Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory

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Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory. *Visible Man* and *The Spirit of Film*
Béla Balázs, edited by Erica Carter, translated by Rodney Livingstone

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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 művészetfilozófiája* (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.

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 művészetfilozófiája* (*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