ACTA UNIV. SAPIENTIAE, FILM AND MEDIA STUDIES, 5 (2012) 73–86

The Face of the Landscape in Béla Balázs's Film Theory[1]

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Abstract. In establishing the concept of cinematic image, Béla Balázs's film theory relies on terms and concepts drawn from classical aesthetics. The everyday (and aesthetic) situation of viewing nature implies totalisation and anthropomorphism of nature, distanciation. Balázs, in contrast, opts for the merging of distant contemplation and absorbed participation, which makes his aesthetic position slightly different from that of his early mentor, Georg Simmel. This is part of his conceptualisation of cinema as a new site of articulation, a negotiation between subject and object, body and spirit, flesh and soul, surface and depth, inside and outside. Accounting for the structure of looking as both the subject and the object are becoming images, Balázs adopts a surprisingly modernist position which anticipates the function of the landscape in Antonioni, Pasolini, and Godard.

The primary concern of early film theoreticians or aestheticians was to establish the medium specific features of cinema which would grant the status of art to this new medium. In the 18–19th century aesthetic thinking, differentiation of various branches of art was possible based on the theory of beautiful and on demarcations draught between art and nature, art and purposeful action. At the same time, the specialisation of arts and media – based on their "material" or signifying possibilities – led to the sovereignty of literature as a paradigmatic branch of art and to a monomedial narrowing down of the other arts (viewed by Pfeiffer [1999] as configurations of media). Assigning a place for cinema within these terms was not an easy task, considering the altogether new experiences viewers of the first moving pictures were confronted with. My paper deals with Béla Balázs's writings on cinema which manifest the ambition of both linking the aesthetic experience with cinematic spectatorship and setting forth the novelty of this experience. My proposal is a contribution to the analysis of one moment of the transition

1 This paper was supported by the János Bolyai research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. For their suggestions at various stages of the writing, I would like to thank Ervin Török and Ronan McKinney.

between a traditional way of defining aesthetic experience and accounting for a new type of mediation. In this respect, I regard the concept of the medium as a historical configuration affected by the unceasing competition among media, the relation between arts and media.[2]

Béla Balázs is acknowledged today as a controversial figure living and working in a period deeply troubled by political and cultural problems. In the early days of his youth, these concerns were shared by a group of young intellectuals gathering around their most prominent figure, György Lukács. Dismissing the values of the 19th century positivism, nationalism and the mainstream artistic tendencies of their era, they were critical towards the modernist projects coming from the West, too. In the void of this spiritual crisis, they sought for aesthetic solutions answering both the situation of the alienated individual and the problems of society. In Balázs's *Journals*, there is a recurrent archetypical situation in the several attempts to formulate the basic mechanism of aesthetic experience. This situation concerns the conscious split between, but also a possible fusion of distant contemplation and absorbed participation. In an entry from 28 May 1904, he notes: "I have to see myself writing [...] for my mood to be complete it is necessary the sensory experience of my loneliness, of the beauty of my situation born from my imagination. And this is the way I view nature, too. When I take a look from the mountain-top crest wandering in the mountains, when I see big lumps of mountains, I love to feel myself in the landscape [*táj*],[3] to imagine my posture in it, to see everything together with myself" (Balázs 1982, 41).[4]

"Seeing myself seeing" or being distant and being in the situation at the same time is accounted for as an experience related to landscape painting in a later

2 Mary Ann Doane formulated the question in a very elegant and inspiring way: "The proliferation of terms such as multimedia, mixed media, intermedia, and hybridization in recent years does not necessarily herald the end of the notion of an isolated medium or of these debates about medium specificity. Implicit in the concept of intermediality, for instance, is a drama of identity and its loss and subsequent regeneration. As media converge, they do not simply accumulate but generate new forms and possibilities that rely on the 'haunting' effect of earlier singular media (see Bolter and Grusin)" (Doane 2007, 148).

