would have had to dissolve into one another five times over, and the effect would have been of magic, a trick device. For a journey of several years, five different landscapes would also have been too few. When, however, we do *not* see the landscapes behind the close-ups of marching feet, then the landscapes we imagine are without number. We are shown no space that would allow us to measure the time through which the feet pass, thus that time becomes simply immeasurable. For the close-up does not just isolate its object; as I have already remarked elsewhere, it raises it out of space altogether. No longer bound by space, the image is also not bound by time. In this psychological dimension of the close-up, the image becomes concept and can be transformed like thought itself. In the panoramic shot, the long shot, objects become imbricated with the general objective reality of their surroundings, which have their own laws. If these objects in long shot are transformed, the effect is of fairy tales and dreams. But transformations that occur in close-up do not occupy a specified place and are not felt therefore to contradict the laws of space. Marching feet in a vacuum cannot be measured by tape measure and stopwatch. They move in a different, mental dimension.

'Song'[9]

The technique of the dissolve can also occasionally make bridging shots of a different, parallel action superfluous. When the hero is shown leaving a given scene, it is not necessary to insert a visual bridge, as used to be the regular practice. If one scene instead slowly dissolves into the next one we

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7. See *TotF*, pp. 146ff.
8. See *TotF*, p. 147.
9. See *TotF*, p. 148.

do not experience this as an abstract leap. A cut-in here might prompt us to ask, 'Where did this man come from all of a sudden?' With a dissolve, however, we do not passively follow the actual course of an action, but *imagine* it with the sovereign freedom that we customarily exercise when we think. What we avoid here is the restless, jerky to and fro that can characterize images on film. Instead we follow the progress of our heroes through their destiny in a gentle legato. Such films then acquire what Carl Mayer suggests is the quality of solo performance, a 'song'.

The Background is Transformed[10]

To link changing scenes of action, there must nonetheless always be a person or an object that remains constant. And this figure must be sufficiently large and visually striking for its backdrop to be able to appear inessential, to fade away in the transition from one scene of action to the next. The figure in question should also be shown in sharp focus in a foreground shot, both so that it attains a greater degree of reality, and so that it is detached from what will soon be the vanishing space in which it stands. The figure (in close-up) thus becomes the surviving element – an island – in a scene that dissolves and is replaced by another. At the same time, the surviving aspect of the figure that remains within the image can be transformed, becoming a component of a new space that has not yet come into view.

In my film *Narcosis* (co-directed by Alfred Abel, with Günther Krampf as director of photography), we attempted throughout to link the scenes in this way. The hero sets out on a long journey. We see his luggage in the front room of his apartment. The shot narrows to his suitcase. Suitcase in close-up. Dissolves into the suitcase swinging in a net. Return to full aperture: the net appears now as the luggage rack on a train.

Another example: the heroine stands deserted and disconsolate in the street, in front of a closed gate. The diaphragm closes around her hands in close-up, crushing a white handkerchief. The handkerchief dissolves into a white rose of similar shape. Dissolve to one more rose, then another. (The hand movements remain the same, arranging and tying a bunch of flowers.) Then the diaphragm opens up fully, exposing a new space: the florist's shop in which we now see the girl working.

Changing Space Without Changing Place[11]

Here then the last remaining detail shot from a now vanished space dissolves into a first, anticipatory detail from the space to come. The image sets us wondering. Can we attempt to guess where we are now?

10. See *TotF*, pp. 148ff.
11. See *TotF*, p. 149. In the later version, Balázs's observations on the 'spiritual' dimension of the dissolve are replaced by a more prosaic reference to the 'non-material' character of this device (p. 150).

What gives the dissolve here its particular poetic, spiritual character is the fact that the space changes, as it were, without a change of place. What we see is a close-up that remains motionless within the image. We stir not an inch from the spot, yet suddenly we find ourselves elsewhere. Mirroring our own mental processes, the dissolve raises images of simple apperception into the sphere of spiritual vision.

This explains why dissolves always point to a deeper relationship. If the image simply jumps from one face or object to another, the result is simply one more sequence. But, if there is a dissolve, we attribute to these people, these objects, some special mutual relationship. The interpenetration of their images appears to us as a symbol of the inner interconnectedness of their nature, their inner meaning.

Formal Dissolves[12]

And even if it does no more, the dissolve accentuates and underlines the formal or rhythmic connections established by the montage. A windmill turning and dissolving into a roulette wheel makes the abiding link between two scenes not their shared object, but their shared motion. In *Narcosis*, that suitcase swinging back and forth in the net dissolves to a swaddled baby wrapped swinging in the net, and we feel an irrational connection, a meaningful connection, which we may, however, be unable to interpret, for it renders superfluous any pedantic spatial and temporal explanation.

In contrast, nothing is so off-putting, so clichéd in a film as the misuse of dissolves, which create the appearance of deeper meaning where none exists.

Panning[13]

This too is montage without cutting. The camera turns or roams and has images of the objects it fleetingly catches pass muster before us. This is not montage assembled on celluloid; it is filmed as a montage from the outset. Its objects are already present in nature or in the studio. What makes the montage productive here is the selection of objects, and the rhythm of the camera movement in its panoramic sweep.

12. See *TotF*, p. 149. Balázs greatly extends the discussion of *Narcosis* here, and specifies that the 'irrational connection' referred to in *The Spirit* derives from the common rhythm of shots of the baby and the suitcase, both of which vibrate to a third rhythm, that of the train in which the action takes place.
13. See *TotF*, p. 139. Referring to advances in camera mobility since the late 1930s, Balázs specifies here that 'the technique of the tracking shot has developed recently to high perfection. Not only can objects moving at great speed be adequately "tracked" but the angle and set-up can be changed during shooting. Without interrupting the continuity we can approach or withdraw, raise or lower the camera while "tracking" or "panning".'

As I have observed, scenes dissolving into one another have no spatial interconnection. In contrast, a panoramic scene conveys the most extreme sense of spatial reality. In an edited scene – here a head, there a head, now a table, now a door – we simply have to infer from its content that these detail shots are all located in the same space – or else we *know* this to be the case because we have previously been shown the scene in long shot. We do remember this. But we do not directly *see* the objects occupying a common space.

The panoramic shot, in contrast, confines us within a single space that remains constantly in shot and is simply probed and explored in search of the objects in it. Our gaze measures their intervening distance by the time the camera requires to advance from one object to the next. And even when we arrive at an object in close-up we bring with us our knowledge of its position in the space as a whole.

Sense of Space[14]

It was in fact the mobile camera, the panning camera in motion, that first allowed us the filmic experience of space. Not space in perspective, not a picture that we experience from outside, but a space in which we ourselves move with the camera, and experience with it the time needed to measure out its distances.

In Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, the space in which the trial takes place is never once seen in long shot. We do not *see* the space; and, if we did, we would see only a two-dimensional picture, albeit one in perspective. But, as the camera travels across the heads of those present, we travel with it and *feel* the dimensions of a space that we too traverse.[15]

Spatial Continuity

In Pabst's film *The Love of Jeanne Ney*,[16] a nervous moneylender wanders around his apartment at night. The light from his pocket lamp creeps along the walls, picking out first one object and then another. The camera pans in his footsteps. He hesitates, lingers, trembles. The light puts out nervous feelers. Each new step in space is a new mystery, a new possibility and expectation. The space is experienced step by step, and the camera penetrates it with him second by second.

But, even when perspective is foreshortened, space derives its reality from time. In Kinugasa's *Shadows of the Yoshiwara*, the camera glances with the utmost rapidity from one object to the next. But even here the intermediate space is not omitted. Spatial *continuity* is not disrupted. We

14. See *TotF*, p. 140.
15. 'We see nothing but individual physiognomies, we look into the faces of outstanding personalities and yet never forget that here is a multitude – because we, with the camera, are there among them' (Ibid).
16. *Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney* (1927), d. G.W. Pabst, based on a novel by Ilya Ehrenburg.

feel the space, not merely as a container, a frame for the objects, but *the space itself*, independently of the individual objects it contains.

In Joe May's *Asphalt*, we are shown the living room of a police sergeant.[17] We follow the camera from one object to the next. From the wardrobe to the cage with a bird in it, to the table ready laid and on to the clock and, only after all this, to the man sitting in this room, one only amongst its various inhabitants. Seen in close shot, every object exhibits its particular, intimate character; and yet, as we scan their intervening distances, we feel the stifling narrowness of this petty bourgeois space in a way that no long shot could achieve (though, needless to say, it would be tiresome and tedious to imbue the space with emotion if it had no particular significance for the action).

The Ritardando Effect of Distance[18]

A sudden change of expression, seen in close-up. A smile, an agitated look. Something has been spotted. We do not yet know what. The camera pans slowly in the direction of the gaze, quite slowly, feeling its way until the cause of the new expression appears in the picture.

Or, conversely, the camera pans back and forth from a close-up of a face in dialogue to a close-up of the other. One of them makes a move. How will the other react? We do not know immediately. The camera slowly pans towards him, and for a moment we are left guessing.

Here then we have an example of the stretching of natural time. This does not seem 'unnatural', for we experience it not as a brake on the action, but like a ritardando of the mode of presentation.

A classic example is a film that shows Chaplin as a soldier in the Great War.[19] We see him standing in the trenches with his comrades, waiting for the order to attack. He is trembling with terror, of course, but makes painful attempts to feign supreme indifference. (For there is no skill in acting bravely if you are not afraid. But to be so scared and nevertheless to persevere …) In his confusion he drops and breaks a pocket mirror. His comrades superstitiously recoil from him, thinking that he is now doomed. The trench is too narrow to permit them to retreat more than two or three paces. But the camera takes so long to pan this distance! The few feet stretch briefly into eternity. Timidly, Chaplin stretches out his hand. But his comrades seem so far away – and this is because it seems to take so long for the camera to follow his gaze and turn towards them. The distance between them now seems immense. 'Can one be so alone in the world?' the camera's slow gaze seems to say.

17. *Asphalt* (1928/29), d. Joe May, featuring Gustav Fröhlich.
18. See *TotF*, pp. 141ff.
19. The reference is to *Shoulder Arms* (1918), d., produced and written by Chaplin, who also starred in it.

We have seen many an image of vast deserts, photographed infinities. But never before the sight of a man standing so alone and forsaken in space. The three paces of emptiness around Chaplin become a desert of despairing isolation. The long pan stretched the scene into infinity; until we see the other men, Chaplin seems to shoulder the entire weight of human loneliness.

Or, again, to join the camera in a race or on a hunt! To swallow up distances yard upon yard! We savour here at length the experience of a camera that makes visible the merest fraction of a second, and transforms into montage the actual unfolding of a situation.

Another example from *The Love of Jeanne Ney*. Jeanne meets her lover after a long interval. They can already see each other but they are separated by an iron railing. Her car drives along one side of it; he runs along the other. The camera tracks along with them, holding both in shot to stretch the excitement of the final moment into a crescendo of movement. They fall into each other's arms. But not with the kind of *single* gesture that might last the merest second. Their embrace depends on them overcoming the vast space that divides them. Here, then, space becomes resistance, a state of separation that the camera penetrates; and, in so doing, it measures the tension of their yearning.

Subjective Montage

When the camera follows a single figure over an extended period, the images that pass by in the background become a subjective montage of that person's impressions. It's as if the director were unwilling to intervene with his scissors. As when a writer tells his story in the first person.

Here the actual surroundings in real space become a montage by means of a figure that passes through them. It's not the images that flash past the spectator, as is otherwise the case, but the spectator who walks past the images. A drunk forces his way unsteadily through a mass of people. Another figure strolls through a strange landscape or creeps through unfamiliar rooms. The camera follows in both cases, and their progress becomes a montage experience, while walking, itself one of the most typical and expressive of mobile gestures, stays always in the picture. Tracked at close range by the camera, a person's gait becomes one of his most significant gestures.

Dream[20]

When two different scenes dissolve into each other they acquire a floating, spiritual quality, like memories. At the same time, they remain spaces that are unambiguous and distinctive. But contrast the dream sequences in *Narcosis*. A girl is expelled from school. She leaves. The camera follows her.

20. See *TotF*, pp. 150ff.

She steps into the street, but she does not pass through a door to do so. The space of the action changes *without interrupting continuity*; we are still in the same space and yet find ourselves elsewhere (and we have followed her every step). Or the girl stands in the vestibule of a theatre and turns to leave. The camera follows. Now she walks in the snow. Past a snow-covered tree. But the stairs and pillars of the vestibule are still clearly visible. We walk on a few steps with the girl. Now she stands in a snow-covered courtyard. Or she sits in her room. She looks up and smiles in surprise. The panning camera follows her gaze along the wall, and the brightly lit windows of a mansion come into sight. The camera pans down the wall and the girl now stands in the street below, at the entrance to the house.

If the transformation from one scene to another is implausible, it feels like magic or a fairy tale. But dreams are different. In the dream, one space does not metamorphose into another; instead, space in general is ambiguous. It isn't space at all. And the very continuity of the panorama, the fact that we travel with it, is enough to establish the unreality of the dream sequence. Here it is not just the montage that is fantastic in nature but the thing itself. Only the moving camera can reproduce this sense of a dream, of being in a particular place and yet at the same time elsewhere.

Film on the Stage

This is likewise a problem of montage. The issue is how to combine images with live action, photographs with constructed scenes.

Belated Reservations

When Piscator carried out his first experiments in Berlin, there were still aesthetes around who raised objections in principle.[21] Their concern was the threat to 'the stylistic unity of pure art'. Traditional aesthetics required all art to confine itself to the unalloyed use of methods exclusive to itself.

This dogma of the unity of style and subject matter in art is, however, no immutable law. Bourgeois aesthetics certainly had recourse to it when it found that it had ceased to possess a unified world picture. Stylistic unity came to represent a substitute for a world view. It became an illusion and a metaphor of the unified meaning that bourgeois culture could henceforth pretend to possess only in art. This Arcadian dream was the last stage of a culture in decay.

It is certainly the case that, for thousands of years and throughout the most diverse social forms and ideologies, this principle remained the most crucial law governing all forms of art. The world in all its multiplicity was reduced to a *single* mode of perception. For the painters

21. Erwin Piscator was among the most renowned theatre directors in Weimar Berlin. His 'Proletarian Theatre', established in 1920, was known for technical innovations which included the integration of projected film extracts into the stage action.

there could *only* be colour, for sculptors *only* form, for graphic artists *only* line, for musicians *only* notes. This reduced to a single common factor phenomena that in reality are alien to one another. They coexist, but they are incommensurable. Reducing the material content of the artistic approach to a single element seemed to bring to light apparently hidden relations. Once perceived with a *single* sense, different art forms could appear to have but a *single* meaning.

But in theatre, at least since the advent of the bourgeois theatre, this stylistic unity has long since ceased to exist. Ever since the introduction of wings and backdrops, optical and acoustic effects have always been combined on the stage. The contradiction between the visual vividness of the background and the bodily nature of the living actors, between the perspectival space of the sets and the actually constructed space of the stage, has existed for three hundred years. What precisely is the stylistic unity here that we are supposed to preserve? Actual living art is less fastidious here than aesthetic philosophy. (Which is not to be taken as a criticism of aesthetics.) At all events, objections to the use of film on the stage have come somewhat too late.

Where is the Contradiction?

In its relation to background, or backdrop, film has merely resolved an ancient contradiction: the contradiction between the mobility of the action and the stasis of the painted landscape behind it. If theatre wishes to provide not just an abstract, intellectual space for the word, but also the illusion of natural reality, then it should surely provide for clouds that float past on the horizon of the set, waves that beat against the shore or crowds of vehicles and people rushing to and fro. As in reality. Theatre heretofore has operated, however, with a contradiction between the colourful foreground and the monochrome photography of the background. This has in fact never really disturbed the audience; but it will cease altogether in the world of tomorrow, which will see the triumph of the colour film.

There are no such things as 'technical problems' in art. But there may for a short time be as-yet-unresolved technical problems. The only problems that can be called artistic problems are those that cannot be resolved by technical methods, however accomplished. A drama that puts film in the *foreground*, in other words, that creates a montage of filmed events with live dramatic scenes, is an example of such a problem. Even if colour and three-dimensionality ultimately allow the sound film to create an absolute illusion of reality; even when it becomes impossible to distinguish the living actor from his speaking image, there will always remain a profound contradiction between the fixed, firmly constructed distance between audience and stage, and the audience's shifting, and thus henceforth non-existent, distance from the cinematic image. The

theatrical spectator is confronted with a self-contained world on stage to which he is external. Film, in contrast, surrounds the spectator. In the cinema we become participants who identify optically and perspectivally with the figures in the film. (See pp. 98–9.) The impossibility of reproducing in theatre film's multiplicity of camera set-ups ensures that the stage will always stand out as a hard, irreducible kernel within the flood of cinematic images.

The Sound Film Rescues the Theatre

The recent incursion of film into theatre was actually an onslaught on the apron stage and the curtain. It was not theatre that stood in need of film, but film that wished to conquer the word and pushed its way onto the stage at a time when it did not possess a language of its own.

Silent film liberated the visible human being (and the human being on film was initially *only* visible) from the constricted framework and the insulated space of the stage and inserted him into the ever-present totality of his environment. The same liberation for auditory man is now on the horizon. This is the artistic challenge of the age. It is of the nature of the socialist world view that no detail in life can be studied in isolation, as if self-contained, because in reality it is connected in every fibre of its being with the great social context. The use of the scaffolding of the stage, as well as the use of film, disrupts the isolation of private scenes on stage and shows us the surrounding context of their time. But now the sound film has arrived. So why import film into theatre when theatre can instead be brought into film, where it will be completely integrated without contradiction?

The theatre that strove to achieve the illusion of reality, that strove with imperfect methods to achieve effects that the colour film will soon have at its disposal – *that* theatre has in any case already been rendered obsolete by the sound film. But for this very reason the theatre will now be able to become theatre once again. Not a visual but an auditory scene of mental events. Theatre will be forced back onto its pure form, its essence, which is not visual (or even auditory!), but imaginative. In America the sound film has already wrested from the theatre its entire repertoire: a repertoire which in any case was little more that a set of primitive sound-film scenarios. Forced to reinvent themselves, the American theatres are already putting on Shakespeare, Schiller, Ibsen. The sound film is rescuing the theatre.

Film Unshackles Theatre

It is significant that it was the emergence of film that enabled the theatre to resume the development of its own autonomous existence. The rigidity of the immobile, immutable stage space is being dissolved. Transformations take place on the open stage: revolving stage, sliding stage, movable flats,

stage scaffolding … The point of these rapid, fluid scene changes is not at all to help the stage to emulate the cinema. On the contrary, they are the means by which the stage has been enabled to part company with film once and for all, to rediscover its own essence. In making its own machinery visible, bringing it out from behind the curtains, the stage radically renounces naturalism of every kind, that is to say, every attempt to create an illusion of reality. Because it can no longer compete with the cinema on this terrain, it has abandoned the attempt to furnish a faithful image of nature. The obligation to achieve *vraisemblance* is in any case one that the theatre had long since denied itself and lost from view. Instead, it reduced its ambition to rendering as faithfully as possible the passive 'scene of the action'. Film, however, has now once more 'unshackled' the theatre (an expression of Tairov's),[22] and the stage itself has now become not only the scene of performance; it also plays an active role as a mechanism, a performing instrument that exuberantly exposes a specific internal machinery, which turns out to possess its own rhythmical and symbolic means of expression.

The Visible Monologue

Notwithstanding all the above, there are ways in which film can greatly enrich the expressive possibilities of the stage. Not so much by lending to theatre film's greater illusion of reality (this merely leads to confusion) but, on the contrary, by allowing theatre to represent abstraction, the purely imaginative. My theoretical comments here are tentative and the following examples are suggestions for experiments that have not yet been performed. (I am currently writing a drama in which I hope, in the autumn of 1930, to carry out the first experiment of this kind.) Would it not be possible to depict on stage, instead of the usual physical background, the emotional background of the characters? To show, as an optical parallel in silent film images, what remains unsaid by the characters? Consider, for example, the 'asides' or monologues that are common in traditional plays. Or the parenthetical reflections that we find for instance in Schnitzler's *Fräulein Else*, the private thoughts we have or that surface at the back of our minds – all the internal images, in short: could these not be made to appear on screen while the characters speak in the foreground?[23] What we would then see would be the hero's face in the foreground, the expression he assumes because he wishes to hide his true thoughts, and behind him in close-up, his inner face. On the one hand, the real person with the false

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22. Alexander Tairov (1885–1950): Soviet avant-garde theatre director. Tairov pioneered 'synthetic theatre', an experimental form that incorporated all the theatrical arts, i.e. ballet, opera, music, mime and drama.

23. Arthur Schnitzler's novella *Fräulein Else* (1924) was an early example of the use of interior monologue. The film version (1929), d. Paul Czinner, starred Elisabeth Bergner and Albert Bassermann.

expression; on the other, his image with the true expression. The subterranean level of an ambiguous psychology, the unconscious, could be projected here as the shadow of the words on the screen.

Montage, the dissolve and trick photography – all devices of the absolute film – have made it possible to depict thoughts and symbols. Between two words, in a rapid montage, we experience the associative sequence of inner thoughts. And what a silence we might fill if we could only show the inner processes of a silent figure on stage! It would be like a wordless chorus accompanying a mute solo.

This is where I see the future of the silent, absolute film. On the stage!

In Piscator's production of *Hoppla, wir leben!*[24] a group of prisoners at one point clamber up to a barred window. On the other side of the stage two guns rise in close-up and aim towards the window. What we see in close-up is the gun barrels, not the policemen or the prison yard, or indeed any actual situation. The film image conveys only the extract of a situation: its meaning. And this essence could not have been achieved by purely theatrical means.

In the closing scene of another Piscator production, *Rasputin*,[25] we see the abandoned Czarina waiting for her rescuers. Her hopes rise as she hears the sound of approaching troops. But, when a veil at the front of the set shows the giant transparent shadows of a battalion marching over the Czarina's figure, she seems pathetically small in comparison. Here the symbolic power of the cinematic image opens up for the stage the new dimension of inner mental processes.

The Mass

The theatre was born of the ecstasy of the mass. It has a long tradition of symbolizing the masses as chorus and background to the protagonists on the stage. Mass scenes belong to the quintessential contents of theatrical and dramatic production. They were also always among the most challenging of tasks facing the director. The fact that the problems they presented could never be solved by the proscenium stage became clear only when film showed us the true face of the masses. Since then even the most ingenious use of stage extras has ceased to convey any impression of the mass. A large crowd (even a very large one) does not amount to that phenomenon we call the mass. The mass seems to have a life and a mind of its own. To show this the stage will have to seek the assistance of film.

24. *'Whoops! We're alive!* Ernst Toller, 1927. Balázs is referring to two film episodes Piscator had composed with the aid of Walter Ruttmann and which formed part of the production. (See S. Kracauer, 1947. *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. p. 192.

25. Alexei Tolstoy and Pavel Shchegolev's *Rasputin, the Romanoffs, the War and the People that rose against them* (1925) was adapted by Piscator and other collaborating dramaturgs, probably including Brecht, who together transformed Tolstoy's original melodrama into a political documentary of the Revolution.

On the stage, as in every artistic representation, the mass was formerly no more than a formless chaos. It might be friendly or hostile, ugly or beautiful – the image of the mass in art always appeared blind and faceless. For only isolation gives us form, only separation gives us consciousness. The mass devours both, and has thus always appeared as law without thought, motion without form. In our theatres, the mass could not appear in any other way.

But the cinema, and especially Russian cinema, has shown us the mass in a new light. Not just its sudden gathering, its senseless tumult, the adventitious mob. It has shown us the mass as a formation all its own: the *organic* mass. Not the *organized* mass visible in every disciplined regiment of soldiers, but the mass that has become an organism, a collective being, with a mind and heart of its own. These images of the mass are not composed in the spirit of decorative commercial art (as is the workers' march in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, for example). These masses have a *physiognomy* of their own, which is as expressive as only a face can be: a mass physiognomy. The movements of the masses are gestures in their own right. Mass gestures.

The mass demonstration in Pudovkin's film *Mother* contains shots of fifty heads compressed into a single frame. The individual faces cannot really be distinguished. What we see is one *single* smile covering the entire surface, *one* single light inspired by a great, common hope. In *Hoppla, wir leben*, the hero makes his appearance at one point marching along with the crowd. He alone still has a face that is isolated, closed. In the general mood his expression stands out like a hard, undigested kernel. And then we see his physiognomy gradually relaxing and his face gradually illuminated by the expression of the crowd. This mass expression cannot be identified on this face or that, but is superimposed as an expression shared on the faces of all. And that is the crux of the matter. What becomes visible is not the way in which individuals are submerged in the mass, but the way in which the mass appears *in each individual face*.

For historical and ideological reasons the dramatization of *this* human mass is overdue. The stage can successfully use extras to depict a dull, amorphous crowd. But if it wishes to show us the mass as a mental formation it will be unable to dispense with film (including the sound film). For mass physiognomy and mass gestures have to be searched for and recognized – and this is work that only the camera can perform.

FLIGHT FROM THE STORY[1]

Cinematography has become so rich in its own purely optical means of expression that it has tended increasingly to renounce expressive means of other kinds. In particular, it has tended to abandon literary methods and above all the story. Camera set-up and montage techniques have achieved a creative power that allows them to dispense with preformed literary narrative, and to tackle directly the raw materials of life. The camera aspires to approach life from a completely different angle. It has no wish to illustrate novels. On the contrary, it wishes to be creative in its own way. It looks for its subject matter *not in the event but in the phenomenon*; it creates its form not through narrative but through the rhythm of its images. (In a similar fashion, modern painting has increasingly liberated itself from 'literary content' in order, as far as possible, to depict no event, but pure phenomenon.)

Truth Without Reality

This separatist trend towards a 'pure' form that wishes to shed its status as a means to depict 'something other' has been a founding principle of the development of every art in the bourgeois era. Every art has thus arrived at a dialectical turning point where means have begun to determine ends and form to determine content. By an inexorable process of logic, every art has now arrived at the form which is its own content. In other words, at nothingness.

Since there is a logic to this development, it slips easily into the danger zone of that pure, that is, formal, logic which, in its drive towards ultimate conclusions, produces truths that are detached from any corresponding

1. See *TotF*, p. 156. In this later version, Balázs names more explicitly the targets of his polemic: the expressionists, and the proponents of the absolute film. He writes (pp. 156–57), 'It cannot be denied that this demand for a "pure style" had some artistic justification in the sphere of the film and the followers of this trend undoubtedly enriched cinematic art by certain variants of style and form. Soon, however, this school, known in European cinematic art as avant-gardism, developed into a separatist art-for-art's-sake toying with mere form … It was carried away by the undertow of the decadent formalism of an expressionism by now grown quite divorced from reality and it ended up in the blind alley of the "subjectless" "absolute film" style.'

reality. Everything makes sense, as in the formulae of absolute geometry. But there is no longer any relation to any meaning in life. This development towards autonomy, dangerous as it is, has, however, not prevented the cinema from discovering in the development of form its most fruitful values.

Flight in Two Directions

A story is a constructed piece of life. Film's attempt to escape from storytelling leads in two different directions: on the one hand to the unconstructed, raw material of life, on the other to pure construction without living contents. Here, mere reportage, nature and documentary films. There, the visual play of impressions and the formal games of abstract films. The final step, which in both cases leads to a departure from the realm of art, moves on the one side towards subject matter without form and on the other to form without subject matter.

Between the two alternatives, however, there lies a vast terrain of pure cinematic art which shows us a world that cannot be narrated, only shown.

Films Without Heroes[2]

The film without a hero represents the first step in this escape from anecdote. Films certainly still have invented narratives with carefully crafted structures; imagined plots with logical development still exist, as do storylines in general. But when the action is not tied to individual central characters it also lacks the constructed dramatic conflict arising out of intrigue. There is no fine thread cunningly woven into a net to ensnare the main characters. The storyline is so broad that its contours lose their definition. It becomes unobtrusive, almost invisible. A life observed in cross-section, rather than in its progress along the path of a single narrow destiny, no longer appears as the life of a particular person with whom we are not acquainted, but as life in general, the life that we know and which for that reason does not appear to us to be something imagined or artificially constructed.

Cross-section Film

A clear example of the film without a hero is the cross-section film. In my *Adventures of a Ten-mark Note*, I set out to experiment with this genre.[3] The screenplay contained no central characters; instead, a ten-mark banknote passes from hand to hand, spreading fate like a plague as it goes on its way. The path taken by the banknote provides the only thread connecting

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2. See *TotF*, p. 159.
3. *Abenteuer eines Zehnmarkscheins* (1926), d. Berthold Viertel, featuring Mary Nolan, Werner Fuetterer and Oskar Homolka. Balázs wrote the screenplay.

events which set one another in motion without their having any internal interconnection. The film's protagonists pass each other repeatedly as if in a fog, without suspecting that their actions have decided the fate of others. (This is true at least of the original manuscript; the final screenplay was utterly distorted, and the film version even acquired a fully fledged love interest.)

Of course, each scene in a cross-section film is just as carefully thought out, its place in the sequence as precisely calculated, as in filmed narrative. Scenes do not, however, follow any obvious progression, but constitute instead a mere sequence of episodes juxtaposed horizontally without dramatic intensification or climax. This explains why these films appear to lack structure, as if adding or subtracting a scene here and there would make no difference to the whole. They seem not to be based on a preconceived plan, but rather, casually observed by the camera without any clear intention or any preconceived literary organization. They have all the plausibility of randomness.

Mass-action Film[4]

The mass-action film has coherent action with structure and dramatic development; and yet it has no heroes. The clearest example is Eisenstein's *October*. The film contains a field of social action from which no private individual fate emerges. Masses stand opposed to masses. The portrayal of their struggle has, of course, been thought out and dramatized. But the marked class character of opposing masses appears in physiognomy and the mass gesture. This is what makes the film unliterary. For an individual character can be invented, but class character cannot be produced by thought, it cannot be invented. Class character is a social fact. It has a validity that far transcends a film's dramatic action. Class character can only be grasped by the camera as an immediate reality and then arranged like a musical composition into an organized series of events, like the location shots of natural landscapes. It cannot be invented.

The Mutual Equality of Atoms[5]

The cross-section film and the mass-action film represent stages in a transition to reportage, even though in the former case every single scene is invented. This is because it is not the components of a film that give it the character of literary invention but the way they are composed into a form. The elements contained in nature and in an artefact are one and the same. A stone remains a stone regardless of whether it is found in a mountain or in a cathedral. Every work of art is composed of particles of reality. Hence, if a film sets out to strip events in a film of their character

4. See *TotF*, p. 160.
5. See *TotF*, p. 161.

as arbitrarily invented story, and to imbue them instead with the universal validity of reality, it is wasted effort if that film tries to lend to each event the capacity to embrace totality. Only atomization leads to totality. If a piece of furniture is to rediscover its roots in the forest, it has first to be broken up, reduced to its status as purely a piece of wood.

This explains why the great masses can be portrayed only in the very smallest of scenes. No continuous storyline is broad enough to encompass them. But molecules are no longer fragments. Isolated and detached from the interconnections of the film's action, they become part of the substance of reality itself. A column sliced in half is a torso. A stone splinter it is not.

If two scenes are connected, they provide the action with a certain direction and point to a particular event – that is to say, they cease to refer to the totality. But a man filling his pipe, another man loading his rifle, yet another leaning over a wounded man, together with two men asleep, etc., do not form a coherent storyline. The coherence they have is within the totality: within the social existence of the masses.

Eisenstein on Intellectual Cinema

As inventions without story we should probably include those film essays of which I have already spoken. Eisenstein proclaims the intellectual film which depicts neither stories nor destinies, neither private nor social fates, but only ideas. Purely abstract subject matter is to be communicated in a purely sensuous manner: intellectual ideas transmitted via the image.

We can let Eisenstein speak for himself. On 17 February 1930 he gave a lecture in Paris at the Sorbonne on the principles of the Russian film, in which he said among other things:

> We have arrived at the completion of the greatest task facing our art and that is to use images to film abstract ideas in order somehow to make them more concrete. The point is not to dress them up in anecdotes and stories. By clothing them directly in images or a combination of images, we seek the means whereby to arouse emotional reactions that have been calculated in advance. These emotional reactions then provoke us to think. From image to emotion, from emotion to thesis. That is the path.

> No doubt, this method risks our becoming over-symbolic. We must remember, however, that film is the only concrete and yet dynamic art that can trigger thought processes. A thought process is itself movement and for that reason it cannot really be guided in its progress by the static arts. I believe that the task of intellectual stimulation (*l'excitation intellectuelle*) can be satisfied by film. That, incidentally, would be the historical mission of our age. For we suffer from the ghastly dualism separating thought, pure philosophical speculation and feeling, emotion.

> In the olden days, in the age of magic and religion, science was knowledge and feeling at the same time. This has now divided into a dualism. On the one hand, pure emotion, on the other, speculative philosophy. We must now – without regressing to the stage of primitive religion – attempt a similar synthesis of the two elements. I believe that only cinema can create this great synthesis of leading intellectuality back to its vital sources in concrete reality and emotion. That is the task to which we dedicate ourselves. That will be the starting point of my new film whose aim is to instruct our workers and peasants in the nature of dialectical thinking. The film will be called '*Marx's Capital*'.[6]

This was a powerful if somewhat premature plan. Seven years ago, in *Visible Man*, I spoke only of visual culture which, sidelined by the invention of the printing press, of conceptual culture, would be reborn once again thanks to the film. Eisenstein harks back yet further, to primeval beliefs in magic, to discover an analogy for the unity of mental experience that he wishes to reinstate with film.

The unity of speculative thinking and unconscious emotion? But such unity surely exists only at a stage, as in the age of magic, when these categories simply do not exist in a separate and distinct duality. This unity cannot be achieved by gluing or mixing. If the idea of a unity emerges only as the *antithesis* of a *divided nature*, it is impossible from the outset. Unity as an unproblematic, self-evident quality can hardly be capable of realization simply by the cinema. Nor indeed by art of any kind. The precondition for such unity to emerge would be a complete transformation of civilized mankind into a society of an entirely different kind, whose product would be in an utterly different human consciousness, which could then be documented in art. And, were these transformations to occur, they would doubtless not be confined simply to local development in a single art form.

And what of historical, dialectical thought as an emotion? I believe Marx would have had his doubts! This emotion, I fear, would not suffice to analyse complex socio-economic phenomena. To capture thought in the photograph, moreover, would often demand excessive simplification. As for the methodical pathway 'from image to emotion and from emotion to thought', I would observe only that the first step here may be possible to calculate in advance, but that, from the point of view of film, the second step then becomes almost impossible to influence or control. For Eisenstein, the image should simply arouse an emotion. The thought then supposedly arises automatically from the sentiment without the direct intervention of the image. In the process, however, all sorts of bizarre surprises are to be expected. For the sentiment aroused by the image will combine with fortuitous moods already pre-existing in the spectator. The

6. For a translation from the original Russian, see Sergei Eisenstein. 1988 (orig. 1930). 'The Principles of the New Russian Cinema,' in R. Taylor (ed.), *Eisenstein Writings 1922–1934*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 195–202.

associations that will be aroused by this cannot be predicted in advance. The situation will be comparable to the emotional impact of music. A warlike march tune can inspire combatants on both sides of the barricades. The eventual impact of the tune then depends on the text alone.

But intellectual montage does have potential beyond its appeal to our emotions. The fact that Eisenstein was so concerned with emotions, even in his work on the intellectual film, reveals him as an artist whose aim is not to import reason into the emotions, but to transport emotion into purely scientific thinking. Well now! The mere possibility of such a momentous idea, of such a tremendous insight amounts to a historical document of crucial importance for the history of film.

Writing Creatively Without Invention[7]

It is likewise possible to write creatively without invention. Every good travelogue, every ethnographic or geographical 'documentary' contains a continuous sequence of events – in other words, a storyline – that is carefully plotted.[8] Even if the individual scenes are not invented, composed or dramatized, but actually experienced, the journey itself has been thought out. A tramp sees only what chance has put in his way. But, just like the creative writer, the traveller has a definite idea in mind, and the route he takes determines the form of his work. His itinerary lays down the plan for the montage of reality, while the film's editing process excises the vestiges of arbitrary material. Here, the duality of form and subject matter is entirely eliminated. Not simply the representation, but even the original perception is cinematic.

The Art of Life

The great art of travelling has found its objective correlative in film. The stuff of experience retains its original form, and yet what is created is nonetheless a new life experience. A deeper meaning is generated by the grouping of the objects filmed. This meaning is not necessarily just scientific knowledge. Travelling is also a profoundly significant emotional experience. For the encounter with alien worlds strikes a chord that is both painful and full of yearning, an obscure homesickness that is normally rudely suppressed. Travellers are the poets of the presentiment that man is not merely a social but also a cosmic being. No description can convey this as successfully as a travelogue.

Is not the South Sea Island film *Moana* a dream of a lost paradise? Isn't Shackleton's glorious film of his South Pole expedition a heroic epic of man's transcendence of the boundaries of the natural world that has

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7. See *TotF*, pp. 161ff.
8. The German term here is *Kulturfilm*: see Glossary entry.

always been destined to be his home: of his confrontation with the dark mysteries of the universe, beyond the frontiers of life, at the only point where class struggle has ceased to exist and nothing remains but the struggle between man and nature?

The Mosaic of Reality[9]

In the 'documentary' with a protagonist, we have also seen the emergence of a hybrid form. The life of a single person is viewed here as representative of the reality portrayed and we follow his development as a leitmotif through the film. Life appears in the form of a single destiny and assumes the shape of a narrative. Its content is not invented, only its form. It is a kind of mosaic, a montage of reality. The film *Nanook of the North* pioneered this development, as did *Moana*, a story of the South Pacific. But the masterpiece of the genre is Cooper and Schoedsack's *Chang*.[10]

This film depicts the struggle of a family of Indian settlers with the jungle, as well as the struggle of a village with a herd of wild elephants; and it turns both into an aesthetically pleasing drama. The drama possesses not only a story, not only a structure that generates heightened tension, but also an underlying stylistic principle comparable only to classical Greek drama. Intercut with images of battles on the ground are sequences of herds of monkeys, who look down on the action from high up in the treetops. Like the judges' tribune in an athletics competition. Here then, human battles are played out to the accompaniment of a chorus of excited monkeys. Like a grotesque variant of the chorus in Greek tragedies, the monkeys serve as an optical sounding board. Animal gestures of sympathy lend to human emotion a quasi-natural elemental force. Just like the popular mass that looks on at a struggle played out between kings, so here nature looks on at the struggle to see who will emerge the victor.

This is not 'acted' and not a single scene is 'invented'. Its meaning derives nonetheless from an act of creative writing for which the 'writer' is the editor and the montage a piece of creative writing.

Cine-eye[11]

This term was coined by the Russian film-maker Dziga Vertov. His idea was to make travelogues which lead the spectator not into remote, unknown parts, but to unknown places close by. To use the camera, the *cine-eye*, to eavesdrop on scenes from everyday lives. The most insignificant scenes become meaningful here because, when removed and

9. See *TotF*, pp. 162ff.
10. *Chang: A Drama of the Wilderness* (1927), d. Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack (who subsequently collaborated on *King Kong*).
11. See *TotF*, pp. 164ff.

isolated from their context, they attract our full attention. They become exemplary. *Pars pro toto*: 'This is how life is!' A child at play; lovers kissing on a bench; a taxi driver quarrelling over a fare. We look as if through a keyhole, and there is something exciting about the intimacy of observing phenomena caught unawares.

The journey into the world close by follows no route map, and hence has no form. It produces no coherent sequence of events and no story, and yet what presents itself to us in the image is nonetheless a form of creative writing, a creative experience. For what we are given is not scientific knowledge but impressions. The same impression that moves us so deeply – if we have eyes, nerves and a heart – when we walk through the streets. The poet guiding us with his camera is no narrative poet. More like a lyric poet who makes optical notes and sketches. When he assembles them in a montage he must, however, ensure that he creates a living image, a living mood. These films may not have a storyline, but they do have a hero. He is simply 'the man with the movie camera', to cite Vertov's most characteristic film.[12] A man with his camera and his sensibility. He himself remains invisible. But everything he sees shows him to us. Everything that moves him makes us feel his emotion. Such is the lyrical film. Walt Whitman might have walked around with the camera like this, or Peter Altenberg. The poet never intends to bring anything to a conclusion or even to think it through; he just abandons himself to simultaneous impressions of the world that have absolutely no objective connection. It is he who supplies the link through his own subjective connection to individual phenomena. This is *his* world. And the 'reality' film in which it manifests itself is one of the most subjective forms of expression that we know today.

Diary and Autobiography

The impressions and experiences of one individual, continuously preserved in film. No structured story and yet a sequence of experiences in which fate plays a hand. A personality that becomes visible only through its way of seeing. Does this not supply the recipe for a film diary or a film autobiography? A genre that amateur film-makers should create and that would be capable of the same great documentary significance as written diaries and autobiographies.

To record a life on camera over twenty or thirty years! Not just interesting and beautiful views but even sorrow, or agitation. Just as with the diary! A whole life trajectory as a montage. The content of the images in such a diary would be tied to a particular individual, and yet they would be far less subjective than impressions in a cine-eye film. For they would be held together by the constant, objective framework of life's external necessities.

12. *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929).

Newsreel

The weekly newsreels might be called the diary of the age. They present reality in its unconstructed, impersonal form. This is, in other words, neither lyrical promenade nor private fate, but reportage. Yet what we are shown is not simply unvarnished reality. Sensation and topicality determine selection and composition and this in itself amounts to a point of view that creates a certain form. Newsreel images are the documents of the historical consciousness of the petty bourgeois masses for whom they are chiefly intended.

A diary of the age, then? What will historians learn about decisive events from this medley of images of sporting activities, parades and catastrophes? Social forces have no visible form. Can we photograph the Young Plan, rationalization or wage cutbacks?[13] Can we capture economic causes and significance in images? At best, the image can grasp ultimate implications, peripheral symptoms. Newsreels point to the outer limits of film. No, the images themselves will have no documentary importance for the historian. All the more important, then, will be historical understanding of the principle of selection informing them.

Views with Views

Economic and political forces have no visible form and thus cannot simply be photographed for a newsreel. They can, however, be rendered visible. In the montage of a documentary of true quality these forces make their appearance in the objects they move, just as the wind becomes visible in the swaying of the trees. My reference here is not to serial images that merely show views of a district or a factory as in the illustrations for a catalogue. Such picture series can be instructive, but they do not amount to a film unless the many views of the filmed object convey the observer's point of view, and the montage of reality images provides an interpretation and explanation.

Take the German documentary *Shanghai*. It portrays not just the splendour and the misery of the Chinese city. It also shows their functional interrelation. It shows class antagonisms and exploitation. The montage becomes a systematic analysis which imposes on the spectator a social insight. That insight in turn forces the audience to formulate a view. Once the insight is there, the view follows *automatically*. The actuality film summons spectators, as it were, as eyewitnesses. For every shot contains

13. The Young Plan was devised in 1929, by a committee sitting under the chairmanship of the US businessman Owen d. Young, as a plan to settle German reparations. It reduced the figure originally due under the Dawes Plan of 1924 by some 75 per cent, and was adopted in May 1930. One year later, under the impact of economic depression, a moratorium on payments was announced. Finally, Hitler defaulted on all reparations payments when he came to power in 1933.

a gesture of showing. Every image contains the natural human reaction that it then also prompts. For the object shown to us began by making an impression and that explains *why* it was photographed in the first place. The origin of the image was an emotion, and this is the underlying cause to which every image retrospectively refers. Images of suffering contain compassion; those of injustice contain indignation.

This is what produces the austere pathos of good documentaries. They can express painful emotions and savage hatred; they can also express tenderness and enthusiasm. If they fail to do so, they are merely illustrations and not films.

Is not *Turksib*, Turin's documentary about the building of the Turkestan–Siberian railway, a moving heroic hymn to human progress?[14] Economic problems are converted here into tense dramatic conflicts. Turkestan has no bread. Siberia has no wool. Not a single road runs across the desert that divides them; a means of connecting them must be found! The lives, prosperity and further development of many millions of human beings are at stake. So the film now shows the heroic struggle of human toil in the cause of civilization. The struggle of technology against natural forces, the struggle of human intelligence against the obtuse resistance of age-old traditions. The weapons of the mind, weapons of enlightenment and organization. An assault on the lethargy of nature and humanity that resembles wave upon wave of cavalry on the attack.

The sympathies and principles of the film-maker are made visible here by camera set-up and montage. (For these are also elements of this reality.) The images show no more than glimpses of the primitive agrarian lives of the inhabitants and of the technical work of railway construction. Through the montage, however, we see the whole underlying momentous but invisible process: the monumental drive of a powerful social impulse. A historic struggle for human development. The montage makes visible not just concrete objects but also amorphous social forces, the underlying reality that we were unable to grasp at first sight.

Reality, in sum, is certainly implicit in mere facts, but becomes manifest only to the spectator who looks more deeply and thus perceives their underlying laws. Individual images yield only facts. Reality is knowledge and meaning, and the interrelationships that produce it can be perceived only in the montage.

War Films[15]

This is the war film that we should make: a film that depicts the invisible political and economic forces at work in war! The Ufa war film had only negative montage images in idyllic sequence that set out only to obscure and rendered the war into a cosy country picnic.

14. See *TotF*, pp. 166ff.
15. See *TotF*, pp. 168ff.

The French war film *Pour la paix du monde!* is utterly different. Distributed by the French war-wounded organization Les Gueules Cassées, the film was produced by their president Colonel Picard (who compiled the material from the war archives). In this film too the social and economic context is not shown. We see only the facts of war. But we see them from the visual perspective of those whom these facts have destroyed.[16] I do not wish to comment here on the film's ideological significance. But in purely optical terms the actuality evokes such profound pathos, it is so saturated with feeling, that it can scarcely be conceived of in a work of art. For these are images seen and shown by those affected. The film was produced by the crippled victims of war. The horror is presented by the horrified, the torture by the tortured, the threats by the threatened, the lethal by the dying. (This film was not permitted to be shown in Germany!)

The camera pans over a silent battlefield, a battlefield that has *fallen* silent. A lunar landscape pitted by craters; trenches stretch to infinity, brimming with the bodies of the dead. A vast landscape with no sign of life. Not a tree, not even a blade of grass. Only the motionless canals of death, filled with the mud of blackened human remains. And the pan continues. Bodies, bodies, yet more bodies … A persistent monotony, like a never-ending howl. Then another sequence: an entire regiment blinded by poison gas, driven through the midst of Bruges, a city in flames. Driven like a flock of sheep, pressed together and disoriented, these blind men stagger on in their hundreds into the flames, or wander aimlessly among smoke clouds and falling beams. A vision from Dante's *Inferno*, photographed by an eyewitness so that we too may become eyewitnesses. Then a hand-grenade assault in close-up; and an aerial dogfight, shot from a fighter plane two thousand metres up.

Immediate Present[17]

This French war film is dedicated to the six cameramen who lost their lives during filming. This fact is crucial. Images of this kind are quite distinct from written descriptions, narrative, historical report, reportage, etc. The fact is that this is not a descriptive account. In photographs of reality what becomes visible is the event itself, in its as yet incomplete presentness.

When someone tells the story of his struggles he has obviously survived them. Even the most faithful and vivid account is merely reminiscence. And, even if he faced the very greatest dangers, they have ceased to be such now.

16. 'The film begins by showing these faceless ones in close-up, their mutilations covered by masks. Then they take off their silken masks and with it they tear the mask off the face of war' *TotF*, p. 169.
17. See *TotF*, p. 170.

Representation by means of a camera is different. It is not produced after the event. We see the situation at a moment in which the cameraman is still present, and we do not yet know whether he will survive. Until the film has run its course we cannot even know whether it will get to the finish.

This lack of distance, this palpable sense of presence as an eyewitness, gives reality films a force that no work of artistic imagination can rival. Anyone who has ever lain by a field telephone listening to a message, the breathless report of an episode of hand-to-hand fighting, will know what I mean. Breathless urgency gives the report a 'style' no narrator can aspire to. The message breaks off sometimes in mid-sentence, and the telephone's silence is as eloquent as a mortal scream.

One sequence in the French war film suddenly breaks off thus. The camera wobbles, the focus blurs, like dying eyes glazing over. Then darkness. The film is 'spoiled'; but the director does not discard the sequence, for it shows the cameraman dying for the sake of his picture.

The Cameraman's Consciousness[18]

What is remarkable about such sequences is not the heroism to which they testify. We often hear of men who look death in the eye with composure. What is special and new here is that these men look death in the eye through the lens of a movie camera. And I am not referring only to cameramen filming battlefield scenes. Didn't Captain Scott, the Antarctic explorer, as good as shoot the scene of his own death, as if screaming his final death agony into a gramophone? And Shackleton, too, as he drifted helplessly on the ice floes. This is a new form of human consciousness that has been vouchsafed to man by the camera. For as long as these men do not lose consciousness, they keep their eye to the lens and use the camera image to make of their situation a perceptible reality. Presence of mind becomes living image. Shackleton's last hope, his ship, is crushed by the pack ice … His men keep shooting…they drift onto the ice floe and the ice floe melts beneath their feet … they keep on shooting.

Like the captain on the bridge and the radio operator at his Marconi set, the cameraman stays at his post to the bitter end. The camera is his mainstay. It is a form of self-reflection. An externalization of the internal process of drawing up a balance sheet of life. The 'clear gaze' of inner scrutiny is fixed mechanically so that it can be retained longer. Scrutiny of one's conscience used to involve an internal sequence of images. Today it is a roll of film loaded into a camera; it functions mechanically and is open for inspection by others. The camera has the advantage that it does not suffer from nerves and is not easily bamboozled. The psychological process goes into reverse. The cameraman does not shoot as long as he is conscious; he remains conscious as long as he continues to shoot.

18. See *TotF*, p. 171.

Nature Films[19]

Whatever happens between human beings can always be invented and staged. If the filmed events are authentic, it is as well to say so. For the image itself can never establish this conclusively one way or the other. It may exhibit all the signs of authenticity, of inimitable reality, and yet be a deceptively convincing piece of play-acting, a wonderful production. Such things are conceivable. No dramatic scene of human interaction can provide absolute proof that it isn't pure make-believe.

Absolute evidence of reality is found only in nature films. Plants and animals do not put on a show for the director. We seem instead to eavesdrop on a scene that could not possibly be invented, and the experience has something almost metaphysically soothing for people who are made anxious by the uncontrollable omnipotence of their own imaginations.

At the same time, good photographs from nature always appear fantastic. Many of the numerous magnificent Ufa documentaries have the air of exotic, sometimes uncanny, fairy tales. For, although *what* we see may be natural, the *fact* that we see it is anything but. The fact that we may watch at close quarters and unobserved the idyllic love life of the porcupine or the terrifying drama of two snakes fighting for their lives is as thrilling as it would be to gain entry into any realm forbidden to man. We feel invisible, and the effect is magical.