3 The Hungarian word "táj" (used in this form as a concept in his film aesthetics, too) has many senses: it primarily denotes a land, a region or area, and it is used in relation to nature. Evidently, as Balázs remarks "not every piece of land is a landscape" (1982, 54). The land appearing in an image (the proper landscape?) is expressed in Hungarian (as in English) by a compound word: "tájkép" (land + image). I will mark this distinction between the Hungarian words, as Balázs uses the expression of "tájkép" once in this passage. Of course, "táj" and "tájkép" are synonymous, but the difference still merits attention, even if Balázs intends to integrate the imagistic features of the landscape already in the land itself.

4 Unless otherwise noted, the passages from Hungarian are my translation, I. F.

entry from 1905: "nature without man – even if it brings a wild devotion in me sometimes – does not satisfy me in itself. It is an old experience that I prefer painted landscapes with one or two figures which encompass the mood of the landscape [*táj*] in a way. If this is the case, I am yearning to belong to that region [*belevágytam a vidékbe*] and to meet that person. In nature, what interests me is its relation with man. (Moods which are related to lands [*táj*] and which are the essence of their beauty and the purpose of the art relating to them, are nothing else than this relation. The painter beholds what that is and emphasises what it is in relation with.) […] When I am wandering about outside and I feel the soul of nature, on the highest degree of ecstasy and tension, I always wait for it: now, now! It must be that someone is coming to meet me at that turning point, a man whose surroundings are these, for whom the feeling which heaves in me now is his essence, a man with whom we would recognise and understand each other. *The man in whom this surrounding nature became conscious of itself*" (Balázs 1982, 210).

These expressive, immersive and conscious relations to nature are the cornerstones of Balázs's aesthetics entitled *Aesthetics of Death*, published in Hungarian in 1908 and dedicated to Georg Simmel. The axiom of this aphoristic and often paradoxical treatise on the meaning of art is that "self-consciousness of nature is man, self-consciousness of man is art" (Balázs 1908, 18). These enigmatic and rather poorly elaborated formulations hint at different levels of consciousness and qualities which transcend nature, respectively man. Art excels by giving form to the formless, as the highest form of consciousness. The *Aesthetics of Death* oscillates between the Kantian position that art is a transcending intuition of the Whole, a special attitude in perceiving nature, life, man, and the Nietzschean conjecture that every giving of form has to do with death and closure: "if death gives form to every thing, then I kill what I form. Every portrait is a partial suicide…" (Balázs 1908, 35). How does the cinema give form to nature and man? What is the status of the image as an art form and as a form of mediation?

The main point that Balázs's first film aesthetics, *Visible Man* (1924) hinges on, is the project of establishing a concept of cinematic image. The new visual dimensions of the moving image make possible the replacement of a conceptual culture and the propagation of a visual culture. The aesthetic project set forth in both his aesthetics, *Visible Man* and *The Spirit of Film* (1930), is to view cinema as a new site of articulation, a negotiation between subject and object, body and spirit, flesh and soul, surface and depth, inside and outside. *The Visible Man* and *The Spirit of Film* propose to define the novelty of the new cinematic medium in the context of a visual culture which promised to make man visible again. While *legibility* based on printed words made the expressive potentialities of the body

unnecessary, the token of the new *visibility* is the body and its movements, opposed to the conceptual culture which "buried [human beings] under mountains of words and concepts" (Balázs 2009, 11). Balázs does not analyse this transition step by step, instead, he invests the new medium with aesthetic claims "elevating" it to the status of art.

In *Visible Man*, the initial valuation of the image is followed by many rival – and often hardly reconcilable – definitions. The concept of the (cinematic) image has also a wide range of synonymous expressions: face, physiognomy, body, gesture, surface – these translations of the image render the concept highly ambiguous. The "language" of film (or of gestures, of physiognomy) reveals a new way of seeing and experiencing through the expressive qualities of the previously degenerated and atrophied body. However, the body in itself cannot become "a sensitive medium of the soul" (Balázs 2009, 12), it needs a secondary shaping or processing through language – a language that offers a "visual corollary of human souls immediately made flesh" (Balázs 2009, 10). But how can film guarantee the passage between or the conjunction of soul and flesh, body and spirit, and not reproduce the shortcomings of verbal language which crystallised the soul through words, but left the body soulless and empty? Is this visual "corollary" a mere supplement or an unalterable consequence of the "soul made flesh?" Man becomes visible through a visible body, but does this body render the human soul, or rather "the spirit of film," the aim of the second aesthetics? These are the central figures and tropes of the Balázsian text, and they require a close examination before we term or classify his theory as "modernist," "anthropomorphic," or "revelationist."[5]