The Ufa films, then, are modest masterpieces that reveal a remarkable and marvellous art. For the essential mark and indeed the essence of all the performing arts is the absolute sovereignty of the gaze to which the object is utterly exposed. The camera appears to function in these films as completely without resistance as can otherwise be expected only of the imagination.

19. See *TotF*, pp. 172ff.

THE ABSOLUTE FILM

I must repeat: 'Camera set-up and montage techniques have achieved a creative power that allows them to dispense with preformed literary narrative, and to tackle directly the raw materials of life.'[1] The mere occurrence of objects acquires such significance in the image that all poetic 'shaping' becomes superfluous. Hence the tendency to abandon the narrative feature film and instead to depict naked, unconstructed existence: reality in its primeval form. At issue here is the desire…no, not the desire, but the dream (wish-fulfilment, anxiety dream?) of absolute, impersonal objectivity.

We Cannot Escape Our Own Nature

We have seen that all forms of documentary have an element of subjectivity. All apperceptions are subject to organization of one kind or another; all acquire coherence and form by virtue of the structure into which an event, a personal experience, a mood, an idea or the consciousness of a historical moment is arranged. Images may be no more than perceptions of pure objects. The all-pervasive principle of form comes from the human subject.

Is there no way of escaping this human condition? Does pure objectivity simply not exist? Is the pure intuition of sheer existence an impossibility? Can we not simply see things as they are?

Objects Pure and Simple

Yes we can. There are films that do not depict events at all. Neither invented events, nor events experienced as personal destiny. There are films that simply show objects; they have no desire to transmit knowledge, but detach their objects instead from every conceivable context and from every relation with other objects. They are objects pure and simple. And the image in which they appear does not point to anything beyond itself, whether to other objects or to a meaning.

And lo and behold! The same tendency reverses into its opposite. The pure object becomes pure phenomenon. The mere fact becomes mere

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1. See p. 146 above.

image. Self-contained reality becomes an impression. In short, the reality film taken to its logical conclusion becomes its opposite: absolute film.

Examples can make this clear – and there are some magnificent ones. One such is Basse's masterpiece *Market in the Wittenbergplatz*.[2] Here we see nothing but trivial objects: market stalls in the process of construction, baskets filled with fruit, people buying, people selling, and flowers and animals, and goods and rubbish, all of this. And yet the wonderment of the joyous recognition that this is exactly how things are cannot be reproduced by even the most miraculous of magic tricks! None of this has meaning. It offers neither a particular novel insight nor anything of topical interest nor a specific lyrical mood. We simply enjoy our fill of what our eye encompasses. The objects are simply there and the sensuous pleasure we take in sheer existence is intensified to the point of intoxication. When we see wonderful photographs of an old market woman picking her nose, or a horse drinking from a trough, or bunches of damp grapes glistening in the sun, it is not beauty or the spiritual that we find so refreshing. It is the sheer sense of life, stimulated by an existence that surrounds and here suddenly comes into view.

This marketplace, then, is 'a purely optical experience'. Yet it still appears also as an event in a particular time and place. This sense of spatial and temporal specificity invests the objects represented with a reality beyond the image. The effect is of facts that are merely communicated to us in the form of images. Their objective existence is not exhausted by the image, they are not reduced to a pictorial impression.

Only Impressions, Not Facts

The wonderful reality films of the Dutchman Joris Ivens, in contrast, no longer set out to communicate realities. They do not point to objects that we might also see for ourselves. What matters in his films is merely the optical impression, not the reality represented. Objects lose their substance here because what the films value is appearance. The image itself is the reality that is experienced. And a reality that is *only* experienced visually is the substance of the absolute film.

The *Rain*[3] that Ivens shows us is no particular rain, rain that has fallen somewhere or other. No sense of time or space holds these impressions together. Ivens watches and magnificently captures how it *looks* when the first drops begin to fall and the surface of the pond seems to shiver with gooseflesh, when a lone raindrop struggles to find a path down a windowpane, when the life of the town is reflected in the wet asphalt. How it looks. We have a thousand impressions – not an object. But only these impressions have meaning in our eyes. The object – the rain itself –

2. *Markt am Wittenbergplatz* (1928), d. Wilfried Basse.
3. *Rain/ Regen* (1929).

holds no interest for us. What such images aim to show is not a state of affairs, but a particular optical impression, in short, an image. The image itself is the reality that we experience and there is nothing behind it, no concrete objective reality beyond the image.

And this remains true even if the film focuses on a single object, as is the case with *The Bridge*,[4] in which Ivens presents the bridge in a rapid montage of images, 700 in all. Here the filmed object seems to dissolve into a multitude of images. The very possibility of creating 700 very different views deprives this Rotterdam bridge of the unambiguous sense that it is a concrete functional object. What we have are impressions, and you cannot drive a truck over impressions. We experience the bridge only as an image and every image has an expression, a character, that has nothing in common with the function and the actual significance of this particular built structure.

No Event – No Causal Connection

Now, it is only the object in itself, a piece of pure existence, sufficient unto itself, that can be so entirely absorbed by the image. In a sequence of events, in contrast, there is always something beyond the image that remains and that cannot become pure form, pure appearance, even in film. That something is the causal connection. In its individual stages, an event can appear as pure impression. Its underlying cause remains obscure – it is a fact that we know about but which we do not see in the image. An object depicted in isolation is removed, however, from time and space, as I noted above. And also from causality of every kind. It becomes pure appearance, a vision. Here we are in the sphere of absolute film.

Semblance of the External World

Basse's marketplace or Iven's films are assemblages of images that have their own meaning, their own real existence. They are not just copies, pointing to concrete objects. On the contrary, it is precisely as images that they have their own concrete existence. To put this another way: these images are significant not because they correspond to objects but because they have essential meanings in themselves. No doubt, they present only appearances, but appearances that manifest themselves in the external world, that are objectively there. They are not like the figments we know from dreams or visions, nor are they criss-cross images that ebb and flow through memory and the unconscious. They are also not mere fleeting impressions that have somehow stuck in the mind, but rather fully existing, succinct forms whose traces the camera has pursued with sustained, objective concentration.

4. *De Brug* (1928*)* also known as *The Bridge/Le Pont*.

Interior Objects[5]

Walter Ruttmann's film *Berlin* is a very different matter. The images he assembles are not of autonomous figures with a compelling power of their own but only impressions of figures: images of images whose contours merge, dissolve and flow together, whose concrete outlines become blurred and indistinct. Tramcars and jazz bands, milk floats and women's legs, crowded streets and the whir of cog-wheels – all of these whizz past like images that emerge half-formed from the unconscious in a drowsy sleep. No image has its specific meaning, its own profundity and mystery. What matters here is not the many individual images, the many individual figures, but the totality, the one great impression that the montage creates.

It is as if the camera has turned inwards and now captures not the phenomena of the external world but their reflection in the mind. What the camera records is not the thing itself but its reception in the psyche.[6]

The mirror shows itself

But every mirror image acquires the character of its mirror. The most diverse objects may be observed in water, for example: mountains and houses, men and machines. All, however, assume the same, watery substance, and, in the final analysis, it is always water that these mirror images depict.

Similarly, whatever is reflected in the soul possesses the substance, the character of the soul. It is not objects or figures that these images show. In the final analysis, it is the mirror itself that appears in them. The human psyche with all its impressions is expressed in the rhythms of the image sequence.

And lo and behold! Though they have a life of their own, these same images become illustrations of objects beyond themselves. They come to represent actual realities. Not, however, the realities of the external world, but of inner life and the psyche. Ruttmann's *Berlin* film[7] would be of little use as a guide to a stranger arriving in the city for the first time. But it would be of interest to a traveller about to leave as a summary of the atmosphere of the city and of his memories and moods. No single image can do justice to the character of the city, for that is a reality that transcends the images and appears only in the associative rhythms of the montage.

Absolute Film as Technique[8]

In his film *The Street*[9] Karl Grune gave an early portrayal of the visual impressions made by a metropolis at night. Grune's images were those of

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5. See *TotF*, p. 178.
6. Balázs adds in *TotF*: 'This is no longer impressionism, it is expressionism' (p. 178).
7. See *TotF*, p. 178.
8. Ibid.
9. *Die Strasse* (1923), d. Karl Grune, screenplay by Grune and Carl Mayer.

a young man's feverish, desiring soul. In Kinugasa's *Shadows of the Yoshiwara*, a recently blinded man still sees in his mind's eye the colourful hurly-burly of a festive crowd. Formless, shapeless images from his injured eyes pour like blood onto the screen. Dreams too are often depicted in scenes that use the methods of the absolute film, but are simply cut in as elements of a narrative feature. Human psychology is shown here not just in its physiognomical and gestural effects, but also through the unmediated representation of inner mental processes. Hence, both Pabst in *Secrets of a Soul* and Ermler in *Fragment of an Empire* use the absolute film as a technique for exploring internal characterization.[10]

Not Souls in the Object, but Objects in the Soul[11]

The absolute film does, however, aspire to be an artistic genre in its own right, a specific world view. What it sets out to depict is not the psychological elements in the world, but the world as it appears in the human psyche. Not the soul as it manifests itself in gesture or speech or action – in a flawed translation, as it were – but the objects of the world as they manifest themselves within the soul. The absolute film refuses to make do with those few inner remnants that laboriously make their way to the body's surface. Nor is it willing to limit itself to the expression of the soul in the human face. It aspires instead to show visions that are within the soul. For our capacity to create images on screen has made such progress that we can now reflect psychological and spiritual realities as directly and effectively as can realist film in its depiction of the material world. And just as the realist documentary is able to dispense with invented narrative, so too can the absolute film. Reality in its psychological or spiritual dimension does not manifest itself only in specific modes of human action. What matters is not the psychology of events but the events of psychology.

Ruttmann's *Berlin*, Cavalcanti's *Montmartre*, the marvellous floating landscapes of Man Ray or Renoir have the quality of fantasies of autumnal mists seen with the closed eyes of memory. Neither reality, space, time nor causality holds sway here. The psychic processes obtaining in the absolute film know only one law, the laws of the mental association. It is these laws that appear in the absolute film.

Hans Richter once attempted, in the vein of the absolute film, to depict such phenomena as inflation in the shape of pure visions and impressions.[12] The film was designed to be a nightmare sequence of visions: piles of banknotes, empty shelves, starving and terrified faces, panic on the stock exchange, champagne orgies, suicides, share prices on

10. See *TotF*, p. 124.
11. See *TotF*, p. 179.
12. *Inflation* (1928).

ticker tape, money, money, money. No continuous storyline, no dramatized scenes. No narrative, nothing but images. Images of internal processes: impressions and associations. Absolute film.

And yet the images contained in these films are linked thematically. They do tell us about processes that also exist beyond the image. Berlin does exist and inflation is a reality. What is missing from the filmic representation is merely the chain of cause and effect characteristic of reality, and the logical sequence of events. The images are not linked by logic but by psychology.

Logic is Only the Means, Psychology the End[13]

Logic in film is only a means by which to make events comprehensible. It is not logic itself that is the theme that must be represented. In art, only the product of logic is of interest to us, not the rational laws that govern it. These appear to us as mechanical and impersonal. Logic is a scaffolding that has a filmic function, but it is no end in itself. Psychological images, in contrast, make psychology itself the object of representation. They show not just the *what*, but also the *how*. Even if a montage of psychic associations is triggered by particular facts or events, it also reveals to us the psychic process of association as an internal fact, as a series of internal events of equal value. The irrational laws governing the associative process become a topic of interest to us because they are individual; they may be laws, but they possess no codified rules. This explains why the associative process can be revealed only in art, only in literature and film. Best of all in film. Because words contain too much conceptual baggage. The image, on the other hand, is pure, non-rational idea. This is why intertitles are inconceivable in the absolute film. Or else they would have to be there for purely emotive, 'non-meaningful' effect.[14]

Surrealist Films

In films such as *Berlin* or *Inflation* the theme and the psychological process within which the theme appears are given equal value. But in the surrealist films of the French avant-garde the emphasis shifts. The psychic process becomes the sole content, the sole theme. *What we see is not an external sequence of events but an internal state of affairs.* A state of affairs consisting of hallucinatory images. The images do not represent particular

13. See *TotF*, p. 180.
14. In *TotF*, Balázs is more explicitly critical of the absolute film, and envisages a new development – voice-over, apparently – that would counter the irrationalism of the pure image. He writes (p. 180): 'If parallel to the sequence of irrational internal images and simultaneously with it we could hear rational and conscious words in counterpoint; if we had two independent manifestations running concurrently side by side, the film could be given a dimension of depth which would greatly increase its possibilities. In this I see the great chance of a new third period in the evolution of the film.'

phenomena – they are themselves the phenomena. Weeping, for example, is an expression of pain, not the pain itself. But a flood of images from the inner core of the mind is not an expression but the substance of the psyche. We do not see pictures of an event but rather the event consists in our seeing images.

What does This Remind You of? [15]

What is it that is depicted in Epstein's *The Fall of the House of Usher*?[16] The film is based on a story by Poe. But the story never emerges clearly. Tragic shadows wander like sleepwalkers beneath dark vaults, over ill-defined flights of stairs and through endless doors. Pale faces float like masks and straying hands stretch out towards invisible goals. What we witness is the pictorial essence of Poe's sinister ballad. Unintelligible but uncanny in its effect on us. We see not narrative events, but the reaction of a psyche. Not the literary work, but the flood of associations it unleashes.

Star of the Sea is the title of a film by Man Ray.[17] It refers not to an event, but to an object, a form, a concept, the starfish, the 'star of the sea', which opens the internal sluice gates to an associative process. Floating landscapes enveloped in yearning, erotic visions of tantalizing vagueness and a weird kaleidoscopic patchwork of partially identifiable forms flow past, emerging with irrational inevitability one from another. The film's starfish theme is not its subject matter as such, but only the initial stimulus for an image sequence. An analogy would be a session with the psychoanalyst where the analyst asks, 'What does this remind you of?' The 'this' is the content of the film. And it also provides the clue to the inner coherence of the sequence of images. They have no other connection. There is no structure as such; only an organic and functional logic that gives the film a form determined by the original starfish motif.

Un chien andalou

A razor blade is sharpened. Such is the motif that sets the film in motion. A young man sharpens a razor blade in the first, soberly realistic scene of a film with the title *An Andalusian Dog*.[18] I should like to describe what

15. See *TotF*, p. 180. The later version is again more virulent in its denunciation of the avant-garde. Balázs writes (p. 181), 'This kind of surrealism is a heightened form of subjectivism. The present fashionable trend of existentialism is merely a nuance of this. Artists frightened or weary of reality stick their heads into their own selves like a hunted ostrich into the sand. All these things are undoubtedly symptoms of decadence in a degenerating culture.'

16. *La Chute de la maison Usher* (1928), d. Jean Epstein, adapted by Luis Buñuel, featuring Jean Debucourt, Marguerite Gance, Charles Lamy and Abel Gance.

17. *L'Étoile de mer* (1928), featuring Kiki de Montparnasse.

18. *Un chien andalou* (1929), d. Louis Buñuel and Salvador Dali (both of whom appear uncredited in the film).

passes through this young man's mind as he sharpens his razor blade, through the mind of the director Louis Buñuel as he makes the film, and what is then ultimately shown in a film which is the most remarkable and brilliant product of surrealism. And I wish to do this in order to demonstrate the impossibility of narrating unconscious images.

Windows looking out onto a balcony. A young man sharpens his razor blade. Evening sky. Full moon. A narrow strip of cloud cuts across the moon like a razor blade. The young man gazes at the moon and the cloud. Then at his razor blade. Somewhat dreamily. An eye appears in the place of the moon. Like the moon, it is as large and round. The razor blade is poised. It slices through the eyeball. The eye runs out. Like a large teardrop, it slowly trickles down a woman's cheek. An oddly dressed man rides a bicycle down the empty street. A little box hangs from his chest. He falls off his bicycle. Lies motionless in the street. A woman appears at the window and sees the man lying in the roadway. She turns around in her room. Sees the man's strange clothes lying on the bed. She comes closer. The clothes fill up with the man's body. He looks at her. Down below in the street someone opens the little box. A severed hand. Onlookers gather around it and contemplate it in a way that is strange, mysterious. A policeman tries to put the hand back into the box. It refuses. The hand keeps falling back on the ground. Even from a distance, it can still be seen. The man and the woman at the window can see the hand down below. Then an erotic struggle between the two, a lustful pursuit through the room. The woman catches the man's hand in the door. Close-up of the hand which, as if cut off, reaches out to grab her. A bloody wound appears in the middle of the palm. A swarm of ants crawls out from the open wound. Horrific. The woman has retreated but the door still does not open. The hand's twitching fingers stretch out to grab her. A crowd gathers in the street. The severed hand lies on the asphalt. A pale girl stares at it distractedly. A policeman puts the hand in the box and gives it to the girl. The girl stands there with the box, motionless, staring along the street. A car. She is run over. The man lying on the bed. Another man approaches, looking exactly like the first one. The man on the bed is now holding the box. The second man snatches it from his hands. The box flies back into the street. What to do with the severed hand? The two men make strange gestures; they are terrified. One of them suddenly holds a tennis racket, which gradually turns into a revolver. He shoots the other man. A park. Hidden figures. Shots. Strange people laugh. The door opens; enter two Jesuits, dragging a piano by some ropes. They advance through the room slowly, gravely, steadily, without raising their eyes. The corpse of a slaughtered horse lies on top of the piano. The body of a donkey is tied behind it. Like tugs pulling a boat, the Jesuits drag all this slowly through the room and disappear. The man turns to the woman as if to say that everything has now become clear …

Segments of the Soul

Shall I continue my narration? To do so is quite pointless. For what we have here is only denoted meaning. Meanings that we may not understand but which we access through emotion. (For meaning to become comprehensible, there would need to have been a process of creative construction.)

The flight from invented, constructed, literary stories leads in Buñuel's film, as in the others I have discussed, to raw material – the unconstructed raw material of the psyche – to the unconscious. To be sure, Bunuel's associative series does not produce a plot. *But nor does it represent a soul.* Even if portrayed with complete accuracy, an isolated psychological process is never so utterly individual as to reveal a fully drawn character. For a human being does not consist solely of the unconscious. And a specimen of the texture of his psyche does not represent him any more than a segment of his skin viewed under the microscope provides us with an image of his external appearance.

Furthermore, internal mental factors are not exclusively optical in nature. We must also make mention here of colour associations, as well as of sounds. These and many other objections can be raised at this point. And yet. Even if the surrealist film has had no wish to lay claim to a status as an independent genre (a situation resulting in part from the pedantry of theorists in aesthetics who will never tolerate the emergence of more than one law in art), it could be argued that, were associative cinema to be used in films that set out to create *rounded* human beings, it could open the way to deeper perspectives, to more transparent representations of human figures (though not entirely transparent, for in that event they would be invisible.) Associations could evoke irrational relationships in ways that are beyond the capabilities of creative literature.

Injection in the Eye

But, if the pedants of the absolute film were to be more obdurate in carrying their work to its conclusion, they would admit that they were less concerned with the representation of a psychology than with its production.

This is no mere play on words.[19] 'Representation' aims at a picture of a psyche that we are supposed to see and take note of. 'Production' is concerned with creating a psychological effect *within* us.

Dr Sachs has drawn attention to what is evidently an unconsciously symbolic scene in a film by Lubitsch.[20] An erotically aroused woman speaks

19. The German makes the slightly punning contrast between *Darstellung* (representation) and *Herstellung* (production).
20. Hanns Sachs discussed Lubitsch's *Three Women* (1924) in an article written after he had become involved, along with Karl Abraham, in the making of Pabst's *Secrets of a Soul*. See Sachs, 1928. 'Film Psychology,' *Close Up* III (5), 10. A German version of the article was published in 1929 as 'Zur Psychologie des Films,' *Die Psychoanalytische Bewegung* 1, 122–6.

to a man and as she does so she unconsciously unbuttons his waistcoat and takes out his tie. A vivid image. The woman unbuttons and takes out. With this symbolic action Lubitsch evidently intended to represent the erotic arousal of one of his characters. If similar symbolic images are introduced into the most absolutely absolute film, however, they are intended not to represent an emotion but to *stimulate it directly* in the spectator. The procedure here is actually one of suggestion. The absolute film does not set out to create a specific artistic representation. It injects its images directly into the eye. Is this still art? This is an academic question whose resolution would bring us not a step closer to an understanding of the issue.

Objectification of Internal Images

It might be said that these associative or suggestive images, since they are staged in the studio, are just as much inventions as literary plots. But this they are not.

A literary story is acted out in the studio as if it were reality; it is transformed from literature to image only by virtue of the shot and the camera lens. Whatever is contrived for and staged in a studio must depict a concrete event, of which the filming process then provides a visual impression. The motifs of surrealist films, in contrast, are not realities. Even as motifs they are images, images from our imagination, our inner mental processes. They are not copies, then, but images that are primary realities. They are constructed in front of the camera from the outset as images modelled on an inner vision. The studio mock-up is merely the first phase of the process of creating the image, a process that is completed by the camera lens. And what the process in its entirety produces is internal images in objectified form.

Metaphors and Parables

Sometimes these resemble the metaphors, parables and symbols of visionary poets (rather than the didactic parallels, logical allegories and ideograms that are sometimes favoured by doctrinaire Russian directors). MacPherson, for example, the editor of *Close Up*,[21] has this to say about a film of Robert Herring's: 'A pyramid of cardboard and a tired, pensioned-off cloth toy camel give us an idea of the Sahara from a satirical point of view. A half-stuffed camel in a corner behind a partition becomes the essence of pathos.'

Even as a motif this half-stuffed camel is not an object but a visionary expression, which simply gains in precision and specificity when recorded on film.

21. Balázs's knowledge of the British Journal *Close Up* may have derived from his association with Andor Kraszna-Krausz, who was recruited by *Close Up* as their corresponding editor in Berlin, and who also edited *Filmtechnik*, a journal of film aesthetics and technology to which Balázs contributed regularly during his sojourn in Berlin.

Optical Camera Technique

The camera makes use of numerous purely optical devices to transform the concrete materiality of objects into a subjective vision. Dissolves, slow motion, time lapse, soft focus, fog filters, distortion, trick photography, etc., and all the wonders of the Schüfftan process. Such trick images show not just the object but also its transformation in our minds. Not just what happens to the object but also what happens simultaneously in us.

Our entire psychic apparatus is revealed in these transformations. If we could dissolve, distort, duplicate and superimpose a particular image, if, in other words, we could let the cinematic technology run on empty, as it were, then the technology 'in itself' would depict mind in itself.

The Significance of Camera Tricks[22]

But the same technical trick can have the most varied meanings. Take, for example, the image of a man dissolving into a tree. If this is a scene from a fairytale film, then it represents a miracle. But, equally, it may be a straightforward scene change in an entirely naturalistic film. In that event, it expresses a conceptual relation between two objects. Or, in a surrealist film, it may serve as an association of two ideas. In that case, it represents an irrational process of the subconscious. And, finally, it may be nothing more than the purely formal play of an optical joke.

In fairytales transformations represent an event that has concrete reality even though it is not 'natural'. In the associative film, in contrast, unconscious transformations appear quite 'natural', but lack concrete materiality. Thirdly, where one object changes into another in the naturalistic film, there is always a logical connection, a meaning. Fourthly, in the desperation characteristic of film comedies the dissolve signals absurdity.

Every optical trick is capable of any of these four meanings (and there are even many more). Everything depends on the context in which it is located. The film as a whole gives a meaning to each of its parts. It is in the nature of every created form – and not just in art – that the nature of the whole is determined from the very outset.

Absolute Images[23]

However distorted a face may appear in water or a distorting mirror, it remains a natural entity, transforming itself in accordance with the laws of nature. This remains true even when the distorting mirror bears the name of 'the soul'.

A mask, however, is no distorted face. It does not contain a double aspect, a tension between an original, objective shape and its subjective mirroring.

22. See *TotF*, p. 185.
23. See *TotF*, p. 186.

Marionettes and silhouettes are artistic forms from the outset. They are absolute images. It is not the camera that determines the form they take. In their case, film is no more than a technique to set in motion a pre-existing form. Montage enables film to give their movements a rhythm that could not be achieved by mere strings and rods. But artistic creation is not the product of the camera here. The camera does not give form to life in such films; instead, ready-made forms are brought to life by a technology.

Visual Fairy Tales[24]

It was among other factors a flight from literature that produced these artistically crafted and stylized films. Starewitsch's enchanting puppet films, as well as the beautiful and sensitive silhouette films of Lotte Reiniger, may perhaps have a story of sorts. But it is not a literary story. For inventiveness begins here not with the story, but with the visual appearance of the filmic figures. Their very appearance is a fairy tale. What determines the fairy tale is not the plot but the shape of the figures in it. The visual imagination is these films' driving force. The otherness of the fairy tale worlds into which we are transported by Starewitsch in *The Little Parade*[25] or Lotte Reiniger in *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*[26] resides above all in the forms they contain. These worlds inhabit a realm beyond any magic. It's not a matter here of miracles intruding into *our* world. What we enter instead is an *other* world, one that operates according to self-contained but different laws.

This explains why the fairy tale storyline must have a logic of development that derives from the original visual form in which the fairy tale becomes manifest. To use puppets to represent the fates of human beings would be inauthentic, mere decorative play. In contrast, if a porcelain rival falls to the ground and is smashed to smithereens, or a tin soldier's leg melts down in a fire, then what presents itself to us is simply the fate of puppets.

The power that transforms a silhouette is neither psychology nor the camera lens, but simply a pair of scissors. The story arises from the form, and is in that sense non-literary. Indeed, what we are dealing with here is strictly speaking the very essence of the absolute film. For, in the visual fairy tale, the action arises from the adventures of animated forms. The action thus has a strict, but highly curious causality. Cause and effect are not determined here by the laws of nature – whether internal or external. They are determined by the pure laws of form. When one silhouette attacks another with a paintbrush and gives it a hunchback, this means simply that the second silhouette has acquired a hump on its back. When

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24. See *TotF*, p. 187.
25. *La Petite Parade* (1928), d. Ladislaus Starewitsch (Władysław Starewicz). Trick film adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy story 'The Steadfast Tin Soldier'.
26. *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed* (1926).

a human silhouette uses a silhouette pair of scissors to transform the silhouette of a stone into a human silhouette that then becomes its partner and equal, then this is the result not of a miracle, but of an event whose causality and plausibility derive from its determination by the laws of *form*. The laws of nature are invalid in the sphere of the fairy tale.

Film Comedy

The secret of genuine film comedy is that the *visual phenomenon is detached from its object* in the world, and embarks on a ghostly existence that is independent of every vestige of referential meaning. Hence Hans Richter's optical comedy *Ghost Before Breakfast*.[27] When six men lose their hats; when the hats fly off and circle round like a flock of birds evading capture; when the same six men creep behind a lamp post, then disappear, as if behind a wall; when the landscape opens in centre frame like a door, and little people start to squeeze through: none of this has any meaning, nor does it intend to engender anything but an absurd comedy that arises precisely from a detachment of the phenomenon from the objects of the world, which is in turn made possible by the autonomous workings of the absolute image.

Comic Content

These are, strictly speaking, the true optical film comedies. For the American comedies do not depend exclusively on camera technique to become comedies.

The same may be said of the fantastic burlesque of Ernö Metzner's *Assault and Battery*.[28] (There is also a fantastic comedy in the fact that this delightful film has been banned by the censor.) And similarly, the charming irony of Ivor Montagu's *Blue Bottles*[29] lies in the content of the images, in the plot and the comic action. These are not absolute films, for their purely optical aspect is no more important than in any good feature film. The camera simply records what is in front of it. It does not intervene in events. These may be fairy tale fantasies: a gust of wind, for example, may sweep a crowd of people into the air, and they play on nonchalantly up in the clouds. This is, however, the work of the gust of wind.[30] The action, then, is motivated by content. It is not simply a play with the camera without any further pretext. The film merely makes use of cinematic technique in order to represent a fantastic event, rather than events being generated solely by the image.

27. *Vormittagsspuk* (1928), starring Werner Graeff, with music by Paul Hindemith and Darius Milhaud, who also feature in the film.
28. *Der Überfall* (1928), featuring Heinrich Gotho and Eva Schmidt-Kauser.
29. *Blue Bottles* (1928), based on a story by H.G. Wells and featuring Elsa Lanchester and Charles Laughton.
30. *See TotF*, p. 189: 'In another film men who are having a fight are caught up by a whirlwind and go on fighting in the air without appearing to notice that they are no longer on the ground. All this seems the work of the whirlwind, not of the camera.'

Comic Images

And yet American slapstick comedy does possess something of the autonomous logic of the absolute image. Not only has cinematic technology provided the opportunity to represent filmic 'actions'; it has also controlled their tempo and style. For it was the tempo of time lapse that determined the tempo of the typical mad chases of the slapstick comedy. And similarly, their non-psychological, purely mechanical confusion and chaos expressed the exuberance of a technology that can do with its creatures as it likes because they possess no gravity of their own or any autonomous logic.

You Can't Kill Images[31]

In the same way, events in slapstick seem unthreatening because they are, after all, no more than mere images. We have felt no fear when figures lie across the tracks in the path of an oncoming train. For what can happen to an image if it is run over by another image? It is simply rolled flat. Then another image comes along and inflates the flattened figure. Somewhat too vigorously, since it makes him twice as fat as he was before.

This complete absence of danger is what makes these old-style comic scenes the absolute products of the image. For every (written) fairy tale, however comic, always contains the possibility of someone losing his life or something being destroyed. But the worst that can happen to images is that they can be erased or faded out or painted over – they can never be killed off.

Surprise and the Absence of Climax[32]

It was, incidentally, the non-psychological and mechanical nature of American slapstick that made it difficult to stretch over more than a single reel. For the mechanical lacks variability. These films might be full of chaotic chases and knockabout fights, but they had no internal movement. The comedy lay in the surprising suddenness with which a difficult situation was mechanically resolved. But it was precisely this comic instantaneity that prevented the situation from gradually developing and increasing in tension. Only a sense of expectation and logical development can give the elements of a plot a direction, a tension with which to hold together the scaffolding of a more complex action. But expectation and logical development arise only in the context of a natural causality. Even in a fairy tale, we divine in advance what might befall human beings and animals and other things. But there is really no way of predicting the various ultimate fates of the lines of a drawing.

31. See *TotF*, pp. 189ff.
32. See *TotF*, p. 190.

La P'tite Lili

I must begin by explaining how Cavalcanti manages to endow this enchanting comedy with the qualities of the absolute image. The images of *La P'tite Lili* appear as if projected onto a sackcloth screen.[33] They may be unstylized photographs of living people and actual streets. But the screen's pervasive sackcloth texture, discernible throughout the film, lends to all its objects the homogeneous substance of the world of puppets or silhouettes. Here everything is sackcloth, just as all is black surface in the world of silhouettes. And this ever-visible substance is not the substance of life, but of an image. And it is this that endows the image with a curiously ironic style. For the trivial nature of the stories is made palpable in the cheap texture of the fabric that forms the essence and foundation, the spirit of the film as a whole.

Felix the Cat and Oswald the Lucky Rabbit[34]

There is an old Chinese legend that tells of an old Chinese painter who has painted a landscape. A beautiful valley, with mountains in the distance. The old painter likes the valley so much that he walks into the painting and disappears into the mountains, never to be seen again.

The issue here is very simple. The old Chinaman has simply used his brush to create reality.[35] For that was the belief at the time: things are just as they appear to be. A picture is no longer a picture; it is a reality that can be entered into, something definitive and fixed.[36]

The matter is not so simple when it comes to Felix the Cat or Oswald the Lucky Rabbit. These are among the most remarkable and brilliant creations ever to have occurred to the mind of a genius. For there can be no doubt that the American artist Pat Sullivan is a genius. Aided only by an omnipotent pencil, he has invented a whole astounding world. A world whose substance is the line and whose limits are the limits of graphic art. His pictures do not create a natural reality into which the artist might enter like the old Chinese painter. This world is populated only by beings sketched with a pencil. Yet their outlines are not so much representations of the shapes of independent beings; the lines themselves are those beings' only substance. Unlike what happened to the old Chinaman, there is no transformation here of appearance into reality; the image does not change into something altogether different. Art is not transformed into nature.

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33. *La P'tite Lili* (1927), d. Alberto Cavalcanti, featuring Catherine Hessling, Auguste Renoir's favourite model and his son Jean's favourite actress.
34. See *TotF*, pp. 191f. The cartoon character Felix the Cat was created by Pat Sullivan and Otto Messmer. Successful during the silent era; its popularity faded with the advent of sound when it was succeeded by Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse. Oswald the Lucky Rabbit featured in a series of cartoons made by Walt Disney for Universal Pictures from 1927 on.
35. 'The old Chinaman had created reality with his paintbrush, not art' (*TotF*, p. 191).
36. 'Well-painted dragons would fly away' (*TotF*, p.191).

Instead, there is absolutely no distinction between appearance and reality. When Felix rolls his tail into a wheel, he can at once ride off on it as if it were a bicycle. What would be gained if that were to become reality? A cat that has been drawn can make do perfectly well with a wheel that has been drawn. There are no miracles in this world. There are only lines that function in accordance with the shape they assume.

In one of his adventures Felix loses his tail. 'What now?' he wonders; and his anxious question grows out of his head in the shape of a question mark. Felix stares at its graceful curves. He seizes the question mark and sticks it on his rump. All is well again.

Lines are lines and where lines can be drawn, everything is possible. There is, it now seems, a profound, mysterious affinity between the graphic forms. Where there is no difference between appearance and reality, resemblance becomes identity. These are absolute images. These films are absolute films.

Mobilized Drawing

In filmed cartoon drawings, the camera has very little to do. There are no shots as such and the rhythm of montage likewise plays a minimal role. So what is the element of creative cinema in these ingenious comedies?

Marionettes and Wajang shadow puppets could be manipulated if necessary with the aid of strings and sticks. Using film to make them move was in this respect no more than a technical advance. But the cinema was the first innovation to bring movement into drawn lines. Only film could open up a new dimension of the imagination by showing us forms that do not so much exist as *come into being*, forms that are events in themselves.

Abstract Film[37]

In cartoons, forms have meaning. They possess the quality of resemblance, and that is their meaning. But, in contrast, in the abstract film, invented as early as 1917 by the Swedish painter Viking Eggeling,

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37. In *TotF*, p. 181, Balázs equivocates in his judgement of the abstract film. Condemning it on the one hand, alongside the absolute film, as a symptom of 'bourgeois decadence', he nonetheless compares the movement's champions to his former mentor and colleague Béla Bartók, whose modernist compositions he judges positively for their presaging of a new revolutionary music. He writes, 'It was in vain that the aesthetes of musical theory said of atonal dissonances that they were symptoms of bourgeois decadence; they nevertheless served Béla Bartók as instruments of a new, vigorously youthful art. New palaces have often been built out of the stones of old ruins. The artistic sensibility and rich form-creating resourcefulness of the decadent French avant-gardists will in time serve well the new spirit and new soul of a new art. Now, in the third era of film art, in which the sound film will be enriched by the resurrected achievements of the once already so highly differentiated silent film, we shall be able to benefit much by the study of the absolute and surrealist films of the avant-gardists.'

the movements of forms bear no resemblance to this or that object, but are instead purely abstract forms that possess only their own meaning. Can they, then, still be said to have any meaning?

Eggeling certainly started a new fashion among the pedants of artistic theory. Films were made which showed nothing but the movement of lines and surfaces, and in which the alternation of 'forms of light' became a 'plastic rhythm'. We might regard such films as ornaments in motion. But it is in the nature of the ornament that it is put to some use, either as decoration or to highlight character.

Intertitles[38]

Do we not also find effects derived from the abstract film when the form of the intertitles is used to make a particular visual impression? The effect of an exclamation or a scream is suggested here by a rapidly rising crescendo in the lettering. Slowly fading script has a similar effect to a fading image, as if signalling a meaningful pause. Are these not gestures with symbolic force? Letters that hurl themselves at us, assaulting our eyes just as a scream assaults our ears? And the distinctive script that is used nowadays in every film to ensure that the continuity of purely visual expression is not completely broken by the intertitles: this script is likewise the image of a gesture. The graphologists will testify to that. Living letters are the graphic traces of an emotional movement. They are not abstract. They are the direct reflections of an inner state. In other words, they are not abstract, but absolute film.

The theoreticians of abstract film would also object to any kind of applied version of the abstract film. They would allow their works to be compared with nothing but music. Abstract film as optical music, then, which does not signify something outside itself, but is itself directly materialized meaning.

Music as False Analogy[39]

But the analogy drawn with music by overhasty theoreticians is superficial and false. For 'abstraction' is a relative concept. There can be abstraction only where there is also concrete substance. Thus it is the fact that a concrete object can be triangular that makes it possible also to abstract the form of a triangle. But, when it comes to melodies, the forms of music, of what concrete reality can they be said to be abstractions? Do they have a corresponding concrete substance? Does *anything* exist that has these forms? Can the forms of music be filled with any concrete substance over and above that which they already possess?

38. See *TotF*'s, p. 182. *TotF* translator, Edith Bone, entitles this section of *TotF* 'sub-titles'. We have used 'intertitles' here to avoid confusion with the sound film.
39. See *TotF*, p. 183.

Music is Not Abstract[40]

The fact is that music is not abstract, any more than architecture, with which it is rightly compared, despite the contradiction between the movement of the one, and the rigidity of the other. The notes of the scale are the concrete material from which musical compositions are constructed. These notes are not abstractions but manifest, natural facts that are transmitted by people and musical instruments. But does anything exist that transmits triangles, circles and straight lines?

Admittedly, music can also be read from a score. But the score is not the music itself but an abstraction from it. The possibility of such an abstraction is proof of the concrete nature of music itself. The ground-plan is an abstraction; the architecture is not.

Time and Form

There is a further point to be noted here. For the moment I shall put it in the form of a question. Can forms that disappear, that we no longer have before our eyes, correspond to and create a unified construction with the forms we see? I have already spoken of the fact that a melody endures, even though it has no extension in time, because the first note is still present when the final note brings the melody to an end. It survives in the melody, which remains present as form. My contention was also that the lines of a physiognomy have no extension in space, because every line is present in every other one. But it is also in fact possible to *see* all these lines simultaneously. This simultaneous visibility makes it possible to merge them all into a meaning which exists not in space but in a dimension of its own. But do forms have the same power of after-effect in time as notes?

The Size of Abstract Forms[41]

And one more point: a good snapshot of Mont Blanc on a postcard can convey a sense of grandeur and a photograph of a tower can give me the feeling of vertiginous height. But a circle and a rectangle only ever convey the effect of the size they happen to have in reality. The effect is anything but monumental.

Form is Overcoming

All this notwithstanding, it is conceivable that the interplay of rhythmic, abstract forms in motion can generate pleasure. And, if it does so, then that pleasure is aesthetic – what other kind of pleasure could it be? In the course of its abstraction, on the other hand, form undoubtedly loses its

40. See *TotF*, p. 184.
41. See *TotF*, Ibid.

deeper meaning, namely its triumph over chaotic material. Genuine forms of art derive their vigour from a process in which *some thing* is shaped and thereby overcome and resolved. Forms rein in and exert power over a resistant object. That is the great pathos of forms; they give shape to *some thing*. And in this sense they resemble a meaning which remains meaning only as long as it dwells inside a thing. A meaning which is not the meaning of something is no meaning at all.

Abstract film is the offspring of theory, born through an act of parthenogenesis. Such a birth is never healthy. Only a dilettante theory, moreover, clings so anxiously to dogmas and categories. Slavish respect for a previously formulated aesthetic law is like the deference towards the state felt by insecure subjects. New phenomena, in contrast, can only be grasped by new theories. And these always begin with a hunch.

Avant-garde

Yet there must be some significance in the abstract film and its accompanying theory if they can provoke such intense discussion. As studio experiments, abstract films are entirely justifiable. Even if they only prove to be a blind alley, they will have performed a useful task. For wherever a genuine absurdity can be shown to exist, a boundary is marked out and with it a path on which advances can be made. There are some who show excessive caution, who risk nothing; but such perpetual latecomers do nothing to further our cause.

COLOUR FILM AND OTHER POSSIBILITIES

Colour photographs of simple motifs were already a possibility seven years ago: here a yellow field of corn rippling in the wind under a blue sky; there a bright red painted boat reflected in green water. As technical sensations, these were beautiful and exciting. Something new had become possible once again. But as yet not something absolutely good. Seven years ago I wrote in *Visible Man*:

> And, if I subsequently had reservations, they did not arise from these defects. On the contrary, it was the idea of the perfect colour film that made me anxious. For fidelity to nature is not always of benefit to art. The figures in a waxworks are often so lifelike that people say 'I beg your pardon' when they inadvertently brush up against them. But no one will claim that they are more artistic than white marble statues or reddish brown bronze figures. Art actually consists in reduction. And is it not conceivable that the homogeneous grey on grey of the ordinary film contained the secret of a true artistic style?
>
> Of course, I know full well that such reservations will not be able to hold up technical advances in cinema. Nor should they. Despite our aesthetic scruples we can rely on the fact that colour paintings have not succeeded in doing away with black and white drawings and etchings. The introduction of colour has not prevented them from becoming great art. The use of colour does not yet commit artists to the unconditional, slavish imitation of nature. Once cinematography has achieved complete fidelity to the colours of nature it will become unfaithful to nature on a higher plane.[1]

My Mistake

What I wrote seven years ago is utterly mistaken. Having not yet completely liberated myself from traditional aesthetic ideas, I simply applied the principles of the plastic arts in this instance to cinema. Hence my express view that 'artistic style' and the exact reproduction of nature were necessarily incompatible.

In the case of film, however, this is quite untrue. For in film subjective experience, the imaginative shaping process, does not operate by

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1. See *Visible Man*, p. 78.

changing the form of an object, but by means of montage. The plastic arts give shape to individual phenomena. Film, in contrast, shapes their *relations* to one another and the rhythm of their movement. Indeed as I have shown, however hard film may try to reproduce 'reality just as it is', the montage gives it a form that is shaped from within.

The Mobile Form

There is, then, no such thing as a film that is not artistically composed, even if we are dealing with the most accurate reproduction of nature in the most consummate colour film. The filmic reproduction of individual images does not need necessarily to be unfaithful to nature. It becomes unfaithful enough in the montage. A work of film art takes the artistic form of a composition of impressions that appear to succeed each other in time. It is a rhythmical form: a mobile form.

This explains why there must be no element of 'composition' in the colour of individual images, since otherwise they degenerate into self-contained entities, paintings that have no progression from one to another, and that cause the mobile form of the film to fragment into a thousand fixed images.

Colours in Motion[2]

In contrast, the sensitive use of colour photography in film will open up to art a whole new, vast and marvellous sphere of experience: a sphere of experience that penetrates to our innermost core. There is no art form that has hitherto encompassed this. Painting least of all. It is the movement of colour.

Why is there almost inevitably an element of kitsch in a painted sunset? Because something that is in its very essence change and motion appears frozen in space. A sunset is not an image but an event. Think of the moment when the setting sun breaches the horizon and distant colours rise in a place already somewhere beyond our landscape. Or when an early dawn illuminates that pale green shot through with gold , and we see a new sky rise over an unfamiliar land. A sky that gives way to a panoply of lilac and red-gold physiognomies succeeding each other in continuously agitated motion. This is a ballad of colours that only film, the colour film, can reproduce.

A child's face, similarly, can never be captured in the act of blushing by a painter. Nor can he paint a blanching face, but only a face that is already pale. Nor indeed the play of colours in rolling waves, or the red flickering of firelight on brown faces. The colour film, in contrast, will be able in time to come to use the close-up to reproduce even the most subtle movement of colour; and it will reveal to us in the process a whole new world that we see every day in reality, but that we do not yet know.

2. See *TotF*, p. 242.

Colour Montage[3]

Colour montage, admittedly, will confront the film with a whole host of new problems and opportunities. When forms are not distinguished by colour, the relationship between them is very different. The similarity between contours is more apparent in monochrome. Many cuts and dissolves suggested by merely formal similarities or contrasts would appear false and meaningless in a film where colour is the decisive factor in determining the character of objects.

In a black and white film, we sense a connection, for instance, when a threatening, clenched fist dissolves into a large rose swaying on its stalk. The grey outline of both suggests a club or a cudgel. But, if we see their different colours, then this breaks every meaningful association.

Conversely, montage has the capacity to reveal particular relations between colours. Colour similarities and contrasts will create even deeper connections between images than formal ones. And these connections will not be merely decorative. Colours have extraordinary symbolic power; they create associations and emotional suggestion. These are vast opportunities for the colour film of tomorrow.

Colour Continuity

The black-and-white film operates by a law of formal continuity according to which very small and very large images, for instance, may only in exceptional cases be cut together. This is because there is otherwise a small visual jerk – a 'jump cut', as it is technically known – whose effect is usually to produce a hiatus in the flow of images, as if there had been a splicing fault in the film.

For the same reason, there will undoubtedly be colours that cannot be cut together, that is to say, whose purely visual correspondence will be insufficient to counter the inevitably crude and inorganic effect of their sudden juxtaposition. The montage must maintain optical continuity even when the contents of successive scenes are quite unconnected. For, even if the contents of one scene do not follow on from another, that scene does represent a continuation of the film as a visual work of art that flows in a single and unified stream.

Perspectival Depth[4]

And this relates to the most difficult problem that will present itself in the future development of montage in the visual film. Even now shots in colour produce a depth of perspective that has remained foreign to monochrome photography. When the stereoscopic effect of colour is

3. See *TotF*, p. 243.
4. See *TotF*, p. 244.

added to stereoscopic drawing, the image background becomes even deeper. At the same time, objects on the horizon that appear blurred and quite small in the fog of monochrome film now remain visible. In monochrome, distance is really just a negative impression; in other words, it is what can no longer be seen. In colour film we can *see* that something is very far away.

This is an advance that will cause difficulties of its own. For film's steady effortless flow of images, the lack of interruption or 'jumps' between them, may perhaps have resulted simply from their lack of real depth, the fact that they inhabited a single surface. In colour film, the gaze will frequently plunge into the depths, and it will not be easy to wrench it back smoothly just one second later. Silhouettes and impressions flit easily past us, but once film has genuine depths the montage rhythm will labour under the weight of new optical burdens. To lend added depth to the frontal trajectory of movement in the montage the camera will probably have to penetrate the space that the colour film opens up before it. The camera will not simply leap across the depths that it can now reveal, but will instead travel into them and thus transform them into foreground.

Three-dimensional Images in Rapid Cut

The same problem becomes even more intractable with the stereoscopic or three-dimensional film.

One should never predict the impossible, only the possible. But we seem to be faced here with an insoluble contradiction. An extreme example can clarify this. Imagine a three-dimensional, colour sound film that gives the absolute illusion of living beings and actual objects flitting by in a whirl of Russian rapid cuts The massive solidity of the figures will inevitably impede the rapid flow of images. But it is precisely here that we encounter the essence, the glorious creative, artistic power of montage. Images will now move with the rhythm of our thoughts and imagination. The simulated reality of the three-dimensional film will compel the montage to adapt itself to the reality of objects as they are. And that will bring us right back to the theatre.

Enlargement of the Image Frame

There have already been experiments with the enlargement of the camera's field of vision. They have enabled the camera to capture more in a single image than the human eye can encompass. But where is the gain in that? The spectator is forced here to search around in the image to find his bearings, just as he does in the real world. In so doing, he may in a sense be said to be searching out extracts of the image for himself, since he is unable to grasp in an instant the entirety of the scene. In other words,

his gaze ceases to be guided by the director. What was once precisely calculated visual suggestion becomes mere random experience.

Imagine a play or a radio play that contains more speech than can be grasped all at once so that the audience can be said to take its pick of the sentences uttered, all depending on whether it is listening from right to left or the other way round. These are hardly conditions under which a particular form that expresses a particular experience on the part of the artist can come into being. This is no longer art.

Enlargement of the Projection Screen

Attempts have also been made to increase the size of the projection screen. An example is Abel Gance's Napoleon film.[5] Here the image frames do not exceed the field of vision in size, but two or even three images are projected simultaneously or overlap with each other. 'Simultaneism' in the literal sense of the word. Thus the centre image will, for example, show a tumultuous session of the Convention, flanked on either side by images of the marching troops of the revolutionary army. New possibilities abound: monumental effects, contrasting ideas in counterpoint.

If the sequence of images in the montage is made to correspond to a sequence of notes in a melody, then this image simultaneity takes on the character of a musical chord. The components of the chord are actions or impressions whose content and form the film must orchestrate. This process is governed by laws of its own, which are at least as nuanced as those governing montage. As yet, there are no films in existence that could be analysed in these terms. What I find especially surprising is that the Russians have made no use of visual simultaneity to give expression to socio-historical relations. The explanation doubtless lies in the nature of montage, whose sequential organization of the image does not necessarily reflect a temporal sequence of events. An image sequence is just as likely to express simultaneous events as a spatial juxtaposition. Thus visual simultaneity is not essential to convey a cross-section of simultaneous events. Quite the contrary: even in this case the audience must continuously switch its attention from one image to another, and will take away from the film an impression that does not necessarily coincide with the director's rhythmical intentions or his direction of the gaze.

5. *Napoléon* (1927), featuring Albert Dieudonné (as Napoleon), Antonin Artaud, Annabella (Suzanne Georgette Charpentier) and Abel Gance himself.

THE SOUND FILM[1]

It is only in the last four to five years that the silent film has begun to gain the momentum for significant further development. This has now been interrupted by a new beginning of a different kind: the sound film. The camera had just started to acquire sensitive nerves and an imagination. The art of montage and the camera set-up had just reached the point of overcoming the resistance of the film material in its primitive state. The silent film was on its way to acquiring a psychological subtlety, a creative power almost unprecedented in the arts. Then the technical invention of the sound film burst upon the scene, with catastrophic force. The rich culture of visual expression that I have been describing is now in grave danger. This as-yet undeveloped new technology has attached itself to a highly developed cinematic art, and has thrown it back to the most primitive stage. And it is inevitable that the standard of the content of film will decline in equal measure with the degeneration of its standards of expression.

History Marches On[2]

But in history there are no tragedies, only crises. For history marches on. We have discovered a new path, and it has blocked off an old one. Even in the economy, every great technological innovation begins by precipitating crises and catastrophes. Invariably, however, it also turns out to have been an advance. The situation is similar in art, where at first every machine appears to embody the principle of unimaginative soullessness. But we gradually come to assimilate the machine as a human organ. It becomes our fingertips. Does anyone today still speak of photography as the 'enemy of art'? The sound camera will soon gain similar acceptance. Think back to the beginnings of cinematography and you will see the truth of this.