The body for Balázs is a multiple site of passage: something that is shaped by and shown by the language of film (a signified) hitherto invisible, and the site of signification through which something else will be shown or articulated (a signifier). In Foucault's terms, the body described by Balázs is a "heterotopia," a locus gathering multiple contrasting efforts of signification or translation and a master-word organising different fields of understanding: 1. the surface of unconscious inheritance (our gestures reflect "the spirit of … ancestors," Balázs [2009, 13]); 2. something that is produced by culture, but in which culture itself can materialise; 3. both the expression of personal and individual traits and the token of "redemption from the curse of Babel" isolating people from each other (2009, 14); and 4. as a catalogue of "standard forms" (2009, 13), body language requires a grammar and a vocabulary which can be learned, but "it lacks strict and binding rules" (2009, 13).

5 These are the labels Balázs is often tagged with in contemporary film theory: see Aumont (2003), Koch (1987), Turvey (2008).

The oppositional logic between exterior/interior, surface/depth is always transcended in Balázs; he is proposing terms which contract and display the opposites in a single term – often concluding in paradoxical statements. Film, for example, both belongs to the surface and has (?) a "deeper meaning," belongs both to the visible and the invisible. "A good film does not have 'content' as such. […] Film is a *surface art* and in it whatever is inside is outside" (2009, 19). On the other hand, "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" [emphasis in the original] (2009, 20). Surface and depth, inside and outside are in a vertiginous circulation as in a revolving door: these untotalisable definitions of film are based on the uncontrollable, divergent potentiality of the visual and auditory dimensions articulated in the two aesthetics.

To understand this kind of thinking, we must reveal the special movement and articulation of the Balázsian text. The style of his essayistic prose could be characterised through the short fragments based on an idea or metaphorical phrasing. This fragmentary character suits very well the theme of the writings – cinema –, as it reveals different aspects or views relating to the same concept or theme. The progression of the text charges the reader with the task of comprehending different aspects and viewpoints. Given the fact that the value and meaning of his terms and concepts changes from passage to passage, one can demonstrate the most contradictory thesis citing one or the other locus of the text. However, if we want to understand the claims of the text, we must comprehend it with taking into consideration the part–whole relationships – this is something that Balázs considered substantial in the case of cinematic spectatorship, too. In the case of reading, as in the case of film viewing, this means the linking of the movement of the eye (horizontally through the lines and also linearly in the case of viewing) and the comprehending work of the mind. Linking the sensory and the cognitive realms is precisely the project of aesthetics, that is, to render mutually adequate form and content, experience and cognitive categories. However, as one critic of "aesthetic ideology," Paul de Man pointed out: comprehension through the mind operates through gains and losses, and there is a moment when, saturated, it cannot encompass, or more precisely name, figure and hold together (i.e. substitute) the whole in itself. Instead, it represents a leap which stands for a lack, a failure of understanding.[6] It is for this reason that reconstructing (comprehending) the vivacity and movement of

6 Here I am alluding, of course, to the Kantian description of the mathematical sublime and de Man's further elaborations on this category. See Kant (1987); de Man (1996).

the Balázsian text does not mean the identification of a single correct meaning, but rather experiencing the multiplication of the text through the different emphases assigned to it. It is Balázs who phrases this feature of all cultural products: "anything that is not capable of reinterpretation will perish. Only the possibility of ever new misunderstandings can guarantee repeated attempts to understand anew" (2009, 216).[7] The articulation of Balázs's texts often resembles that of poetic texts: the fragments are divided into small fragments based on contrasts, using exclamations, figures and tropes, chiastic structures. The task of the reader as (s)he strives to comprehend the text corresponds to the activity to which Balázs gives the name of "theory:" the field which introduces us into an unknown territory which lacks the familiarity of experience.[8]

I will concentrate now on the problem of the face and of reading faces. Reflections on the close-up and the face are considered the pillars of his film aesthetics, even if these reflections never have been carried through their final consequences by the critical reception. According to Jacques Aumont, for example, his aesthetic is "idealistic," since "it is based on the hope of a revelation that it believes is possible because it believes fundamentally in the face as an organic unit, infrangible, total" (Aumont 2003, 139).[9] In my paper I will try to elaborate on another way of reading Balázs, taking my examples from his aesthetical writings and autobiographical novel as well.