1. See *TotF*, pp. 195f. Large portions of Balázs's comments on the sound film in *TotF* are placed in quotation marks to signal that they are taken directly from *The Spirit of Film*. He justifies this extended quote by claiming that the sound film has made few aesthetic advances in the twenty years that separate *TotF* from *Spirit*. See note 5 below.
2. See *TotF*, p. 196.

First the Spoon and Then the Soup[3]

Technical innovation is the most effective inspiration. Opportunity is the muse itself. It was not the painters who first invented colour, or sculptors who developed the hammer and chisel. Similarly, the cinematograph had been in existence long before it occurred to anyone to use it as a means of creating a particular form of art. In art the means exist prior to the artistic development. The feeling that searches after the words to express it was first sought and awakened by words themselves.

For development is dialectical. Technical innovation stimulates the idea of a new art. But once the idea has been awakened it develops very rapidly in the unresisting space of imagination and theory and goes on to inspire technical innovation itself, giving it direction and confronting it with specific tasks.

Why do the first sound films strike us as so crude and kitschy? It is because we measure them by the standard of their own promise and because we already have in our minds the idea of the future lofty achievements of the art of film. Our revulsion signifies not rejection but the high standards we have set.

High Standards[4]

The standards we set for the sound film legitimate it as a new and important art. The challenge it faces is not merely that of complementing the silent film and making it resemble nature more closely, but of approaching nature from a completely different perspective. The challenge is to open up a new sphere of experience. We do not yet call for technical perfection (in sound reproduction), but we do want *new objects* of representation.

For, if the sound film wished only to speak, sing and make music, as the theatre has done for centuries, then, however advanced its technical sophistication, it would never become a new art, but would remain a technology of reproduction and duplication. But, as in every new discovery in art, something has been *uncovered* here that hitherto has been covered *up*. Covered up and shielded from our eyes. Or perhaps our ears.

This is what the visual film did when it became an art: it discovered an unsuspected visual world. It showed us the face of things, the play of nature's features, the microdrama of physiognomies and mass gestures. Through montage it revealed the relations between forms and the psychic rhythm of mental associations.

3. Ibid.
4. See *TotF*, p. 197.

The Acoustic World

What the sound film will now uncover is our acoustic environment. The voice of objects, the intimate language of nature. Everything that has something to say over and above human dialogue, everything that still speaks to us in the great conversation of life: voices whose influence on our thinking and feeling is incessant and profound. From the roaring of the surf and the din of the factory, to the monotonous melody of autumn rain beating on darkened windowpanes and the creaking of floorboards in the abandoned room. The more sensitive lyric poets have often described these voices that accompany us on our way, pregnant with meaning. The sound film will represent those voices, it will enable them to speak again. And our sensibilities will be refined by this new aural sensitivity.

The Discovery of Noise[5]

Hitherto, we have interpreted the sounds of the bustle of life merely as confused noise, as a chaotic din. This is how an unmusical person hears an orchestra. At best, he or she hears only the dominant melody, the loudest tune. The rest merges into a chaotic roar of sound. The sound film will teach us to listen more attentively. It will teach us to read the score of the many-voiced orchestra of life. We shall learn to distinguish the voices of individual phenomena and to understand them as the revelations of particular forms of life. Its motto must be: 'Art is salvation from chaos.' Well, in days to come the sound film will bring us salvation from the chaos of noise because it will interpret it as expression: as sense and meaning.

The Precondition of the Art of the Sound Film[6]

Only when the sound film can dissect noise into its elements; only when it can foreground single, intimate sounds and use *sound close-ups* to make them speak; only when it can orchestrate all these elements in the montage and combine them in deliberate fashion into a cumulative unity will the sound film prove itself as a new art. Only when the director is able to lead our ears as he led our eyes in the silent film, only when he has learned to emphasize, to detail, to highlight will he cease to be

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5. See *TotF*, p. 198. Balázs adds here, 'Twenty years have passed since I wrote down these conditions. The sound film has left them unfulfilled to this day. The arts did not accede to my theoretical wishes. During its evolution the human spirit has had many a fair prospect open up before it, which the great highroad of human culture then bypassed and left behind. No art exploits all its possibilities, and not only aesthetic factors influence the choice of the road that is ultimately followed in preference to many possible others. And I would not have repeated this my old demand if the sound film had since advanced farther along another road. But it has advanced nowhere. What twenty years ago were opportunity and perspective are still perspective and opportunity today.'
6. See Ibid.

overwhelmed by the clamour of a world that passes over him as a dead mass of sound. Instead he will intervene in that world and give it form, and the voices of things themselves will begin to speak through the sound camera-operator.

The Inadequacy of Radio Plays

But hasn't radio already done all this? Doesn't the radio play already give shape to this acoustic world? No. The radio play merely describes it with the aid of acoustic illustrations. For we are so unfamiliar with the intimate sounds of nature and the world of objects that we simply do not recognize them unless we see the images to which they belong. In radio plays we must always be told what we are hearing. In essence then, the radio play is a narrative or dramatic representation with acoustic illustrations. There is always a commentator present as a mediator who provides us with an explanation of the sounds we hear. In the sound film we receive this acoustic impression in unmediated form. We do not need to have it explained to us. We can identify it ourselves because we can see where the sound is coming from.

The Uncultivated Ear

There are few things that even a semi-civilized person cannot recognize and distinguish once he has seen them. But he will find it hard to identify more than a small number of sounds with assurance unless there is something present to give him a clue. The huntsman will distinguish sounds in a forest, the workman in a factory will do likewise. But there is no such thing as a general acoustic education for us all.

The sound film, however, will teach our ears to differentiate. Just as our eyes have been taught by the silent film to see, we shall also learn to make associations and draw inferences acoustically. And doubtless, once our ears have been schooled by the sound film, it will be possible to make radio plays that dispense entirely with verbal commentary. We should remind ourselves of the Russian landowner who was unable to understand the Fairbanks film.[7] We cannot even begin to imagine the sound films and radio plays that every child will comprehend five years hence.

For the problem is not a defect in our hearing.[8] It is simply a lack of training. Dr Erdmann has claimed in an essay on the sound film that our hearing is accustomed to finer distinctions than our sight.[9] We are all able to distinguish countless nuances of sound and tone. Our acoustic vocabulary is far richer than that of our sense of colour and light or shade.

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7. See p. 94 above.
8. See *TotF*, p. 212.
9. Balázs's reference is in all likelihood to the film theorist and composer Hans Erdmann, who published widely on sound issues in film, and played a 'key role in developing theoretical and aesthetic reflections on film music' in the silent and sound film. See Georg Maas. 1994, 'Der Klang der Bilder,' *montage a/v*, 3, (1), 150.

Nevertheless, a distinction must be drawn between the identification of a sound and a recognition of its source. I may well be able to distinguish one sound from another without knowing precisely what the sound is. Dr Erdmann gives a good example of this. He says, 'We can distinguish between innumerable shades and degrees of intensity in the indistinct hubbub of voices in a large crowd, but we may well be unable to tell with accuracy whether the excited crowd we can hear is expressing its delight or its anger.'

This great distinction between our visual and aural education owes its existence in part to the fact that we frequently see without hearing. Images, for example. In contrast, we are not accustomed to hearing the sounds of nature without seeing something of their sources.

Sound and Space

The true problems of the sound film arise not from deficiencies in its recording and reproduction equipment, or from the technical imperfections of the sound camera and loudspeaker systems, but from the untutored state of our hearing. Technology will soon have advanced to the point where every sound will be pure and undistorted. Nevertheless, it will be a long time before we learn to identify it and locate its position. And even this development of our hearing may well prove to have its psychological limits.

Sound Casts no Shadows[10]

The fact is that sounds cast no shadows. Hence they do not create figures in space. The things I see in space are either contiguous or overlapping. Optical impressions do not merge into one. If, however, several sounds are heard simultaneously, they blend into one total, composite sound. I do not hear what is to the right or the left, the front or the back, nor do I hear spatial extension or direction. To distinguish individual sounds, I would need perfect hearing, a rare phenomenon indeed. And even then I would be unable – as yet – to locate their position in the common space.

The fact that sound does not create space renders the pure radio play an impossibility. Only setting (whether described or depicted) can create a heard locality for the dramatized event.

Localizing Sound[11]

This explains why it is so difficult to localize sound. If three people appear in an image at the same distance and we hear them talking, it is almost impossible to determine which of the three is speaking. Unless the speaker accompanies his speech with explicit gestures. For the precise

10. See *TotF*, p. 213.
11. Ibid.

direction of sound is not something we can identify. A loudspeaker cannot cast a ray of sound as can a spotlight or a beam of light. There is no such thing as a straight sound ray.

An image shows us the angle from which the various sides of an object have been perceived. Sound has no sides, nor is the direction from which a recorded sound was initially heard indicated – as we shall see in more detail below – by the sound set-up. There is an American short that features two clowns, both birdsong imitators. The acoustic reproduction of their peeping and cheeping is consummate. But it is not differentiated either in timbre or in content. When the two men stand facing each other, we never know which of the two is whistling, and the effect is immediately one of a general aural impersonality. The sounds seem to come from neither of the two clowns. They detach themselves entirely from the image, and become a general peeping and cheeping that are akin to the musical accompaniment to a silent scene.

Sound Doesn't Linger

We are, however, able to localize a sound if it has a characteristic timbre, and if it coincides with a close-up or a striking gesture. We *see* its source and are able *for that reason* to hear it as emanating from that point of origin. The sound acquires a direction. Let's say for example that the sound emanates from a man in the bottom left of the screen. If the same man then walks across the image space to the right-hand corner, the sound *does not follow him.* He may gesticulate and shout as much as he wants; for a time at least, we continue to hear the sound from what we originally identified as its point of origin, namely the bottom left. Sound is not tied to its visual object. Acoustic impressions continually detach themselves from the optical image.

The reason for this is that direction is not an integral part of the acoustic impression in the moment of its perception. It is rather something we infer logically and then implant in that impression. Inevitably, this mental process always involves a time lag. It always takes time to orient our hearing to what we see. In the interval, we experience an uncomfortable dissolution of the unity of optical and acoustic perception. We seem to be listening to a company of ventriloquists.

Eric von Stroheim brilliantly turned this technical defect to his artistic advantage when he made the hero of his first sound film a ventriloquist with a dummy.[12]

Acoustic Perspective

Our uncertainty in the matter of acoustic perspective is undoubtedly caused in large degree by the untutored nature of our ear. Even if we cannot see the

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12. *The Great Gabbo (1929),* d. James Cruze, based on a story by Ben Hecht, with Stroheim as Gabbo and also starring Betty Compson.

source, i.e. the object of a sound, we do have the capacity to hear it coming closer or moving further away in space. For in this instance it becomes either louder and clearer, or else gradually quieter and less distinct. But, if a sound does not move, and if we also do not see its source, we will very frequently be unable to tell whether a muted sound is the faint echo of a loud cry in the distance or a soft whispering nearby. This remains true even though the distinctions that determine whether a sound is loud or soft in character are quite clearly qualitative and not just quantitative. And they are also distinctions that we shall undoubtedly in future be able to recognize and hear.

Theory Saves Money

Until we have reached that point, the sound film will have to find ways of dealing with the deficiencies in our hearing. These represent problems that can be resolved only when theory has established precisely *what* is in need of resolution. Theory can circumvent experience and thus save much time, effort and money.

The Spatial Character of Sound[13]

It is actually rather strange that sound does not establish space, that it is so limited in its capacity to determine perspective and direction; for sound seems far more spatial in nature than visible phenomena. A voice sounds different in a cellar from the same voice beneath a lofty dome, on water or in the street. Indeed, it is impossible to abstract sound from space. Sound always possesses a particular spatial character, which derives in turn from its point of origin. And if our ear were better tutored, we would soon be able to identify in every sound the space it inhabits. Even today we are already able more accurately to deduce the nature of a space from the timbre of a sound than from the light cast on an object.

But associating a sound with the particular character of a space is not enough for us to orient ourselves. What use is it to a blind man to be told that he is in a wood or a stairwell? He will still not venture to move, since he remains unaware of the exact *location* of a tree he might bump into, or of the steps that he might fall down. We may be able to hear space, but not the *location* of sounds within it. The sound of two voices in a single shared space gives no clear picture of the spatial relationship between them. Unless we can see.

Miracles of the Microphone[14]

If, however, sound is accompanied by an image, as it is in the sound film, then a reality is revealed to us that has never before been depicted in any

13. See *TotF*, p. 214.
14. Ibid.

art. This is genuine sound, that *spatial sound* whose timbre still contains the atmosphere of the source from which it springs. All sounds that art has ever hitherto communicated, whether from the concert platform, from the stage or from the open-air theatre, have always been false or unnatural. For we have heard them within the space of their own reproduction, and they have therefore lost the texture of their origins. The stage can conjure up visually the magic atmosphere of a forest glade, but it cannot do so acoustically. Sound on stage is never the same as sound in the forest. For acoustic effect is determined by actual spatial location. And, even if the original timbre of a sound can be manufactured by various technical devices on stage, it will produce in the auditorium an entirely different acoustic impression.

The miracle of the microphone, however, is that it is able to capture sound and reproduce it with its original timbre in any given space. In this respect it resembles the camera. For, if an object is photographed, let us say, from its right-hand side, then we see it in the image from the right hand side, even if we are sitting on the left of the auditorium. And just as our eye aligns itself with the lens, so our ears too become identified with the microphone diaphragm. I have already spoken of the crucial importance of the camera's dissolution of distance between the spectator and the film action. The sound film abolishes acoustic as well as visual distance. Not only as viewers, but also as listeners we experience ourselves as immediately present within the events on film.

As I have also already explained, this is possible in the sound film but not the radio play because, notwithstanding the radio's localization of sound, the absence here both of an image and of spoken commentary, leaves us unable to orient ourselves in space and therefore to imagine it with any precision.

Silence[15]

Of all the arts the sound film was also the first to discover how to represent silence. Silence, the deepest and most significant human experience, is something that hitherto none of the silent arts, neither painting nor sculpture, nor even the silent film, has succeeded in expressing. The art that comes closest to having done so is music, which has on occasion seemed to give voice to inner sonorities in the very depths of silence.

If no purely visual art has been able to represent silence, then this is because silence is not a condition but an event. An event for human beings. An encounter.

Silence is significant, moreover, only where there is also the possibility of sound. Where silence is intended. Where silence falls abruptly, or where it is entered as if by a traveller in a foreign land. Silence here becomes a great dramatic event, a cry turned inwards, a screaming hush.

15. See *TotF*, p. 205.

Silence of this kind is no neutral stillness, but a negative detonation, a holding of breath. Like the circus music that falls silent at the moment of a death-defying leap. A silence, then, that follows necessarily from sound. And that is therefore capable of representation only in the sound film.

Silence and Isolation[16]

No radio play can represent silence. For, if voices fall silent in a radio play, the action ceases altogether. What we hear is not silence, but simply nothing. If, however, we *see* objects as they fall silent, then this silence has the effect of a momentous dramatic turning point. The objects we see are many and various in the sounds they make; but when they suddenly fall silent, they do so in a uniform way, as if silence were a shared secret language. Call and response, an inaudible communication. And in the mutuality of silence, this community of objects turns inwards and pays no further heed to the human world.

Silence and Space[17]

Silence can also not be represented on the stage. The space of the stage is simply too small. For the great, 'cosmic' experience of silence is a spatial experience. How am I to perceive silence at all, then? Not simply by hearing nothing. (The deaf do not know what silence is.) On the contrary, silence is what I hear when the morning breeze wafts in my direction the crowing of a cock from a neighbouring village; when from a mountain far above me I hear a woodchopper's axe; when from across a lake I hear sounds made by people I can barely see; when in a winter landscape I hear the crack of a far distant whip. Silence occurs when what I hear is distance. And the space that falls within the range of my hearing becomes my own, a space that belongs to me.

Where there is noise, in contrast, I feel surrounded by walls of sound, a prison cell of noise. Life beyond noise is drowned out, seen as if through a window. Like a silent pantomime. But a space that is only seen never becomes concrete. We experience only the space that we can also hear.

The Productive Sound Camera

Can the sound camera become as productive as the cine camera? Can we hear something in the sound camera that is audible neither in nature nor in the reality of the studio? Are there sound effects that are first produced in the filmstrip itself? What is it that the sound camera does not merely reproduce but that it also creates? What is it, in short, that makes of sound film an original art form?

16. Ibid.
17. See *TotF*, p. 206.

Visual film became an art thanks to the close-up and montage. These were the means of expression of the film-maker's subjective will to interpret and create. In the case of the sound film the situation is not yet so clear.

The Sound Set-up

I should like to begin with the sound set-up because it represents the most difficult problem of the sound film. The highly developed art of camera set-up has succeeded in making even the most simple-minded film bearable on occasion. The story may be idiotic, but the images are beautiful. Thanks to the ingenuity and sensitivity of the set-up.

In the case of the sound camera there is (at present) no equivalent for the 'set-up'. Of course, a sound may be made to emanate from above or below, from close by or far off. But the effect of this is only to localize that sound in space. The change in perspective produces no change in the form, the 'physiognomy' of sound. The same sound from a single identical source cannot be recorded in three different ways by three different sound-camera operators; it cannot be 'interpreted', as is possible in any optical image of that same object. A sound cannot be completely altered by the subjective temperament, the personal attitude of the camera operator, while still remaining the same sound. But this would in fact be the precondition for the development of a creative art form specific to the sound camera. To record sound without having absolute control of the possible sound set-ups is merely mechanical reproduction. The way the actor speaks in the studio or the sound mixer orchestrates his sounds in the studio may well be great art. In the studio! But as long as the sound film lacks the possibility of control over set-up, recorded sound will maintain its character as a mere reproduction of studio art.

Sound is Not Represented

Recorded sound is, indeed, not even representation. No doubt, what we see on the screen is the image of the actor, but we do not see the image of his voice. His voice is not represented but reproduced. It may sound somewhat altered, but it does have the same reality. Like a painting in which the light is not painted but bounced onto its surface from a light reflector!

Sound is more concrete, we might even call it more voluminous, than the image from which it takes its cue. This qualitative distinction between sound and image draws attention to the shadowy nature of photography. This is a distinction that the colour film or even the three-dimensional film will go some way towards eliminating. But the price to be paid will be the more cumbersome rhythm of the montage.

Impediments to the Visual Shot

The sound film also represents an obstacle to the visual set-up. The impossibility of sound set-ups, the primitive reality of sound, forces the camera set-up back to a level of primitiveness that the visual film had overcome seven years ago. When, for example, a sentence, in order to remain intelligible, has to be spoken as simply, as directly as possible into the microphone, then it becomes impossible to give the speaking head an interesting or characteristic expressive twist. Dubious relapse into the theatrical.

Nevertheless!

Such contradictions remain irksome, however, only as long as we are still unaccustomed to them. Once they have been accepted, even aesthetic pedants will cease to take offence – just as they have come to accept the contradiction between speech and song in the *Singspiel* or between the puppet and a living voice in the marionette theatre or between image and intertitle in the silent film. These are simply the problems and difficulties of the sound film that we have to resolve and overcome. They are not insuperable obstacles.

Sound Details

There is indeed one productive sound recording method to which the sound film already has recourse. The sound camera is already capable of rendering sound details that correspond to details at the level of the shot. Here the director not only directs our gaze around the cinematic space in accordance with his own creative intentions, but also our ears. For example, he may begin by showing us the raging tumult of a great crowd in long shot. The camera then dollies in towards a single individual. The sound camera does likewise. And what emerges from the mass is not just an individual face, but an individual voice, a personal utterance.

Or again, the sound camera pans over a battlefield, taking in the thunder of the artillery and the whining of shells before homing in suddenly on a birdcage in a trench, where it isolates not just the image of a canary peacefully pecking at grains of food but also the faint sound of that pecking, a sound that in the midst of the din of battle can be heard only in the closest possible proximity, with a microphone at one's heart.

Sound Control

Furthermore, the sound camera already has the technical capacity not just to record sound, but freely to determine its intensity and timbre. Sound reproduction, as we know, is already adjusted, 'controlled', as the

jargon has it, during the actual performance. For the time being these constant adjustments are designed merely to sustain a constant impression of natural sound. This is because our ear is still confused by unaccustomed sounds. This is the mark of an imperfection not in the equipment, but in our auditory sense. It is at least conceivable that, once our ears have learned to hear, we shall learn how to play on the loudspeaker as if it were a musical instrument. Sound control enables us to modulate even natural sound during the process of its reproduction. Will this perhaps one day provide the basis for the development of the set-up as a technique of film sound?

The Sound Close-up

I have explained in some detail in a separate chapter why the optical close-up should be seen as more than the mechanical reproduction of an impression that we might equally experience in reality. For in reality we never experience anything in such isolation as the image close-up and almost never in such microscopic detail. Similarly, we may say of the sound close-up that it can transmit auditory impressions of which we are only in the rarest of instances aware with the unaided ear, even though we do constantly 'register' them in some sense. We hear, but simply do not become conscious of these soft, intimate sounds, since they are drowned out by everyday noise as if by an avalanche of sound. They are the undertones, the minor events of the acoustic world that slip unawares into the unconscious, where their effect is often more powerful than any sound that penetrates our waking minds. The task of the sound close-up will be to raise for the first time to the level of consciousness this large and important sphere of auditory experience.

This technique is not feasible either on the stage or in the radio play. On stage, if the theatre director wishes us to hear a faint, fleeting sigh, he must find a way of emphasizing it, either by reducing to silence other sounds and voices, or else by positioning the actor right at the front of the stage. In each such instance, he can only draw our attention to this faint sigh by depriving it of its character as a sound that is unobtrusive and unobserved. By removing, in short, its essential characteristic. The microphone, in contrast, does not drag sound into the foreground. The sound camera itself seeks out its object, and we then hear sound in its hidden lair, as something otherwise inaudible.

Such effects are likewise impossible in the radio play. In Pudovkin's *Mother* there is a wonderful sound sequence even though the sound film did not yet exist. The eponymous mother sits alone by night, watching over her husband's coffin. Alone and motionless, like the corpse beside her. Nothing moves. Silence. The camera pans slowly towards a water pipe on the wall. We see in close-up water dripping from the tap. In monotonous rhythm. Incessantly.

What we receive here is an acoustic impression that Pudovkin was already at this early stage able to convey, albeit by a circuitous route. The faint sound of the constantly dripping water is what makes us conscious of an endless silence. In a radio play it would be necessary to explain in words the meaning of this monotonous dripping. And that would put an end to silence.

Utterances Overheard

The same is true of the dialogue in the sound film: what makes the greatest impression on us is what is closest at hand and quite, quite faint. Not the clear, logical sentence or the formally sung song, in other words, but the fading sigh, the sound of breath, the stifled sob. The sound that is indeterminate, even in its own interior nature. The faintest possible human sound, like the note from a loose piano string.

This is a form of perception that is entirely new. It may be possible to make these sounds in the theatre, but they cannot be framed in close-up and brought into close proximity, unposed, to be experienced with all their original casual force. What we hear is someone's private babble, an experience that produces the excitement of a very special form of eavesdropping on another living being.

Spoken Landscape

In film, what attracts our interest is less what a person says than the sound of his voice. In dialogue, too, what is decisive is not the content, but the acoustic, sensuous impression. (A crucial contrast to the theatre!)

One proof of this is that we are not dismayed when we hear incomprehensible foreign languages in a sound film, provided that we still understand the plot. In *Melody of the Heart* the 'people' speak Hungarian while the protagonists speak German.[18] In the Froelich film *The Night Belongs to Us* the Italian peasants speak Italian.[19] The effect is of the image of an original landscape, an acoustic location shot, a linguistic landscape.

The Sound Close-up is Not Entirely Isolated

The particular characteristic of the sound close-up is that, despite its being just a detail, it is never so completely separated from its acoustic environment as is a visual close-up from its background. In the latter case, we simply do not see whatever is not in the frame. Only exceptionally does a shadow or a ray of light enter from off-screen and allow us to sense the presence of things

18. *Melodie des Herzens* (1929), d. Hanns Schwarz, starring Dita Parlo and Willy Fritsch. The first German sound film.
19. *Die Nacht gehört uns/La Nuit est à nous* (1931), d. Carl Froelich/Henry Roussel, featuring Hans Albers and Charlotte Ander.

that are not at that point visible. A recording of an isolated sound detail, in contrast, still remains interlaced with sounds from both its visible and its invisible surroundings. For even though we cannot look around corners, we can hear around corners. When a sound camera singles out two heads whispering to each other in a noisy bar, the noise of the bar cannot be eliminated for the purposes of a sound close-up, since this would interrupt spatial continuity and create the impression of an abrupt transposition both of the speakers and of the spectator to an entirely different place.

But nor is this necessary. For the wonder of the microphone is that even in the midst of the greatest din, it can detect the softest sound simply by moving up close. If we sit at the same table as the whispering couple and lean over to listen to them, we shall still hear the general noise of the bar, yet at the same time hear and understand every whispered word. In the case of sound reproduction, the situation is the same as with the projection of a visual close-up. The image in close-up is seen by everyone in the auditorium, wherever they sit, from the same distance as that from which the camera has taken the shot. Sound too is heard by everyone in the auditorium, wherever they sit, from the same distance as that from which the microphone has recorded it. Each of us thus hears the whispering in this sound close-up right up against his ear, and understands what is said regardless of the simultaneous ambient noise. The impression is of an embedding of the quieter sound in the surrounding clamour. This has a charm of its own, and can indeed lend depth to characterization, since we hear not just the sound close to us but also its relation and connection to the acoustic totality.

The purely visual film cannot do this. I cannot show a close-up of a tree blossom and *at the same time* show how tiny and insignificant it is on the huge tree. I cannot show a head in close-up and *at the same time* show it disappearing in a crowd. The sound film can lend form to this significant paradox. It can allow us to both see and hear a man screaming in close-up and at the same time, in the same image, to hear the general tumult that drowns his lost, lone voice.

Sound Montage

The most immediate problems of sound montage arise from the defects in our hearing, to which I have already referred.

Sound is hard to localize. The emission of a sound will thus have to be visually indicated either with a striking gesture or with a close-up of its source. If, however, the intended effect is that of a sound heard in the distance, then the image has at least to indicate its direction. By heads turning towards it for instance, or by the direction of a look. Sound can begin to be localized, then, through visual gesture.

The contemporary technology of fixed loudspeakers does not, however, allow sound to 'stick' to the moving image. If an actor begins to

speak in the left-hand corner of the screen, the sound does not travel with him if he then continues talking while walking towards screen right. What becomes necessary here is to interrupt the actor's walk with cut-in of the space: a shot in which the speaker cannot be seen but in which his voice can be heard. If in the following shot the speaker has arrived at screen right and is now seen in close-up, the sound will once again appear located on his lips.

Such acoustic problems, and there are a hundred similar ones, can be overcome with this and a hundred other montage techniques. And they will continue to be necessary at least until loudspeakers have advanced to the point where these difficulties can be eliminated once and for all.

Visual Rhythm and Sound Rhythm

There are deeper problems of sound–image montage that are the product not so much of sound technology as of our psyche. Let's assume, for example, that we are watching and listening to a violinist playing in close-up. The movements of his fingers and his bow are synchronized with the rhythm of the music. Then the shot distance changes. We now perhaps see just his fingers. The movement of his fingers continues to be synchronized exactly with the rhythm of the music. Yet, despite this, we sense a stumbling, a gap. For we have now identified the optical with the rhythmic image. As if there were only one particular shot that uniquely matched this rhythm. There arises here a curious relation between rhythm and spatial image: one that makes it advisable to change camera set-up only where there is also a striking change of rhythm.

Visual rhythm and sound rhythm must, then, be synchronized. This rule applies, however, not just to movements *within* the image, but also to the movement of images themselves in the montage. In the case of the violinist, for example, the musical rhythm coincided with the movement of his fingers, but not with the alternating movement of the images. There remains much work to be done to establish how sound rhythm can be brought into alignment with both the rhythmic movement of individual scenes and also with the rhythm of the montage.

Similarity Between Sound and Image

This same example of the violinist shows that the synchronization of sound and movement within a given scene does not entirely resolve the issue. The relation between sound and image still varies in each different shot. What this in turn uncovers is a set of relationships of whose existence we can at present scarcely guess.

It will turn out, for instance, that there is a certain affinity between the sound and the form of its source, that sound and image must be in some way similar. For not every thing and every person has the voice we might

assume them to possess on the basis of outward appearance alone. A small bird roaring in a deep bass is not the only instance of an image we would find both implausible and grotesque. There are also far less obvious, more subtle contradictions that would similarly offend our sensibility. Our hearing will soon become so sensitive that it will reject all substitute voices, and also refuse the invisible voice that is made to speak for the visible other who appears in the image. For we shall hear that it is not his own voice with which he speaks. And we shall also distinguish between shots that must be silent because they are already replete with visual expression, and others that demand to be supplemented acoustically.

Acoustic Supplement

This supplement will become an essential principle of the sound film. The point is that we should not hear, or *only* hear, what we can already see. The acoustic dimension should not just reinforce the effect of natural reality, but should use sound to emphasize something that we might otherwise have overlooked. It should awaken ideas and associations in our minds that the silent image on its own might have failed to arouse. And it will do so by juxtaposing sound montage and image montage contrapuntally, like two melodies.

The most forceful form of the acoustic supplement is asynchronous sound montage. Here, when sound enters the image space, we do not see its source. We do not see the speaker. We see only the listener, and we too become listeners. We do not see the gun; we only hear the shot and only see the victim. The acoustic space of the scene is larger than the space that is shown within the frame.

Asynchronous Montage and the Tracking Pan

One especially effective source of tension is the camera pan that follows a sound in search of its source. A face in close-up. A call. Startled, the face listens and turns. We do not yet know who has called. The camera roams slowly through the space. The voice gets louder, comes closer. Until, finally, the speaker appears in the frame.

One of the most beautiful sound-film motifs comes from a scene in *The Singing Fool* where Al Jolson has his wife perform in his local honky-tonk.[20] An embarrassed silence follows her song. She casts a disappointed look around the room. Only one person can be heard clapping off-screen. The camera pans slowly around the audience. Not a single hand moves. But the clapping continues. The camera searches further. The isolated clapping gets louder. The camera comes closer … and Al Jolson appears in the frame. He is the only person to applaud his wife.

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20. *The Singing Fool* (1928), d. Lloyd Bacon, featuring Al Jolson, Josephine Dunn and Betty Bronson. The commercially successful follow-up to *The Jazz Singer* (1927).

This scene in itself is surely ample evidence of the capacity of sound film to produce specific effects that no stage production can emulate. And the most valuable feature of any art is surely the specificity of the forms and the mode of expression that can be achieved only in that art and nowhere else.

Asynchronous Reality – Synchronous Representation

Very often, however, we also find the reverse situation. The sound film will often synchronize sound impressions with their corresponding visual images, even if this does not reproduce the reality of our everyday perception. In reality, sounds made at a distance are always heard belatedly; the impression of sound lags behind that of light. Sometimes, this fact is exploited to give a better acoustic and visual sense of distance. Often, however, the sound montage corrects reality and creates a closer association between sound and image than exists in fact. For this is one case in which our natural mode of perception contradicts our imagined reality. We *imagine* sound and image as the indissoluble *unity* of a *single* event. And for the most part the sound film will have to adjust itself to our imagination rather than to nature. For what matters here is not objective factual reality, but only the specific, immanent spiritual reality of the work of art. What matters is illusion. And illusion is for the most part only disrupted by the exact reproduction of nature.

Subjective Sound Montage

Sound montage, then, can generate relations between sound and image and between sound and sound which represent not outward perceptions but internal mental associations. Associations, thoughts and symbols are suggested and given form by our auditory sense. Almost all the psychic and intellectual expressive resources of image montage are thus also available to sound montage. And the art of the sound film will soon reach a stage in which it will not simply reproduce the sounds of the external world, but also represent their echo in our minds. Acoustic impressions, acoustic emotions, acoustic thoughts.

The Sound Dissolve[21]

Sounds can be made to 'dissolve' just as well as images. And the contrasts or similarities between them can bring to consciousness profound, unconscious relations, perceptual affinities and meanings. Just as is the case with images.

A figure on film listens to a song on a gramophone. We see the effect. The recorded voice dissolves into the original voice, and this acoustic

21. See *TotF*, p. 217.

montage signals a change of scene. We now hear that we are somewhere else, though we do not yet know where. We hear that the singer is now present. We do not yet know what she looks like, but we know already, with mounting expectation, that she is significant.

A human whistle dissolves into a train whistle. A human panting into a chugging engine. We make the links, and our imagination fills the space between sound and image within an asynchronous montage.

Frequently, the dissolve from one acoustic impression to another is mediated by their common rhythm. The clattering rhythm of a train. The same rhythm, echoed by the drumming fingers of a man in the carriage. Then all we hear is knocking: 'naked' rhythm. Then, gradually, the swelling music of an entire orchestra.

When the sound montage cuts together the slamming of a door with a gunshot, a connection becomes clear. When the clinking of glasses fades into the clash of arms, what is awakened are mental associations, thoughts, a deeper meaning.[22]

Absolute Montage

This kind of relational sound montage will have particularly appeal when it is used asynchronously, that is to say, not simultaneously with the image montage of the sound sources. Here the acoustic impression detaches itself from one image, and its audibility within another establishes an association that emphasizes the special meaning of the sound. What is reinforced here is both the mental link between scenes and events and the interior quality of that link. This is because sound is more abstract than the image.

Absolute Sound Film

This brings us to the absolute sound film, a form that will undoubtedly find greater application in even the most ordinary feature film than did the absolute visual film. The sound film has the capacity to give form in far richer and more subtle ways to the psychic world of internal ideas than could the silent film. For it is capable of representing a more complex set of associations that move in two different directions. A sound evokes an image and at the same time another sound. And the establishment of those associations needs no connection with either empirical experience or with logic. For these constitute perceptions of the irrational reality of our souls.

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22. In his passage on the sound dissolve in *TotF*, Balázs takes the opportunity to distance his film theory from the 'empty formalism' of the sound-film avant-garde. He writes (p. 218), 'Such sound similes and acoustic symbols are often somewhat too obvious and can easily degenerate into empty formalism.'

Psycho-technical Problems

There is just one psycho-technical problem that makes the absolute sound film more cumbersome than the absolute visual film. The apperception of a sound takes longer than that of an image. An image montage can use rapid cuts that approximate to the original tempo of the mental process of association. It will, however, be impossible to use the same technique in the sound montage, where rapid cutting hinders the recognition and indeed the very perception of sounds.

The Psychic Impression of Synchronicity

We shall also have to deal with sound's capacity for reverberation. However, this will not in every instance be an obstacle. A sound may continue to reverberate in our ears, even though we can no longer hear it in the following image. Here we can speak of a *psychic effect* of synchronicity, which enables the creation of the subtlest of moods and the deepest associations.

Symphony of Noise

All the sound effects that I have spoken about up to now represent an event. The psychic event of associations that may be of a concrete external or an inner psychological kind. In both cases, the sound is always a sign and expression of something that is not itself sound. But just as the visual film is able to form into a visual work of art the purely decorative values of the image, its pure elements of light and form, so too the sound film brings into mutual relation sounds that may well have nothing to do with the content of the story, but which possess their own abstract acoustic identity. *Two Hearts in Waltz Time*, an otherwise charming and intelligently ironic film, contains a scene with a kitchen symphony.[23] A great banquet is in preparation. A series of sound and image close-ups follows in rapid rhythm. Wood is sawn. The saw rasps. Wood is chopped. The axe thrums. Fire is kindled in the hearth. It crackles. Sugar is pounded. Cream is whipped. And boiling water bubbles. Then the same sound images, repeated in rhythmic phrases. Everyday sounds, composed into a work of art. A symphony of noise comes into being.

Film Music[24]

The ability of montage to forge music from everyday sounds also has implications for film music. By the time silent film reached its final phase,

23. *Zwei Herzen im Dreivierteltakt* (1930), d. Géza von Bolváry, featuring Walter Janssen, Oskar Karlweis, Willi Forst and Gretl Theimer.
24. See *TotF*, p. 235.

musical accompaniment had already become more naturalistic. Crime thrillers were no longer accompanied by Beethoven symphonies. Instead, orchestral means were used to transform everyday sounds into music. There emerged a new form of illustrative music. Edmund Meisel was also already working on the construction of his so-called 'noise machine' for use as an orchestral instrument.[25] All this not only foreshadowed the advent of the sound film, but also demonstrates that it met a pre-existing need. For technical innovations do not simply appear out of the blue or even arise as the mere scientific products of laboratory experiments. Technological developments have their own social preconditions. Inventions emerge as they fall due.

Film music's first achievement was to synchronize the duration of dramatic representation in each image with the duration of musical expression. It developed brief musical forms that lasted no longer than the gestures they were designed to illustrate. In the initial phase, the rhythm of everyday sounds was faithfully imitated. In Meisel's celebrated musical accompaniment to *Potemkin* we hear the sound of the ship's engines. But this remains music because what we hear is not the original timbre of the engine, but the sound of an instrument – a sound, however, that also naturalistically evokes the engine's original rhythm.

In the sound film, it will be impossible to create a musical accompaniment – in so far as such a thing will continue in sound cinema – that is entirely abstract. For sound in film operates as a binding medium, as it were, that connects music to an image of reality, and assimilates them both.

New Raw Material For Music

Musical accompaniments will, however, continue in future to be synchronized with wide or landscape shots. Unless the intention is to create an acoustic effect of absolute silence. But this form of 'illustrative music' will have to be highly naturalistic, and perhaps to make use of sounds and noises found in nature. This will not spell the dissolution of musical composition, as academic aesthetes fear. On the contrary, musical composition will acquire a new raw material. Even noises will now be incorporated into musical form.

There is, however, one form in which an organic union of 'pure music' with film can occur. And it takes the shape that I already conjectured seven years ago in *Visible Man*. Music here would not be regarded as an accompaniment to the image, but the images as accompaniments to the

25. The Austrian-born Meisel (1894–1930) was a composer who first worked in film when he was commissioned by Prometheus-Film in 1926 to compose a musical score for the 1930 German release of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*. He also composed a score for Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin. Symphony of a City* (1927), and was acclaimed in both instances for his innovative use of contrapuntal sound/image relations, as well as his atonal and harshly percussive sound sequences.

music. The image would reflect ideas aroused by musical listening, the fantasies that scurry before us like clouds across the sky. Music would be the reality, and the images the drifting unconscious. Not film with accompanying soundtrack, but sound made visible in film.

Dialogue

I have been speaking up to now of the sound film. And I have discussed the spoken word only as tone, as natural sound that I have analysed with a view to its acoustic effects. But dialogue in the talking picture is more than a problem of acoustics. Compared with dramatic expression, speech has so far brought to cinema more difficulties and far fewer benefits.

Optical Drawbacks

There is above all the benefit that image continuity is no longer interrupted by written intertitles. The price we have paid, as I explained above, is that the art of the camera set-up has had to be reduced to a primitive level. The montage rhythm has likewise become more cumbersome. The reason lies in the necessity to sustain the same camera set-up for the entire duration of a scripted dialogue. Our eyes may have for the most part understood what is at stake, but we are compelled to hear out the spoken text.

Actors also have to speak distinctly. This hinders their visual performance. Gestural language is hindered by linguistic gesture. In *Visible Man*, I wrote:

> In film, however, speaking becomes immediate, visual facial expression. To see speech is to learn quite different things from just hearing the words. The speaking mouth often shows more than actual words can convey. … But the moment we see a mouth shaping words, and become aware therefore of an acoustic dimension, then the performance loses its effect … A good film actor … speaks plainly to our eyes, not our ears. These two modes of plain speech seem to be irreconcilable.[26]

There is certainly a considerable loss of visual nuance here. So what of the gain? The answer is that it has so far been a highly problematic one. For, in silent film, the actors themselves gave poetic form to their performed dialogues. And the great personalities among them created an inaudible poetry of expression that was sublime beyond all words. We understood not in the language of words, but of looks: the look of an Asta Nielsen, a Lilian Gish, a Chaplin. These mute dialogues seemed to convey the profoundest human revelations, even when the overall storyline was nothing but the most tedious kitsch.

26. See *Visible Man*, p. 25.

But nowadays, alas, we can hear what they are saying! And the triviality of their words nullifies the human depth of their gaze. For, alas, it is not they who speak, but the scriptwriters. The mask has been stripped, and a great illusion destroyed.

Now at last, however, is the time for the poets to become active in film. The best and the greatest. The time is now!

On Intertitles

What, then, was the position previously with intertitles? These too were only rarely penned by writers of any stature. This is not in doubt. But there was then far less written text than the volume of spoken texts required today. The title's sole purpose was to render comprehensible the course of the action. And it was possible to show a whole series of dramatic dialogue scenes without intervening intertitles.

The same is not possible in the sound film. Visible speech must also be audible to us. And it must be this even if the action is already visually comprehensible. For if things make a sound, if we hear music or footsteps, if we hear wind, water and the noise of machinery, and if we hear people speaking in this or that scene, then they cannot be allowed simply to fall silent, or to communicate in mere sign language, in other scenes. A sound film with inaudible dialogue is a nonsense.

Use of Dialogue

How to make proper use of dialogue is a problem that film-makers will be able to solve only when they have had considerable experience with sound film. Initially, attempts were made to keep dialogue to an absolute minimum and to direct scenes so that the actors had only a few opportunities for speech. (Sternberg tried this in *The Blue Angel*.[27]) However, this method has risks of its own. In *The Blue Angel*, for example, it served to consecrate the silent scenes in a way that their contents did not deserve. For the silent scenes did not possess an atmospheric content that was striking or special; they were merely devoid of sound. Characters in a sound film, in contrast, are not merely noiseless when they do not speak: they *hold their tongues*. And where someone who can speak audibly holds his tongue, that silence has a particular dramatic emphasis. To hold your tongue is not a quality (like being mute), but an event. It has an undeniable significance that must be grounded in the plot; otherwise it simply distorts the style as well as the intended atmospheric effect.

A happier solution was Froelich's in *The Night Belongs to Us*. The film scenes were cut here to a length that was even shorter than that customary in the silent film. If speech was unavoidable, it was brief and confined where possible to single punch lines.

27. *Der blaue Engel* (1930).

Voices from Nowhere

The art of camera set-up and the play of facial expressions can often be saved by introducing a voice into the image while showing only the listener, not the speaker. Such voices from nowhere do however acquire a certain pathos that may render them impersonal, ghostly and oracular, qualities that are not always appropriate.

There are, then, many issues to be considered here. In the sound film what matters is not just the content of what is said but also the position of the statements in the montage. They acquire the same positional value as the elements of a poem. What we will therefore need is a new kind of lyrical musicality. And this calls for poets, for yet more poets! The skills and routines of mediocre drama will not suffice if sound-film dialogue is to acquire a specifically cinematic character and to become more than mere filmed theatre.

Sound-film Ideas!

What we expect from a new art form is not only new refinements but new basic forms, not only new ways to express individual experience but also new ways of shaping the work of art in its totality. A new blueprint. If the sound film is to become a new genre on a par with the other arts and with the silent film, it must use sound not just as a complementary element that merely enriches dramatic scenes, but as a dramatic event of central, decisive importance and as the basic motif of the action.

Is it not the case that we already experience acoustic events that influence us and determine our actions, that even become our destiny? It is this fateful quality that the sound film will for the first time be capable of representing. But it can do so only if the basic idea, the poetic concept that underpins the final manuscript can be made specific to the sound film.

Music with Dramatic Accompaniment

Hitherto, music incorporated into film was, understandably enough, its most unfilmic element. And this even though the physiognomies of film's silent listeners were a fruitful source of studies in silent performance. What was represented here, however, was an effect without its cause. The cinema orchestra was at best able to provide an external commentary, a form of footnote outside the text. But wouldn't the Pied Piper of Hamlin now make a first-rate theme for a sound film? Or the ageing Beethoven, whose deafness prevents him from conducting his own overture so that he is booed off the stage? In the sound film, music will not accompany the drama; the drama will accompany the music. Action as consequence of the music!

Musical Inserts

The songs, the 'hits' that have become an inevitable component of sound films have up to now almost always been inserts in an action that could have run its course just as well without them. Music and singing 'occur' in these sound film operettas, just as boxing matches, horse races or similar sensations were once used to ginger up the story in silent film. Only rarely does the filmed operetta involve material that might also originally have been acoustically experienced.

Yet it is not actually necessary for these inserts to be so entirely far-fetched. A musical number needs do no more than effect a change in the direction of the action, or simply bring to a climax and to a final resolution a pre-existing mood. Used in this way, the music could have an entirely organic function within the action.

But this would become a genuine sound-film idea only if the song's role in the action were to be decisive. *Two Hearts in Waltz Time* contains an unassumingly graceful instance of such an idea. A composer of operettas has been given a day in which to write a waltz. Nothing occurs to him. He receives a visit from a girl he doesn't know. She brings inspiration with her. He improvises the waltz on the piano while she sings along. The girl then suddenly disappears before he can find out who she is. Left alone, he tries to finish writing the waltz but doesn't get beyond the first five bars. He has already forgotten it. The following day the composition is sent for. There is nothing to send. He has forgotten it and failed to write it down. Only one person may be able to recall it. The unknown woman. There is nothing for it but to put an advertisement in the paper: 'To the girl who heard the waltz …' In short, the song brings the couple together.

This is a harmless operetta fairy tale but it is also a pure sound-film idea. The song has the function of a well-kept secret, a form of legitimation that is comparable to the lost ring or the lost slipper of the old fairy tales.

Optical Emphasis

We can also imagine how sounds might be used as moving forces in a drama. Might they not be used as a guide for a blind man that helps to decide his fate? This would be an extreme case, of course, sound film in its purest form: the world as acoustic experience. A film in which the sounds do not underpin a visual action but, on the contrary, the images serve merely as a scaffold to support a world of sound.

An extreme case. But only in extreme cases does the meaning, the intention of an art become manifest.

A motif belongs absolutely to the sound film only if it makes sense only in a sound film and nowhere else. Music and song have acted even in quality operas and *Singspiele* as a driving force of dramatic action at least

since *The Magic Flute* and *The Magic Violin*.[28] What will make sound film different is *how* these elements drive the action and *what* they thereby set in motion.

The elements of dialogue that are specific to the sound film will be even harder to identify. Is there such a thing as a dialogue that is possible only in the sound film: a dialogue, in other words, that is impossible on the stage? Certainly, such a dialogue is the foundation of the brilliant idea at the heart of Erich von Stroheim's *The Great Gabbo*. The ventriloquist's conversation with his dummy in Stroheim's film would be inconceivable on the stage. It is a technical film trick, and it makes visible the profoundest psychological events. Split consciousness is dramatized. Actual dialogue becomes the transformed manifestation of inner conflicts.

Crisis of Transition

This, then, is a film that wraps the most marvellous basic idea in the most trivial of forms, the subtlest psychological design in the clumsiest of dialogues, and buries both in a kitschy, tasteless vaudeville setting. This is a tragic document of the crisis of transition: a talkie that is visually vacuous because its extended dialogues permit neither changes in camera set-up nor rhythmic montage. From the standpoint of technique, then, the film falls far beneath the standard of popular visual culture previously achieved by its audience. This is the price that we have paid for the sake of the word. And what of those words themselves? They have had to be adapted to the intellectual standards of the American audience. For the sake of film. Thus has the word debased the image, and the image the word. And this has been the ruination of one of the most beautiful of artistic ideas.

The Finality of Interpretation

Sound-film dialogues differ from other dramatic dialogues in that they are uttered only once, and once and for all. Every nuance of intonation is final and fixed for all time. No new director can come and direct the film all over again; no other actors can present it in a different way. What the sound film unambiguously and immutably 'immortalizes' are either the film-maker's original artistic intentions or the mere vagaries of chance.

Yet for that very reason we need also have no fear that the contemporary sound film will have too long a life. Stage plays that can be reinterpreted time and again in accordance with current taste by the directors and actors of later generations: these will survive. But anything

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28. *Die Zaubergeige.* There is an opera of this name by Werner Egk but its first performance was in Frankfurt in 1935. Balázs may be referring here either to the nineteenth-century puppet play by Graf von Pocci, on which the opera was based, or else to the silent film with the same title (1916), directed by Hanna Henning and featuring Susanne Lafrenz and Joseph Römer.

that is not capable of reinterpretation will perish. Only the possibility of ever new misunderstandings can guarantee repeated attempts to understand anew. The talkies will, on the other hand, prove to be of inestimable value as historical documents. They will show us something that we never knew with certainty from older literary works; we shall know the work's original intention.

Sound-film and the Grotesque

Human dialogue seems set, then, to remain the least edifying element of the sound film. All the more captivating does it seem, therefore, when we hear animals, creatures of fable or even cartoon characters speaking. The implausibility that this generates in the realistic sound film, the fact that the sound does not 'resemble' the character depicted, nor match the image: none of this appears to us here as a defect. We place no importance on plausibility.

But what does implausibility actually mean in the context of sound? We can imagine creatures of fable; we can even draw fairy-tale figures we have never seen. But fairy-tale voices? Fairy-tale sounds? What do they sound like? Our imagination may conjure up figures that are impossible in reality, but we cannot imagine sounds that could not actually be uttered. We can draw something that does not exist. For the image is a representation and can therefore be invented. However, we do not hear the representation of sound but the sound itself. So, if we hear it, it exists.

This means that sounds are never fantastic or grotesque *in themselves* but only through their implausible relation to their source. The roaring of a lion is grotesque when it issues from the throat of a mouse. No sound is fantastic in itself, only its origins may be so. When Mickey Mouse, the entertaining successor to Felix the Cat, spits, his spittle hits the ground like a drumbeat. Or there is the spider that plays the threads of her web like the strings of a harp; the skeleton that takes a bone and beats out a rhythm on his own ribs. It may sound like a xylophone. But the sounds of the drum, the harp or the xylophone are not fantastic in themselves.

New Territory

It is through such sound-film fantasies that we become aware of our own sound associations, the irrational links between our visual and auditory conceptions. The fact that moonlight is bright silver is known to everyone. The poets have told us so many times. For that very reason it would seem grotesque if it were to descend on the surface of the lake with a clatter. We also know roughly what lilies of the valley would sound like when Mickey Mouse makes them ring. But the poets have not given their views of the sounds made by all silent objects and so we shall continue to make many curious discoveries about the profound interconnections between sounds and forms in these grotesque *jeux d'esprit*.

The Ultimate Questions

I have attempted to describe the intellectual keyboard of an expressive and representational instrument that has gradually emerged in film: the spirit of a technology and the technology of a spirit.

Its development has been rapid; it is now getting increasingly into its stride, and its development is still very far from complete. It should actually be possible to calculate its direction and its limits. But the conditions of an intellectual trajectory do not themselves lie in the realm of the spirit but in the social and economic base that underlies it.

The question of how film will develop in the future is even harder to resolve in aesthetic terms alone than any question of the future development of other arts. Everything depends on how the audience now develops in its economic and social structure and hence *in its ideology*.