The concept of the "face" has two major applications in Balázs. On the one hand he speaks of the face of things (everyday objects, the landscape, the mass, the machine, the race, class, etc.) – face here is attributed to things which do not have a "face" in the literal sense of the word. On the other hand there is the face of man framed by the close-up, often described in terms of "struggle", "field of battle" (2009, 31) or "duel of facial expressions" (2009, 37). The face of man at the same time can be "invisible," "polyphonic" (2009, 34.). It seems at first sight that in the first use of the term "face" Balázs makes a figural transfer or extension of the literal sense. In rhetoric, the figure of giving face is accounted for by the figure

7 This claim is announced in relation to the future of the sound film: because it is based on the photographed theatre, sound film has no future, according to Balázs, because it fixes every accent, intonation, etc., while the appeal of theatre consists in ever new interpretations.

8 "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" (Balázs 2009, 6.).

9 Gertrud Koch's thesis on Balázs: "Balázs's strength, after all, rests with his aesthetic analysis of film, his insisting upon the priority of the expressive nature of the image over its semiotic determination" (Koch 1987).

of prosopopoeia which refers to a linguistic positioning (as the etymology of the word denotes: prosopon: 'face, person, mask,' poiein: 'to make').

Let us have a closer look at this figurative concept of the face. Balázs implies that things in themselves do not possess a face, only the way of looking at things can confer a face on them. To see the face of everyday objects means to remove the veil cast on the face by "our traditional, abstract way of seeing" (2009, 47). The face of the landscape presupposes a "subjective relation," too, which gains meaning in two different frames of interpretation. On the one hand this relation can be accounted for as *appropriation and anthropomorphism of the human mind regarding nature*: "Nature's soul is not something given *a priori* that can 'simply' be photographed. [...] 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" (2009, 54). The questioning of this kind of human understanding comes to the fore in *The Spirit of Film* – now in the terms of matter and form, objective and subjective – where it is extrapolated as the Kantian problem of meaning-attribution: "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?" (2009, 165).

Balázs has two answers to this question: 1. Subjectivity is "inescapable," since in the image the position of the subject (its relation to the object) is already inscribed, while objectivity "is no more than an impression that certain shots may consciously create" (2009, 120) (the "reality effect" of cinema later theorised by so many). 2. The possibility of seeing only the objects without the involvement of the formative subjective principle is realised in films which "detach their objects 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" (2009, 165).[10] We can draw two important conclusions regarding this second formulation of "objective" seeing. One is that the objectivity described here repeats the formulation of the effects of the face in close-up,[11] with

10 The dense continuation of this passage also merits attention: "And lo and behold! The same tendency reverses into its opposite. The pure object becomes pure phenomenon. The mere fact becomes mere image. Self-contained reality becomes an impression. In short, the reality film taken to its logical conclusion becomes its opposite: absolute film" (Balázs 2009, 164–165). The coincidence of the terms of opposition can be read in several ways here: as the critique of the oppositional relation in the first place, or as a vertiginous substitution along an invisible axis.

11 Contrary to the close-up of things and parts of the body, the face in close-up establishes a "new dimension." Isolated from its context, the image of the face

one difference: the face brings about an excess of meaning which has similar impact on the viewer as the loss of meaning. Second: subtracting subjective intuition from meaning attribution does not lead us to ontological certainty, as in the case of documentaries: "the image itself can never establish conclusively" if "the filmed events are authentic" (2009, 163) or not.[12]

The counterpoint for the anthropomorphic vision, then, is not some kind of secure and objective notion of reality, but a kind of vision which does not confer form and meaning to things. Balázs describes this kind of seeing in terms of the "invisible" – even in the cases of "proper" faces: there are "nuances about the palimpsest of the facial expressions of Asta Nielsen – 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" (2009, 103). The "invisible countenance" created by the restraint or failed acting of the film star Sessue Hayakawa is another example of conveying a meaning which comes through the eyes, but is something larger than cognition or perception.