Will the sound film displace the silent film for good? Will the three-dimensional colour film become the ultimate achievement?

Sceptics

Old Lumière, the inventor of cinematography and colour photography, has declared himself irritated and sceptical at the thought of such developments. The great technician has spoken in this context of the limits of technology, and also of film as an art whose boundaries technology can not only expand but also violently rupture.

Chaplin has sworn that if he absolutely has to make sound films he himself will appear in them only as a deaf mute. He has great expectations of the sound film. He sees in it the ruin of cinema as such. Eisenstein, meanwhile, believes only in the asynchronous system.

To me, one thing appears a logical necessity. This is that, for as long as the silent film remains a possible option, it is forced to return to its original terrain: the terrain of the visual. Driven from the domain of dramatic, dialogical plots involving human interaction, the silent film will return to the subjective and the associative, in other words, to the absolute film. Only if it succeeds in proving itself as a distinct artistic genre will the silent film succeed in resurrecting itself alongside the sound film. For there is no going *back* to the silent film. I do believe, however, that we can move *forward* to a new type of silent film that is yet more highly developed.

There are many sceptics, and they are not the worst of their kind. But advances in a popular art are decided not by aesthetic values but by social needs. And in the history of art there are no periods of decline that do not contain the seeds of future developments. We apparently have no choice but to place our trust in history – though it must be said that we are not minded to let history take 'its own' course unaided. For our own aesthetic judgements are themselves both the products of history and the vital forces that propel historical development by actively intervening in the dialectical process.

We cannot, however, predict the future of an art on the basis of eternally immutable aesthetic laws, as we might use astronomy to predict an eclipse of the sun. The factors in play here are themselves in constant flux. To calculate the future of cinema would thus require that we calculate the very future of civilized humanity itself.

IDEOLOGICAL REMARKS

The spirit of film is, like the spirit of language, an object of 'national psychology'. Or in more concrete terms: class psychology. For the economic and technical preconditions of film ensure that individual forms rarely make their appearance or not at all. Film directors may certainly possess their own personal trademark, just as writers have their own individual style. But only to the point where the universal comprehensibility and popularity, in other words, the profitability, of the film is not placed in jeopardy. If that mark is overstepped, the work remains an isolated case and fails to influence the organic development of the art. Only that which has such influence or universal validity, however, is of historical significance.

The spirit of film, like the spirit of colloquial language, is an object also of sociology. Whether we believe that a particular work has artistic merit or not may be a suitable question for the history of art. The question the history of *mankind* or the history of culture asks us to address is *why an object pleases or displeases us in general*. Never before was an art so influenced by this question as film is today. Apart from colloquial language no product of the mind has ever hitherto become to this extent a document of the thoughts and feelings of the masses.

Art History and Aesthetic Value

I have somewhere remarked that it was time to write the history of bad literature and bad art: the history of commonplaces, of worn-out expressions and clichés. What I was calling for here was an *art history which dispenses with aesthetic evaluations* and concerns itself exclusively with the socio-psychological causes of the great successes, the broadest popularity, the widest acceptance. Such an ideological analysis of film would yield a cultural history of our times, a symptomatic index of living ideologies in general.

For taste is no metaphysical matter. Every animal savours what gives it gratification. Even aesthetic taste is a defence mechanism of the mental organism. Even class taste is an organ of the drive for the self-preservation of classes. Taste is ideology.

It would be a rewarding task to uncover the ideology of film and to trace it back to its economic and social roots. A great labour for a

monograph of its own. What I can provide here are no more than notes and unsystematic pointers. And frequently, only questions to be answered by persons better qualified than I.

Popularity

Technical collectivity

The technical nature of cinema itself excludes the possibility of absolute individualism. A film can never be that exclusive expression of an individual human being which we find in any other work of art. Writing, painting or composing music are all solitary pursuits. Film, however, is the collective achievement of the scriptwriter, director, cameraman, set designer and actors. To say nothing of the producer's perpetual meddling. And an art whose very existence depends on consensus among a large group of individuals contains already in its innermost structure a communality that is also the precondition of its universal comprehensibility.

The character and the social significance of capitalist cinema has been determined by the economic imperative of maximum popularity. An art form that has grown into a major industry could not remain the privilege of the ruling classes. It is a dialectical feature of the capitalist economy that on occasion a privilege has to be sacrificed for the sake of profit.

Aesthetic Value and Popularity

Yet it has seemed until now to be a universal law that in art intellectual value and popularity have always stood in inverse relations to each other. For the cultured aristocracy, the epithet 'incomprehensible' has always been thought to be a mark of nobility. And this even though there has always been a popular art that was not a whit inferior or less worthy than the art of the educated classes. By this I mean *popular art* made *by the people* themselves. It goes without saying that art created *for* the people by those on high contains only the negative conditions of popularity.

German Intellectuality

A special feature of German ideology has always been the belief that good art and popular art are incompatible. Great popularity is highly suspect here, and rightly so. It is held to be proof of banality. This is the product of a unique intellectual tradition that has been forced for particular historical reasons to develop in an abstract, speculative direction. The idealist German spirit raised its head to the clouds because it found itself disbarred from earthly pathways.

Marx describes this isolation of free German thought from a repressive political reality in his introduction to the 'Contribution to the Critique of

Hegel's *Philosophy of Law*': 'Just as ancient peoples lived their previous history in the imagination, in mythology, so we Germans have lived our future history in thought, in philosophy.'[1] '[In politics] the Germans have thought what other nations have done … The abstraction and arrogance of Germany's thought always kept pace with the one-sided and stunted character of its reality.'[2]

This estrangement of mind from reality noted by Marx has, naturally enough, expressed itself also in art. The most valuable qualities of art have been developed as the basis for a secret language of the educated. If art has wished to become popular, it has degenerated into triviality. Where can we find in German literature the equivalent of Mark Twain, Kipling or Jack London? Writers who spin their tales in a universally accessible, ordinary language and yet are great artists? This art of the surface which is anything but superficial, this subtlety without finesse, this sensuous pleasure in objective reality, this charm of the light touch, this magic of a simple storytelling which eschews excessive intellectual complexity, and yet remains significant and poetic?

When German art aspires to popularity, it is described as making 'concessions'. But does Chaplin, for instance, purchase his popularity with 'concessions'? Does he become trite whenever he is universally comprehensible? If the art of film wishes to survive it must become popular not only at its lowest but also at its highest level.

The Vanguard of Progress

The fact that something is popular does not mean that it has no connection with social reality. In a society in which education is not common property, it is for the moment only the privilege of the few to develop even the simplest understanding of their own situation. Reading the writings of Karl Marx requires a significant amount of scholarly training, even though it can hardly be claimed that those writings – unlike the occasional more vulgar account – are remote from actual life.

In art, too, an initial lack of popularity is not an unmitigated sign of irrelevance. Any more than comprehensibility is a sign of understanding. Latent tendencies to universality are often first formed and made conscious in individual instances. Those instances stimulate a general intellectual advance; yet they may at first be misunderstood and combated. Hence the slogans that protest against ideas that have in fact long since been assimilated.

I have observed this in particular in a number of as yet unpopular advances in the sphere of the absolute film. Those advances may involve a lot of fanciful aestheticism, much obsessively pedantic theory, esoteric

1. K. Marx, 1975, *Early Writings*, (trans. G. Benton), Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 249.
2. Ibid., p. 250.

individualism and even bluffing. My misgivings on this are well known. But I also know full well that those who wrestle, experiment, and chance their arm with the specific instruments of creative expression are the trailblazers of progress. They do not always succeed in discovering viable paths but it is they who set out in search of them. It is to these pioneers of film among creative spirits and the public that I dedicate this book.

Popularity is not Irredeemable

Pressure to seek popularity inevitably lowers the level of expression initially. But this need not continue to be the case. The very fact of popularization stimulates an educational process that soon transcends an original primitive lack of sophistication. This has been amply demonstrated by the development of visual culture under the influence of the silent film.

The production of a sound film, for example, is significantly more costly than a silent film. Thus profitability can be secured only by even greater popular interest. This explains the low standard of the first sound films. But the regression of the first sound films to the triviality of the early silent films is the result of more than an underdeveloped technology. It demonstrates also that the visual culture of the wider cinema audience has now become much more sophisticated than its intellectual culture. This will not, however, remain the case.

The Petty Bourgeois as the Foundation of Film Production

The capitalist film industry naturally strives for the largest possible financial turnover. In so doing, it must go halfway to meet the ideology of the broadest masses, while at the same time not compromising its own. In its search for profits it must aim to please the 'lower' social strata – but only those whose intellectual and emotional needs it can satisfy without threatening the interests of the ruling classes. The relevant group in this context is, then, above all that section of the masses which is least aware of its own interests.

This explains why European and American film production attunes itself ideologically to the petty bourgeoisie. Not simply because the petty bourgeois can still afford inexpensive pleasures. The petty bourgeois has no class consciousness. He will therefore not reject whatever contradicts his own social and economic interests. Above all, however, the petty bourgeoisie represents the largest market simply because its mentality does not remain restricted to a single social stratum. There is a petty bourgeois lurking in many a proletarian, as well as in many an intellectual and big bourgeois. What unites them all is the common emotion that cinema-going evokes.

The Limits of the Petty Bourgeoisie

The petty bourgeois condition is characterized by a limited viewpoint which sees life through an asocial and apolitical lens. What this produces is a 'modest' egoism born in fact from a myopia that assigns reality to matters of immediate importance. Such is the impregnable, mighty fortress of the petty bourgeois: a fortress built around a clear division between inside and outside. From this polarity emerge the basic elements of petty bourgeois art. The petty bourgeois seeks security within this limited horizon; within its bounds, he finds the intimate experience characteristic of all idylls, and envisages beyond its limits the greatest romantic adventure. It is thus within this mutually complementary polarity that we must seek the essential motifs and oppositions available to the cinema.

Romantic idyll	Demonic erotic dangers
Intimate domesticity	Fairy-tale upper-class affluence and shady vice
Private property	Adventures in crime
Modest poverty	The dream of advancement to the most elevated spheres

Romanticization as Defence Mechanism

The romantic, then, is both whatever is already far distant, and all that *is to be and to remain far distant*. Everything that threatens peace of mind is thrust out of bounds: romanticized. Romanticization is a defence mechanism of the petty bourgeois. No horror must be allowed to shake his faith in the stability of his life's foundations (however much these may in fact already have been undermined). The function of the happy end is to maintain this faith. However bad his situation may be, nothing appears so bad to the petty bourgeois as change. For every change spells chaos in the mind of the man who is ignorant of historical and social relations.

Will Hays's Code

One American film industry tycoon, Will Hays, has formulated ideological rules for that industry's products as follows:

The life of the upper classes shall be represented.[3]

Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed.

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3. Nothing in the Hays Code supports this assertion. It is conceivable that Balázs may have misunderstood the American text. The closest any formulation comes to it is: 'Correct standards of life … shall be presented.' Other quotations are reproduced here from the original. See http://www.artsreformation.com/a001/hays-code.html.

> [No] sympathy with the crime as against law.
>
> Methods of crime must not be explicitly presented.
>
> The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld. Adultery … must not be explicitly treated, or justified … Scenes of passion … should not be introduced when not essential to the plot.
>
> No film or episode may throw ridicule on any religious faith … The history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations shall be represented fairly.
>
> The following subjects must be treated within the careful limits of good taste: actual hangings or electrocutions, third-degree methods [on the part of the police] … brutality.

Such are the rules that govern the censorship of American films. Before they even go into production. The rules that the screenwriter already has in mind as he writes the very first line.

Of course, not each and every film is made to accord one hundred per cent with this petty bourgeois ideology. At the level of detail and, more rarely, throughout the entirety of a particular film, a different spirit breaks through. The onward march of history, too, introduces new motifs into the otherwise unremittingly narrow horizon of the petty bourgeois. His attitude may remain the same. But the objects towards which he must adjust this attitude keep changing. (His asocial ideology must even be brought to bear on the social problems that he is called upon these days to address. He is assisted in this task by the social kitsch film.) The general thrust remains: reassurance! Reassurance must be the goal, even in the representation of the most exciting sensations. All viable themes and motifs of the cinema are concerned with reassurance.

Love

Love, for instance, is the subject most easily treated without reference to class struggle. As a force of nature, it appears to have a universal validity and, for that reason, a claim to universal interest. It is certainly the cinema's most popular theme. In films that stage a dramatic conflict with social obstacles, the power of love almost always emerges victorious. Love triumphs over all class distinctions and provides reassurance that class antagonisms are not to be taken too seriously.

Romance also strengthens the petty bourgeoisie's own conviction that it is radical and emancipated. There is even a hint of rebellion in films that criticize social institutions and prejudices which deprive human beings of the right to love. These institutions and prejudices are always those that scarcely occur in the lived practice of the petty bourgeoisie. The films thus commonly involve incarcerated nuns or ruling princes who are prevented from following the impulse of their heart. Other exotic or obsolete prejudices are similarly denounced. Idealistic revolts against forms of

oppression that have long since ceased to exist become here the ideological safety valves for petty bourgeois liberalism. And, if the film portrays a rich girl who is not permitted to marry a poor boy, or vice versa, it is intimated that such strictness might well turn out to be an error in calculation. For, more often than not, the boy here ends up in the last act with more money than the girl. Or vice versa.

In European films, extramarital love is not necessarily morally condemned. But it remains either a risky adventure, or a fairy-tale fantasy. In both cases, erotic passion is made to resemble a natural catastrophe, a serious disease which may indeed befall you but which does not – or should not – form part of the normal course of life. This explains why petty bourgeois ideology always sees passion as something exotic and romantic. Passion appears to manifest itself only on the periphery. It is in fact *forced onto the periphery by the process of romanticization*. Romanticization is a petty bourgeois defence mechanism. There is a point beyond which the petty bourgeois refuses to see, and it is here that fantasy sets in.

Family

Family feelings are also 'ordinary human feelings', which is to say they are more or less the same in all classes of society, and are therefore open to standardization. Motherly love is an international commodity that has commercial value in all strata of society. The fact that the American film industry exploits the emotional contents of family life as if they were oilfields and coal mines has its roots in the circumstance that in the over-organized apparatus of American life the family is the only island in which human beings can still enjoy human relations. And woe betide them should they seek human contact elsewhere. For what film teaches us is that family happiness is solace for every wrong. What should we care about class struggle? The family compensates all.

'Cosiness'

The reification of the Taylorized and rationalized human being goes hand in hand with his need for sentiment. Once expelled from the concrete business of living, feeling flows like squeezed lemon juice and coagulates into pipe dreams. Since it does not occur to the petty bourgeois to attempt changes in his own real life, he creates the cinematic myth of a cosy Vienna where mood or feeling is no longer devoured by the tempo of the machine. The mythology of the age of the heart of gold! Here, the spirit of opposition is diverted into pipe dreams that are in fact the products of unease and discontent.

Abreaction

A similar ideological safety valve is created by parodic films that ridicule small-town life and long-since vanished petty principalities. The petty bourgeois laughs at conditions even more wretched than his own to restore his self-esteem, and to avoid rebelling against the reality that humiliates him. He may be likened here to the army sergeant who receives a box on the ears, then passes it on to the helpless recruit – which latter may, of course, be a figment of his own invention.

The Detective

The petty bourgeois's fear for his possessions is likewise projected outside his own social sphere. To divert anxiety from the everyday, legal robbery of capitalist exploitation, danger is romanticized and appears exclusively in the shape of criminality. (For what is permissible is also legitimate.) For the sake of completeness, I would like to quote here a passage from *Visible Man*:

> Cinema began with the figure of the detective. The detective is the embodiment of the romanticism of capitalism … Money is the buried fairy-tale treasure; it is the Holy Grail and the Blue Flower that men yearn for. For the sake of money the intrepid criminal risks his life; he is hardly ever a poor proletarian forced by poverty to steal. For the most part, he is the elegant cat burglar in evening dress … who dons a mask by night not for a bite of bread but for the romantic treasure, the mystical bloom of life …

> The hero of these films, however, was the doughty defender of private property, the detective. He is the St George of capitalism. In the heroic sagas of olden times the knight in shining armour leapt on his charger in order to do battle for the king's daughter. Nowadays, it is the detective who pockets his Browning and leaps into his car in order to defend with his life the sacred takings from the Wertheim department stores.

> What is romantic about that? [What is it that] appears to transcend the bounds of the natural? Well, whatever transcends the bounds of the penal code. In the eyes of the [petty bourgeois], justice and the world order are the same thing. And the symbol and representative of the world order is the policeman … For the police cordon is the outer limit of life; beyond that lies mystery [and adventure].[4]

Kitsch

'Once expelled from the concrete business of living, feeling flows like squeezed lemon juice.' Isn't this a description of kitsch in general? More urgent than the aesthetic question of exactly *what* kitsch is, however, is the

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4. See *Visible Man*, p. 81.

socio-cultural question of *why* kitsch gives such pleasure to the petty bourgeois masses.

Kitsch is not simply bad art. It helps the inarticulate and even the untalented to express something that is anything but kitschy. In contrast, there is also high-grade kitsch of great artistic sophistication.

In general, we call something kitsch if it is full of fake or over-emphasized feeling. A certain sentimental and portentous habit of expression that departs from the normal or natural, and gives special precedence to mood and atmosphere. Kitsch is distilled sentiment. It relates to art as that 'squeezed lemon juice' relates to the living fruit: as a mood condensate that can be packaged as a conserve, then brought into play as and when required. But why does it taste so good? What explains the profound and universal need of the petty bourgeois for kitsch?

Dissociated sentiment is a phenomenon characteristic of the reification and objectification of life in capitalist society. Emotion is separated off here from a mechanized reality that has no space for sentiment. Feeling then ceases to be the organic content of life and becomes a thing for itself. The atmospheric confections of musical 'hits' are an unprecendented example of this distilled essence of sentimentality. The hit song and the saxophone tango are the psychological waste products of the modern turn to objectivity.

I observed above that 'romanticism is a form of repression'. Well, kitsch is romanticized sentiment. True feeling is exiled in kitsch to the periphery of everyday reality to prevent it from disrupting normal affairs and the activities of business. This is why kitsch is called upon to speak a special language, and to acquire a patina of solemnity redolent of high days and holidays. Emotion is a state to which, the petty bourgeois believes, one should surrender oneself entirely. Of course, we cannot afford to do this every day. And so the very urgency of the demand becomes a perpetual pretext for inaction. The issue is exaggerated to a point of such extremity that it has no further material application. And that is precisely what makes it kitsch: emotion without consequences.

Pathos

Kitsch is the product of forms of expression that have lost their binding force, of the hollow speech modes of a declining class. For the rising class sees through these and dismisses them as ideologies. The rhetorical pathos of feudal art was not kitschy from the outset. It became kitschy, despite the fact that the art itself underwent no change. What shifted was reality. And pathos in the bourgeois world became kitsch because it ceased to have any application. If the new, revolutionary pathos of the Russian film does not feel kitschy, then this is because ultimate consequences are drawn from the emotion it expresses.

Opposition to Kitsch

However, it is not just the need for kitsch that has its roots in ideology, but also the opposition to kitsch. A social order that has been discredited also loses its aesthetic authority. The opposition to a class does not just take the form of political struggle; it starts much earlier, with a critique of taste. When Rousseau called for an abandonment of prevailing customs and a 'return' to nature, the French Revolution was only in the air as a kind of latent tension. In fact, the return Rousseau demanded implied a step forward. It was itself a call to revolution. Because it was a repudiation of prevailing customs. Today, too, our growing desire for naturalness, for simplicity, for restraint in our modes of expression, amounts to a negation. A negation of customary forms of expression, which we have ceased to trust, even though we have as yet no replacements.

Romanticism in Reverse

But negation is not enough. It merely pushes beyond the horizon what we do not wish to perceive. Beyond the horizon of a directly experienced and perceived reality and into the blue haze of a fairy-tale remoteness. For the small-town dweller of old, romanticism began at the turnpike in the town wall. His fairy-tale world was larger than ours in exact proportion to the smaller size of his actual world. For the petty bourgeois of the modern city, in contrast, it is becoming increasingly difficult to escape ideologically into distant worlds. World commerce has de-romanticized geographical distance. Ineluctable social knowledge has discredited the illusions of social and historical distance. When the modern city-dweller finds the sight of the real world around him unpalatable, he can no longer easily turn to stirring pirate adventures or legends of Indian maharajas. Even the criminal underworld and the more exalted world of millionaires are increasingly ineffectual in diverting our attention from the travails of our own. The petty bourgeois city-dweller is too enlightened. So he has found another escape route; the modern film calls on the entire resources of its art to assist him in an escape into the world of the imagination.

The *small realities* the modern petty bourgeois city-dweller now suddenly discovers are used to draw a veil over the greater reality. If the naturalism of the modern film has succeeded in developing into a subtle and high-quality art form, then this is due in great part to its ability to meet halfway the new ideological needs of the petty bourgeois. Hence also the long evident divergence between the laudable verisimilitude so evident in the details of more recent films and the false stupidity of the overall storyline. This new fanatical concern for factual accuracy, the pleasure taken in recording real-life observations, this emphasis on aspects of everyday reality represents a flight from the general picture into the world of detail. For details do not allow large-scale conclusions.

Only the totality has meaning. But what we are given is petty bourgeois romanticism turned upside down. A new ideology of the ostrich with its head in the sand: an immersion in the details of life that absolves us of the need to see life itself. *Such is Life* and *People on Sunday* are but two of a number of recent German films 'taken from the ordinary life of ordinary people' that conceal their meaning under a plethora of facts.[5] This is petty bourgeois romanticism, but in reverse. It makes use of reality to cover up the truth.

Proletarian Films

Proletarian films, too, are also made in Germany. As Siegfried Kracauer once remarked in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, such films 'rate predestination more highly than trade unions'. And 'from the blue-collar and white-collar workers, whom they think of as being unorganized, they always pick out one for beatification … They depict the proletariat in order to rescue the hero from that hell.'

The ideological meaning of this optimistic happy ending is obvious. But the process of ideological repression characteristic of the modern petty bourgeois has not in recent times always been this crude. He has taken cognizance of certain facts. Just not the facts from which he ought to draw immediate conclusions. It has, for instance, become possible to depict poverty in all its tragic hopelessness. But always only amongst the lumpenproletariat and other social misfits, or at best the unemployed. This sustains the illusion that everything is just fine as long as the proletarian has work. What the petty bourgeois criticizes is the damage caused by *functional failures* in the economic system. He does not wish to know what damage is caused by the system when it functions well. He is happy to shed tears for people who have fallen under the wheels. Indeed, he is comforted by the fact that nothing can be done to help them. Because one is not expected to proffer assistance.

The De-romanticized Hero

The petty bourgeois cherishes the quiet life; he cannot abide *demands*. When he was still a romantic in the old meaning of the word, he liked fairy-tale heroes, who were so magnificent and unattainable, so remote from practical possibilities that, for all his admiration, their example did not commit him to emulation. As film took flight into petty detail,

5. *So ist das Leben* is probably *Takový je zivot* (1930), d. Carl Junghans and featuring Vera Baranovskaya and Theodor Pistek. *People on Sunda y /Menschen am Sonntag* (1930) d. Carl and Robert Siodmak, was based on a screenplay by Billy Wilder. It featured Erwin Splettstösser, Brigitte Borchert and Wolfgang von Waltershausen, amateur actors whose day jobs were those they portrayed in the film and to which they had returned by the time the film was released.

however, and reversed its romantic dream, the hero was brought into closer proximity. So close that he ceased altogether to be a hero and his example to represent a moral imperative. American films have for some years now propagated the ideal of the decent man with a simple heart who is happy if he can find his girl and need attend to nothing more ambitious than mere living. His example challenges us neither morally nor intellectually. Just like the old-fashioned romanticism of make-believe worlds, modern matter-of-fact romanticism avoids both the challenge and the pathos of a possible or actual heroism.

Objectivity and Reality

Thus has the wonderful realism of the modern film degenerated in the hands of the average film-maker into a petty bourgeois ideology. An ideology of objectivity, of a mode of objective documentation containing no emotive interpretation of a kind that might challenge us or call for critical judgement.

Objectivity has become a widely used slogan of German aesthetic criticism, and for that reason needs further comment here.[6] Above all, the point must be made that in its current form this is nothing more nor less than a revolutionary or socialist slogan, which people imagine stands somewhere on the left. But, on the contrary, as an image of the Taylorized world, this objectivity has emerged from the world view of the capitalism of the big trusts. It is the aesthetic of the production line, the last stage of the 'reification' that Karl Marx defined as the greatest curse of bourgeois capitalism.

What Marx called reification was precisely this process of objectification. He describes it as the 'spectral objectivity' characteristic of all the expressions of capitalist society: an objectivity that almost entirely obscures from view the essential quality of those expressions, which is that that they are relations between human beings. The result of reification is that a man's own labour, his own life, comes to stand opposed to him as an independent being, alien to man and obedient to laws of its own. (And therefore easy to photograph.) Human beings become mechanical parts inserted into a mechanical system, alienated from their individuality. (They become, in other words, impersonal! Devoid of a private destiny.) Such is the process of objectification as described by Marx. What it produces is an impotence that manifests itself as objectivity, and that cannot transcend a passive, contemplative stance.

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6. The reference is to the *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement of the 1920s, sometimes referred to in English as the New Objectivity. Its outstanding representatives were Otto Dix and Georg Grosz in art, Hindemith and Kurt Weill in music, Ernst Jünger and Erich Kästner in literature, as well as the new photography of Albert Renger-Patsch and August Sander.

False Opposition

There can be no doubt that the need for reality originally arose from a rebellion against a deceptive romanticism. But individual realities do not add up to reality. Facts do not amount to the truth. In contrast, even a fairy-tale can convey the meaning of larger complexes, the meaning of reality. So there is no reason to mistrust every poem one comes across!

The same critics who call for a rigorous naturalism seem unable to stifle their enthusiasm for Chaplin. So do his films depict life 'exactly as it is'? Is life really exactly like the gold-diggers he depicts in *The Gold Rush*?[7] Is the figure of Chaplin, indeed, a figure drawn from everyday reality? However we may answer this, in watching the grotesque and fantastic scenes in Chaplin's films it is hard to avoid the impression of truth. For the opposite of 'false' is not 'real' but 'genuine'. The opposite of 'deceptive' is not 'real' but 'truthful'. Even the opposite of the 'unreal' in art is not documentary factuality but the living, the palpably concrete. Even a Chaplin fairytale, then, can be genuine, truthful and alive.

Man is Part of the Picture

It is undoubtedly the case that knowledge of reality is a precondition of liberation from every false ideology. The need for factual knowledge is the desire of the free political consciousness to orient itself. But, if this same objectivity excludes the inner life of man, it turns into a reactionary ideology. For man himself, with all the resonances he shares with the world around him, forms part of factual reality. Man in his yearnings, his fantasies and dreams. If these are to be given artistic form, more is needed than the mere reportage of 'tangible' things. What is required to give shape to the intangible atmosphere of reality is the sensibility and imagination of creative writers. Writing is a natural human organ for the perception of a reality that may not be tangible, but is perfectly real for all that.

Of course, the universal is more important than the private, the law more important than the isolated case, the mass more important than the individual. But, in art, universal law can be represented convincingly only if it can be shown that it applies in every concrete instance.

The pedantic philistine exponents of objectivity reject personal psychology of every kind. But, if film-makers are to show how much psychology depends on social context, they will have first regularly to portray it. If we fail to identify in individual destinies the universally valid and representative elements of human fate, we do not solve the problem of the concrete individual, but merely evade it. The mass psyche manifests itself as much in the attitude of individuals as elsewhere. And, where it does so, the task is not to show the human being in the mass but the mass in the human being.

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7. *The Gold Rush* (1925), written and directed by Chaplin, who also stars in it.

Russian Developments

The development of the Russian film is highly instructive as an illustration of my general thesis. Above all else, Russian films are not 'objective', even though their possession of a revolutionary and socialist spirit can scarcely be gainsaid. They have great pathos, they are moving and they are consciously concerned to provoke emotional reactions. In doing so, they do not care in the least about naturalism even though they master it effortlessly. But when the Tartar hero of *Storm over Asia* cuts down the entire English officers' mess with his sabre and then, as swashbuckling as any Fairbanks hero, pulls down the entire building with his bare hands; and when subsequently the Tartars storm in amid a cloud of dust, these scenes are both overwhelmingly thrilling, and the expression of a deeply authentic ecstasy. But objective reality they certainly are not, any more than is the moving happy ending of *The End of St Petersburg*, where the woman with the fried potatoes looks for her husband and finally discovers him, beaming with joy, surrounded by the splendours of the throne room of the tsars. There is a profound symbolic truth in this scene. But it cannot be called objective. Can there be anything more fantastic than the struggle of the women's battalion in *October* or the bull-mating scene in *The General Line*? No! The truly revolutionary film has nothing in common with the slogans of German objectivity.

Three Stages

As far as the portrayal of human beings and the masses is concerned, we can today distinguish three stages in the development of the Soviet film. It began with *Battleship Potemkin* and Pudovkin's *Mother*. Sociologically, both films incline towards private motivations. The mother in Pudovkin's film becomes a revolutionary for entirely private reasons. Because her son has been tortured and murdered. Her attitudes are not determined by any general insight or larger feeling. (This is all the more striking as, in Gorki's novel, the mother's transformation is not an immediate reaction to the death of her son, but takes place much later, when she is gradually drawn into the struggle in which her son was previously involved, and replaces the son whom she has now lost by embracing all the oppressed as her children.) The conflict on the *Potemkin* also appears as a private matter involving one particular battleship. Almost the only factor triggering the unrest is the boat's rotten meat; we see no unrest anywhere but in the mutiny on this ship.

The second stage is exemplified by *October*. By that film and by *The End of St Petersburg*. Here, every private grievance disappears into monumental representations of universal situations. Masses ranged against masses, classes against classes. The development of the plot is not determined by private psychology.

In the third stage, however, there has been a dialectical reversal towards the portrayal of individual destinies and psychology. It was in the nature of the mass films that their dramatic structure was not easily varied. The fate of an individual is more subject to variation than the destiny of the masses. Even though a skirmish on the barricades can be depicted in more than one way, it remains much the same in all essentials. In the case of the impersonal mass film or the historical panoramas of the Civil War, little room thus remained for further development.

For this reason, the next stage saw the Soviet Russian film reverting to the portrayal of individual destinies, of private psychology. This is not in every sense a backwards move. For what we now have is a reversal of the situation in the first Russian films. In *Mother*, a personal theme was included as just one element in a general social movement. More recently, the Russians have attempted to use a personal history to reveal the implications of the social movement. The general situation is illuminated from within the framework of an individual destiny.

This came about with the period of reconstruction. Film-makers now produced films dealing with the slow revolution, intimate studio dramas of the internal spiritual construction of socialist man. Films illustrating the transformation of private into collective life. *Third Meshchanskaia Street*, *The Child of Another*, *The Girl with the Hatbox*, *Fragment of an Empire*,[8] and Dovzhenko's wonderful picture poem, *Earth*[9] – all films that show the impact of the new ideology on the thoughts and feelings of the individual, together with all the conflicts and crises that such a developmental process entails. What we find in these films might be described as a representation of the first consequences of the political revolution for concrete human relations. In *Fragment of an Empire*, the attempt is even made to use the psychological development of a single human being to portray war, revolution and the momentous transformation of an entire social order.

Schematization often distorts ideology, and unfortunately Russian films provide examples enough of this fact. Even in these masterpieces of the art of cinema, the enemy, the bourgeois or kulak, is coarsely caricatured as a villain and a brute. Propaganda is the intention. But it is undermined by its schematic approach. For the injustice perpetrated by one wicked capitalist is no proof of the injustice of the capitalist system. On the contrary, it merely gives to the spectator the escape clause that the fault lies not in the system but in the morality of the individual. The intention to produce socialist propaganda would have been more successfully achieved if these films had shown that even the most well-intentioned capitalist was quite unable to modify the *injustice of the system*.

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8. *Tretya meshchanskaya* (1927), d. Abram Room, featuring Nikolai Batalov, Lyudmila Semyonova and Vladimir Fogel; possibly *Das Kind des anderen* (1916), d. Evgenij Červăkov, featuring Wilhelm Diegelmann and Käte Haack; and *Dewuschka s korobkoi* (1927), d. Boris Barnet. p. 130.
9. *Zemlia* (1930), d. Alexander Dovzhenko, featuring Semyon Svashenko and Stepan Shkurat.

Poetry and Reality

I have said that realities are not enough to produce reality. For reality is to be found only in interconnections, in the law. Facts alone do not yield up the truth. Truth lies in interpretation, the discovery of meaning. The meaning of the totality and the law which governs it can indeed be expressed in a fairy tale (or, equally, an allegory, a parable): a tale that challenges us thereby to adopt an unambiguous point of view. The modern petty bourgeois's stupid fear of poetry and the imagination is the ideology of his fear of interpretation, of meaning made intelligible.

Poets Do Not Lie!

Poets cannot lie because they make no pretence of imparting facts. We can be moved by melodies but not misinformed. Fairy tales can no more mislead us than dreams. Though, of course, literary works can suggest false ideologies, as much as they may contain fake psychology or misleading logic.

The most harmless fabulations are thus those pure inventions that aim merely to entertain and have no deeper intentions. For the complete absence of intellectual interpretation is least likely to lead to *errors*. Only fake psychology strikes a false note. If psychology is entirely absent, the story becomes a weightless, surface art, a playful game with intricately ornamental narratives. And, if we call this 'diversion', then surely diversion into a fairy-tale land where, after all, one cannot stay for ever is far less dangerous than *conversion* to a belief in a reality that is falsified or misrepresented.

Most dangerous of all are facts without truth. Our newsreels, our documentary montage films will, with few exceptions, go down in history as the greatest lies of our age. Two years ago, on the occasion of its foundation, the *Volksfilmverband*[10] wanted to preface its first feature film screening (Pudovkin's *Storm over Asia*) with a newsreel. The newsreel was not to consist of images filmed for the purpose. Instead, film extracts that had already passed the censor, and been seen without difficulty in hundreds of cinemas, were borrowed from Ufa. Yet they were banned by the police! Now, newly arranged, these straightforward photographs of actual facts evidently acquired an interpretation, a meaning, an ideology that seemed to pose a threat to public order. How phoney the montage of these documents must have been originally if their provocative character could have remained hidden for so long!

10. The *Volksfilmverband* was set up in 1928 by a number of left-leaning intellectuals who joined forces with socialists and communists to create a forum in which spectators could express their dissatisfaction with commercial film. Its journal, *Film und Volk*, was the first journal of the German left devoted exclusively to film. Balázs published contributions in it. For an account of the *Volksfilmverband*, see B. Murray. 1990. *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic. From* Caligari *to* Kuhle Wampe. Austin: University of Texas Press.

The Ideology of Absolute and Abstract Films

I have asserted that the demand for a point of view is what the petty bourgeois wish to avoid at all costs. The mere reporting of facts contains no point of view and hence does not impose one on the spectator. This suits the wishes of the petty bourgeois. Nevertheless, facts cannot always be trusted. Even without a particular interpretation, the language they speak is often all too clear. What offers the best protection from any demands for point of view is abstraction. The mobile ornaments, the 'optical music' of abstract films, neither contain nor provoke opinions. They provide an aesthetic escape from the obligations of reality.

Admittedly, the revulsion in the face of reality exhibited by the cinema of *l'art pour l'art* may also be the ideological expression of a protest against a given historical situation. The principle of *l'art pour l'art* espoused by the French Parnassians undoubtedly displayed a passive revolutionary attitude, a reluctance to be part of a despised and hated reality.

But, in turning away from that reality, these poets were forced to adopt the formal dreams of Mount Parnassus, since there existed no other new, revolutionary reality for them to join. The situation is now different; for we live in an age of open, ideologically conscious, revolutionary class struggle. The ideology of abstract art today is at best an escape route for sceptics.

At [a recent] Congress for Independent Filmmakers in La Sarraz, Eisenstein offered an ingenious defence of the abstract film's dissolution of phenomenal forms. He asserted that what mattered was not the imitation of form but the representation of the underlying essence. It would be a kind of cannibalism to imagine that by devouring the form of a phenomenon we might also consume its essence. We are devouring, he maintained, the shape of an object with our eyes in order to incorporate it into our soul.[11]

If Eisenstein were not such a hopelessly Kantian dualist, he would not think this psychophagy cannibalistic. For no phenomenon has an accidental form. It is shaped by its essence. It is the *sole* phenomenal form of this essence and therefore, for the visual experience, it is the essence itself. The phenomenon must not be dissolved and abstracted, but *given a physiognomy* so that its essence may become manifest. For that essence cannot be made to emerge on its own.

11. In 1929, Eisenstein devoted his speech at the Congress of Independent Cinema in La Sarraz to the problem of imitation, which he called the 'key to mastering form.' See M. Iampolski. 1998. *The Memory of Tiresias: Intertextuality and Film*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, pp. 224ff.

Asocial Surrealism

For surrealists, only dreams have true reality. In surrealist films of inner realities, what is represented is not what impinges on life from outside, but whatever thoughts 'occur to us' about life. Instead of a representation of the world, we are given a world of representations in their illogical, purely organic ebb and flow.

Such is the subjective reality that these films contrast with the reality of the social. What they portray are associations that are human, but socially invalid. They may have a decisive influence on individual destiny, but they can never influence the common modes of social intercourse. What we see in this exclusively internalized art, an art that is only psychological, is the last gasp of bourgeois individualism, a last rebellion against the collectivizing tendencies of historical development.

This art takes its psychoanalytical 'excavations' so far as to explain the psychic workings of the mind as the products of physiological processes of the body. And so we arrive at nature itself, a state in which we can no longer make value judgements and no longer need to take responsibility. And precisely that is the object. Art serves merely as an ideological cloak.

The body now becomes entirely private, no longer conditioned by any interpersonal process of communication. The body signifies absolute isolation, even in sexuality. At the same time, it represents the most unoriginal and non-individual aspect of human beings. Ideas that are immediately physiological in origin resemble one another to the point of utter boredom.

Despite Everything!

The character of a commodity is determined by the interest of the producer and the needs of the consumer. The spirit of films in Europe and America consists almost in its entirety of an amalgam of the ideology of capitalism and the ideology of the petty bourgeoisie. Efforts to alter this by writers at their desks and bohemians in their studios are in vain. It is the law of the market.

Nevertheless! The spirit of films is not identical with the spirit of film. The emergence of the art of the printed book signalled the spread of lies, follies and kitsch. Yet, all this notwithstanding, it was a decisive step in human emancipation. The spirit of technology cannot be hobbled by its occasional abuse. Thus even the cinematograph in its innermost destiny rebels against its owners.

The laws of the film market force each capitalist nation to rein in its own nationalist ideology. Cinema has created the world Esperanto of an internationally comprehensible film language. Understanding, however, acts as an impediment to imperialist propaganda. (The linguistic limitations of the sound film contain the seeds of the decline of Hollywood.) Film is relentless in its creation of a normal human type and

gradually it will even overcome the animal hostility between different races. In its search for profit, capital has been forced to abandon the art of film as a cultural privilege of the ruling classes. Despite everything!

By its very nature the technology of film has abolished the distance between the spectator and a hermetically sealed world of art. There is an unstoppable revolutionary tendency in this dismantling of the solemn distance of the cult performance that surrounded the theatre. The gaze of the cinema is the intimate gaze of a participant. In film there is no absolute and eternally valid standpoint for the gaze. For film is familiar with the meaning of shifting camera set-ups and hence the relative nature of meaning. And even if this technique can be misused for quite dangerous deceptions its underlying spirit is revolutionary. Despite everything!

Film is the art of seeing. It is therefore the art of the concrete. In obedience to its inner destiny it resists the murderous abstraction that has succumbed to the spirit of capitalism, turning objects into commodities, values into prices and human beings into impersonal labour power. Despite everything the photographic technique of the close-up forces film to develop a realism of detail that situates us unflinchingly in present time. We may read, over breakfast for instance, of the 'heroic death' of thousands without losing our appetite. Numbers have no face. Words do not foam at the mouth. But our appetite fades in the face of eyes brimming with tears in close-up, a sound recording of a death rattle. The close-up confronts us. And it is well known that lying is harder face to face.

Despite everything!

Film is the art of seeing. Its innermost tendency is to lay bare and unmask. It may be the most powerful creator of illusion, but it is also quintessentially the art of open eyes. Its realism may sometimes lapse into an ideological evasion of reality, but realism ultimately remains revolutionary. In the struggle for truth, the revelation of factual reality remains the decisive weapon. In the struggle for mankind, the best propaganda is to show us human beings as they are.

The art of seeing does not remain forever in the hands of those who so often prefer to look away. It can never wholly flourish in the hands of those who have something to hide. Those who blinker the lens and cast veils over the photographed object are inevitably handicapped as artists. They lack the full capacity to use the tools at their disposal. For they are forced to blunt their weapons before they put them to use.

What explanation can we find for the miracle of Russian film? In the absence of the most basic technical resources and utterly without experience, the Russians have overtaken the European and American film in the space of five years. This cannot simply be ascribed to the greater talent of Russian directors. It results rather from the fact that the prevailing spirit in Russia is not in conflict with the spirit of film. The tendency of the camera is coequal with the directors' own tendentiousness. The need for political propaganda stirs them to call on all the registers of the art of film.

The spirit of film that I have attempted to describe in this book is the spirit of progress. Despite everything! This spirit predestines the film to become the art of the people, of the people of the world. And, if one day we are able to speak of the people of the world, then we shall find that the film will be there ready and waiting to provide the universal spirit with its corresponding technique of expression.

APPENDIX: REVIEWS

I. Siegfried Kracauer, 'A New Book on Film' (1930)

Béla Balázs, who published a book on film a few years ago, *Visible Man*, has now followed it up with a second book: *The Spirit of Film*. In the meantime, the sound film has acquired a dominant position and trends in the silent film have come to the surface that were difficult to discern earlier on. This new book incorporates them, discusses the changes that have occurred and corrects a number of the author's earlier assumptions. Like his first book, it is not so much a film aesthetic in the narrower sense as the attempt to elicit the meanings provided by film and by film alone. This is not to suggest that it confines itself to the description of significant phenomena in the spirit of a phenomenology, since it also undertakes to interpret them. On the whole, this analysis is carried out from a Marxist standpoint. More accurately, on the foundation of certain ideas oriented towards Russia.

Balázs fulfils his intentions in a methodologically appropriate manner. The materialist dialectic prevents him from subsuming his material under general concepts taken from idealism, concepts that are as abstract as they are empty. It does not deprive him of his capacity for responding to the particular intentions that surface in film. He uses an approach that is doubtless favoured, if not rendered possible, by the knowledge Balázs acquired as a film-maker. I have seen bad films by him. Films that are neither convincing technically nor satisfying ideologically. But, be that as it may, as a theoretician Balázs owes his ability to put his ideas together and make concrete statements to his practical activities as a film-maker. He couches his ideas in a simple style that frequently culminates in dazzling formulations.

His familiarity with the subject gives rise to seminal analyses of individual topics. The close-up is a case in point. It shows, as Balázs accurately observes, the face beneath the play of features, the face that we cannot see. He illustrates its function in the dissolve by referring to the example of the marching feet of the soldiers whose boots change into slippers and ultimately into bare feet. How can it be possible to have a dissolve like this which creates such a sense of the passing of time? The close-up 'does not just isolate its object ... it raises it out of space altogether. No longer bound by space, the image is also not bound by time ... and can be transformed like thought itself.'[1] A number of other insights

about camera set-up and montage are no less illuminating, not least the sections devoted to individual genres. I should like to single out the 'montage essay', a phrase he coined in connection with *Turksib*. The discussions of the sound film are less compelling.

All of these analyses of meaning are rooted more or less in a social theory based on Soviet Russian practice. Thus Balázs takes from there the concept of the fulfilled collective and the positive approach of the masses. It cannot be denied that his method leads to a number of important and useful insights. Chief among them is the realization that by eliminating the distance from the spectator that is characteristic of all the visual arts hitherto, the film becomes an art form that turns towards the masses and has the task of unmasking. (He observes very rightly at the end that the reason why the Russians have such extraordinary achievements to their credit is that their aspirations coincided with the tendencies implicit in the medium of film.) Among the sociologically valuable commentaries that Balázs derives from his general position is his discussion of the weekly newsreels or of a film like *People on Sunday*, which is viewed as 'petty bourgeois romanticism in reverse'.

Admittedly, the Russian doctrines have been introduced wholesale, very much to the detriment of his interpretations. Balázs behaves like a convert. They are not a living source for him; it is rather that he feels secure in them. He takes over the entire complex of Russian ideology without reservations. Since he adopts them in the ready-made form we are accustomed to, without following them back to their origins and thinking them through from the inside, his conclusions inevitably remain somewhat shallow. What I have in mind here is the far too simplistic explanation of the petty bourgeoisie – he fails entirely to do justice to the figure of the detective, for example. Another instance is his problematic assertion that the close-up and in general the closeness of the camera to its object reveal the general trend to simplicity that stems from 'the present generation's sceptical view of the traditional forms of expression of the feudal and old bourgeois mentality'.[2] Furthermore, there is the naive demand in the context of the dominance of the sound film: 'Now at last is the time for the poets to become active in film. The best and the greatest. The time is now!'[3]

And, finally, there is his overestimation of this or that Russian film with their stale ideologies (e.g. Dovzhenko's *Earth*). To say nothing of the fact that such unexamined attitudes make it impossible to demonstrate the meaning of films which are not dominated by mass experience. Balázs does in fact appear to realize this since there are occasional deviations from his main line, tacit concessions to the world of bourgeois ideas. On the whole, however, his focus is insufficiently sharp.

Despite all this, the book is a forerunner and forerunners have a hard time. It contains a host of good insights. And everyone can benefit from reading it.

1. See p. 134.
2. See p. 105.
3. See p. 204.

II. Rudolf Arnheim, *The Spirit of Film* (1930)

Béla Balázs was writing about the art of film before any such thing existed. And today, when it has already ceased to exist and we live in hope of its resurrection, he has taken up his theme again in a new book. (*The Spirit of Film*, published by Verlag Wilhelm Knapp, Halle, which is selling the paperback – 217 pages without illustrations – for eight Marks each.) His knowledge of film does not just come from his experiences as a spectator; he has himself written screenplays and worked on the German versions of great Russian films. And, since he is a highly sophisticated stylist, the films that he has watched so appreciatively are recalled with great vividness in his book. Not every practitioner is able to say something worth reading about his field of expertise. Of course, we should pay close attention to them when they talk about 'purely technical matters', since in doing so they often let slip valuable insights into the mysteries of their art. But when they set out to tell us about these mysteries, we mainly hear the typical clichés of the half-educated, groping their way towards the uncanny realms of the spirit in a reverent but unfocused manner. 'In the final analysis film is a cosmic experience and as such not capable of definition.' But why invent quotations? 'What was lacking was the pearl of eternal value that had been experienced from the innermost depths of the soul.' And 'Not for nothing did Lessing reveal to us the pathways and boundaries in his Laokoon study.' Such pearls of wisdom are to be found in Hans Kahan's *Dramaturgie des Tonfilms* [Dramaturgy of the Sound Film], (Verlag Max Mattisson, Berlin SW 68). Here too we hear the voice of a practitioner, but one for whom the world consists entirely of clichés. He thinks he is talking about art but what we hear reeks of the world of the studio. He consistently misses the point of all the crucial questions and the laws of art that he promulgates have been countersigned by the production manager. He quotes Rabbi Akiva when he wants to say that something is old hat. His idea of logic is visible from the statement that 'If we take film straight from life and are overwhelmed by powerful impressions, we are forced to think primarily of the newsreel.' And here is his style: 'The hit song has become an epidemic, seldom a pleasant one.' Sometimes he forgets himself and lets himself go in studio jargon of the very worst kind: 'Since life is sometimes kitschy enough to bring conflicts to an end with fatal consequences …' and 'If you go in for naturalism Russian style …' On the back cover of this curious publication we see the author laughing. The reader cannot help doing likewise.

   The book by Béla Balázs simply towers above this one. As far as he is concerned, it was indeed not for nothing that Lessing analyzed the Laokoon group. We sense on every page that the author had a genuine instinct for art before he undertook to explore the limits and possibilities of the new pictorial art. He is helped in this by the fact that he has greater imaginative powers than is customary among theorists. Seven years ago he predicted

the forms of the silent film and now he provides us with an astoundingly vivid and versatile account of the sound film and colour film. He sees films that have not yet been made. And indeed the merit of his book lies in the profusion of points of view and examples that he spreads out before the reader, admittedly without always placing them in the appropriate context. Balázs's mind responds more actively to the sensuous than to questions of rational order and indeed he is so overwhelmed by his subject matter than he is unable to get a proper grip on it himself. Unable consistently to separate the office of the legislator from that of the chronicler, he abstains from judgement and surrounds every film with a luminous halo of metaphor which gilds the wheat and the chaff in equal measure. He brings a whole heap of things together, a heap criss-crossed by intricately constructed passages – but a heap nevertheless. Suggestions and questions are to be found in profusion. The reader's hunger is aroused, but not satisfied. Balázs provides us with all the materials needed for a superlative aesthetics of film. The book that he has not written is outstanding.

His preference for sensuous and vivid detail is linked with the fact that he approaches film from above, not below. He feels stimulated by the challenge of analyzing the great successes of the cinema, as we can see from his amazingly apposite comments on surrealist films and cartoons. But he feels less comfortable starting from the basic elements (although he has not ignored these entirely) and constructing a system from the ground up on the basis of a concrete psychological analysis of the 'characteristics' of film. Only by doing that could we arrive at universally valid rules that are precise enough to give the reader the stable foundation of knowledge that he desires.

Such a method based on the elements has the disadvantage, not just in aesthetics but in all the sciences, that its general laws only achieve a crude approximation to the individual work and are unable to explain its unique character. This is particularly irksome in art. But if what is required is knowledge rather than just enjoyment and pleasure then such drawbacks have to be accepted. And the fact is that the labour of the theorist can lead us much closer to the heart of the matter than people generally recognize.

However, while bearing this in mind, we should not allow ourselves to forget that in his book Balázs has shown us a hundred new and important things that no one had spoken about hitherto. Moreover, he asks many questions to which answers are now overdue. Anyone in search of a stimulus to his own thinking, anyone in search of the right starting post and the general direction will find all he needs in Balázs. As to externals, it would be a good idea if the readers of a second edition were allowed to benefit from a thorough revision of the text. Holywood, la petit Lili, Renald Colman, Ramon Nowarro, Feyeder's Johanna film, Basset, Walt Withman, Winkelmann, Extase, 'Premiereplan', Thema Con variazione, Tempis, déjà vue, 'Phokus', eine dantesque Vision, 'storys' – such clangers should not be allowed.

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