Another formulation of this vision, which precedes the meaning attribution of cognition, is made clear in the second definition (more properly, the origin) of the face of landscape: "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" (2009, 54). This should make us skeptical about the "Romantic intimacy with things" (see Tredell 2002, 35), a label Balázs was put under, or at least makes us ambivalent towards it. The face invoked in this passage is not the result of a one-way attribution (it is not an anthropomorphism as in the first case), rather a confrontation ("a face which gazes at us"), as the concepts lined up in the sentences above – emergence, expression, emotion, the claim of understanding and the failure of

detaches itself from space and time, cause–effect relations, from the known categories of our understanding. Interestingly enough, Balázs gives an example which recalls one of the "images" of the Kantian sublime: "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" (2009, 105).

12 According to Balázs, only nature films possess the "absolute evidence of reality" (2009, 163); this impression of reality can be accounted for by the paradox that nature, experienced this way, is observed from an "unnatural" closeness, a mediation which makes our (human) point of view invisible.

comprehension[13] – testify it. The specularity of anthropomorphism which guaranteed the readability of the face of nature *and* of man is suspended here: the invocation through the face is the reverse case of the Romantic apostrophe. Unlike the Romantic poet, who invokes natural phenomena, inanimate objects and deceased persons to create his own poetic consciousness through the apostrophe (see Culler 1981, 149–171), here the landscape has the invocatory power to address the man.

Analysing the everyday landscape viewing situation, which became an exemplary topos in classical aesthetics, too, W. J. T. Mitchell identifies three specific attributes: looking at a landscape means 1. abstraction and totalisation of certain features while dispensing with others ("to ignore all particulars in favor of an appreciation of a total gestalt"); 2. preservation of the subject's position by withdrawing oneself to a "broader, safer perspective, an aestheticizing distance, a kind of resistance to whatever practical or moral claim the scene might make on us;" 3. consciousness of looking, the landscape situation makes visible the structure of looking itself (Mitchell 2002, vii-viii). The exemplarity of the landscape from the perspective of the cinematic image can be derived from the third claim, but – as we will see it – Balázs rethinks the first two claims attached to landscape from a modernist view.

To further elaborate on these points, it may be useful to confront Georg Simmel's and Balázs's conception of landscape. As a disciple of Simmel, Balázs was deeply influenced by the concept of "form," central to Simmel's aesthetic writings. Form for Simmel is a comprehensive, structuring force which is present not only in the reception of artworks, but also in everyday experience. For Simmel, the unifying power which manifests itself in the landscape, the face, the image[14] – aesthetic structures *par excellence* – is accounted for by the intertwining or merging of the subjective and the objective; it is the manifestation of an a-temporal "psychic act," unaccountable in terms of causality or chronological time. This form, in the case of landscape, is accounted for by the "mood" of the landscape, an inseparable and instantaneous configuration or constellation of subjective and objective forces. Mood pertains both to the landscape and to the beholder: it is at one and the same time the projection of a feeling and the form giving unity to landscape. (These two components cannot be

13 The representation of the "horrifying" quality of the machine and of the supernatural is centered around the category of "incomprehensible" or "unfathomable:" "*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*" (2009, 60).

14 See other texts by Simmel: *The Picture Frame: An Aesthetic Study* (1994) and *The Aesthetic Significance of the Face* (1959).

integrated in a cause–effect, before–after relationship.) The landscape achieves in this way what neither nature, nor the individual can achieve: it combines the unity characteristic of nature with the self-contained character of the individual. (Simmel deplores the tragedy of modern individualisation which confronts the subject with an unreconcilable dualism: "the individual entity strives towards wholeness, while its place within the larger whole only accords it the role of a part" [2007, 23].)

Landscape for Simmel is based on the mutual readability of man and nature. This statement, however, stumbles when it comes to formulate "the unique and actual" (2007, 28) mood of the landscape, conceived as the merging of subject and object. The abstractions we use to capture the mood of the landscape ("we call a landscape cheerful or serious, heroic or monotone, exciting or melancholic" [Simmel 2007, 28]) destroy its uniqueness and immediacy.[15] The landscape and its beholder – as a totalised wholeness –, merging into the unity of perception and feeling, proves to be ungraspable and unsignifiable. The "vividness of perception" cannot be "described with concepts" (2007, 28). The failure of signification, of naming does not hinder Simmel to compensate this loss through the unity of feeling.

Balázs takes over this passage from Simmel almost word for word; the landscape of Balázs, however, has an element whose equivalent we do not find in Simmel's account. Returning to the surroundings of Szeged – the birthplace he left in early childhood – he reflects on this experience both familiar and alien in his autobiographical novel,[16] in the following way: "there are lands in which we see something else or something more than beauty. They impress us as physiognomies, they have a definite expression which means something and wants something. I am not thinking of those general contents of mood which usually are designated as kind, severe, melancholic, or heroic. These are only varieties for decorative beauty. The something 'else', however, which you seem to glimpse in certain landscapes, looks back at you from them, as if you were known to them and they were waiting for you in this place to come to this region [*vidék*] finally. This kind of land, as if were touching you, handling you, stabbing you in the heart. It is not only about beauty. Lands that are addressing you in this way are of two different kinds. There is one in which all of a sudden you feel the painful sensation that you are far, in foreign places (and this has nothing to do with geographical distance or the exotic). Still, there are lands which you seem to

15 "It is only by effacing its immediate and actual character that I can reduce it to general concepts, such as melancholic, cheerful, serious or exciting" (Simmel 2007, 28).

16 Other motifs and elements of theoretical writings (as physiognomy, silence, face, for example) are to be found in Balázs's literary works and vice versa – they are often word for word takeovers.

recognise, although you have never seen them before. You recognise them as your proper home. Not as if they were more beautiful or more pleasant than other lands. Not at all. Often the sorrow of resignation melts into this feeling. But you feel as if you were anchored and big gates were closing in on you somewhere, and there is no more to say: here you are home. It is very peculiar that both lands are harrowing, and the two kinds of pain are deeply related. Since that farness, that foreignness is not a random place, but it is *your* farness where you are foreign. That is also your fate, too" (Balázs 1967, 226–227).

The passage could be read as a painful and lyrical account of the lack of identity and the related feeling of homelessness experienced by Central-European Jewish intellectuals, the fate of whom was shared by Balázs. Exile, rootlessness, loneliness from which – Balázs, like so many of his contemporaries – was seeking refuge (in transcendentalism, in Marxism, etc.) to compensate for the lack of national, ethnic, religious or group identity.[17] But it would be mistaken to fix the burden of this passage only in personal anxieties. The question of interest here is how the above mini-narrative stages the relation between subject and object through the concepts of the face, gaze, distance, identification, rupture. There are several outstanding features of the text that are striking in this regard. The first is the attempt to distance the described phenomena from the aesthetic quality of beauty. This implicit critique of beauty is reiterated in the dismissal of anthropomorphisms of land(scape) as "kind, severe, melancholic, or heroic" (human traits transferred to nature). The suspension of all known approaches to the landscape results in submitting oneself to the agency of the landscape. There is almost a tactile, bodily quality to the relation envisioned between the subject and the landscape which in its turn becomes subject, agent of the look. (More precisely, that "certain something more" in the landscape turns out to be the agent of the look.) If the landscape addresses the subject as a body, this contact can be approximated only through emotion and feeling.

Let's investigate the structure of this passage which gives us a model of seeing, more closely. The passage starts out with a model of perception: seeing "more than beauty" in a landscape confers the landscape with "a definite expression." But this expression is not something graspable or signifiable (in this aspect it resembles the category of the sublime in Kantian aesthetics, which is something else than beautiful, too). The landscape-viewer's inability to grasp this something else turns him into the object of the look – the first inversion of the fragment. The formulation ("as if you were known to them and they were waiting for you in this place") recalls Baudelaire's *Correspondances* ("L'homme

17 The passage alludes to the well-known figure of "homesickness in one's own home" of the turn-of-the-century Hungary, deploring intellectual belatedness and appearing mainly with Endre Ady's poems.

y passe à travers des forêts de symboles/Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers"). Baudelaire's "forest of symbols" is not a real forest, nor is Balázs's landscape a site of nature; they are "haunted" by the unknown and frightening despite their familiar gazes. Instead of confusing words, Balázs's landscape issues tactile sensations which can be interpreted as a substitution or extension of the gaze (already described in the ancient Greek philosophy). The exchange between optics and haptics (second inversion) in the second paragraph gives way to the language of emotions. This final inversion (which in its turn is based on chiastic reversals) will bring about a totalisation, a comprehension of that "something more," but not without loss – which is here expressed by the excess of pain and resignation. From the brake and rupture inscribed in the model of seeing – described by the asymmetrical character of the subject's seeing and the gaze of landscape – we end up in the reaffirmation of the sentient subject – through a loss, though.

Landscape is not something to contemplate, but it is not the exclusive object of sensory perception, of immersive absorption either. It hinders the proceeding of the aesthetic understanding, insofar it stages the failure of perception and comprehension, and ends up in an unanswered question regarding the subject. This landscape cannot be accounted for by the categories of closeness, remoteness, familiarity or strangeness. Like silence (another category worth of attention in Balázs), it is a transgressive concept which announces the gap built in the model of cognition. There is always a surplus ("something more, something else") to beauty, to cognition, an excess which cannot be grasped. The passage taken from the autobiographical novel concludes with the description of pain: the foreign landscape presumed familiar or familiar in its foreignness evokes "the sorrow of resignation," renouncing something that never belonged to it (as in the working of the figure of nostalgia). The description dramatises the solipsistic loneliness[18] of the subject, and points to a passage from the prosopopoeia of landscape to the prosopopoeia of man.

The central category of this dramatised situation is the gaze which is also invoked in the description of childhood dreams in the novel. This gaze has an imperative character in its "anxious, meaningless meaningfulness:" "the viola green colour of the sky in a dream can be so blood-curdlingly frightening because it is as if something else would be encompassed in it, something which is not a colour, but some meaning or intention, like a gaze which is fixed at you, like a calling which summons me and wants something from me. As if I have seen something that is not in fact destined to the eyes. As if something strange, not intended for the eye penetrated into my consciousness through my eyes,

18 This is the central category of Balázs's theory of lyric (*A lírai érzékenységről*).

because it could not break through any other way" (1967, 32–33). The sentences resound the statements and the tone of the other passage: "as if," excess, the gaze. This troubling character of this "something more" finds an expression through the exchange between the senses (feeling, looking, touching), reminding one of Baudelaire's *Correspondances* again, where different kinds of sensory perceptions are substituted, exchanged one for the other through the connective "comme," but this enumeration does not transport us to a transcendental realm above the senses.[19]

It is obvious that the above fragments (and many other in Balázs) approximate this very passage from the sensory, phenomenal world to the transcendental. Going beyond the comforting model of subject and object merging in the unity of perception, Balázs suggests that perception, and with that the visible, is made possible by an articulation or inscription which cannot be accounted for in terms of the phenomenal. The gaze of landscape is such a mark. In the "eyes" of the imperceptible and unreadable gaze, man is posited as a question, as a calling or an absence on which the gates of understanding are closed in. This primary and forceful gaze aims at the center of identity, the consciousness, through the eyes, and it is not the object of perception, but rather its condition. By being the object of this gaze can man face the "face" of the landscape. Linking cinema to an aesthetic model of viewing nature and making an image of the seen object and the seeing subject at the same time, accounts for Balázs's efforts to establish a continuity between determining questions of aesthetics and the aesthetic potentialities of the new medium. Accounting for the structure of looking, Balázs adopts a surprisingly modernist position which anticipates the function of the landscape in Antonioni, Pasolini, Godard invoked, for example, by Deleuze in the description of the perception-image.

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19 See Paul de Man's reading of Correspondances: Anthropomorphism and Trope in Lyric (1984).

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