

Béla Balázs

Daydream

Absztrakt

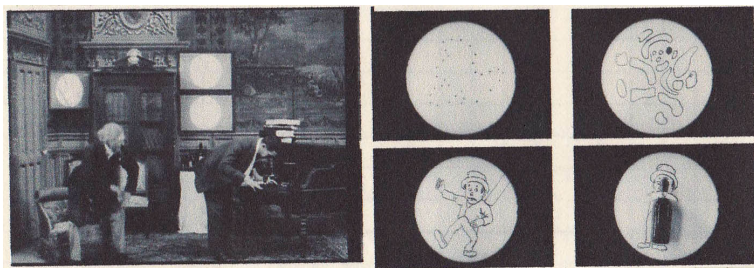
Written during the period leading up to Balázs's first formulation of his theory of film in *Visible Man* (published in 1924), this short meditation on microbes recuperates the biologism of early twentieth-century notions of the unconscious.

Szerző

Béla Balázs (1884-1949) is author of one of the first systematic film theories. *Visible Man* (1924) encapsulates some of the most important concepts and aspects of early and classical film theory. Balázs would revisit his first film aesthetics several times. He contributed to a number of films by writing screenplays and directing.

Daydream

The other day I observed a live cell growth. The cell, however, did not see me. This fact shook my view of the world. For, in fact, if the cell had had an eye, and it had looked straight into my eye, because of its particular perspective, it still would not have perceived my being, my human form [alak]. What is the point of all body culture? Something cell-like comes along and does not even see you. Is it generally a complete illusion, that we are “forms” [alakok]? Although I do not wish to get ahead of myself.



Émile Cohl, *Les joyeux microbes*, 1909

How do we stand with respect to the billions of tiny creatures that inhabit us? Do they have any notion of what the human is like? Do they even suspect that there is such a thing? Do we imagine that we can explain to the unusually vigorous and temperamental sperm-animal that it belongs to a so-called man, and that it is, to some extent, at his disposal? It would laugh.

It is clear, therefore, that this beautiful world's shapes [alakzatai], as we perceive them, are just illusions of the human perspective. Even fleas see the world completely differently. Not to mention microbes.

We *know* that every thing is composed of billions of atoms, each of which has its own form and possibly its own life; however, we do not *see* this; every encapsulating, formative surface [felület] is merely the product of our own superficiality [felületességünk]. No, no, there is no thing-in-itself, things only exist for our sake, or for that of the fleas and the microbes.

From any given perspective, atoms will reconfigure into different shapes, so that those that humans see are only the ideology of their eye. It is not definite that things will always stay the same. But it would not make much difference if they did. Because I can picture to myself quite well that our ancestors of twenty-thousand years ago saw entirely different things in this same nature. It seems that we must also regard modern painting from his viewpoint. Similarity? With what? For it is only in our eyes that forms take shape. The atoms of the world hang together in unified interconnectedness, and if I happen to discern in this distinct shapes, this takes place in a

manner similar to the unexpected discovery of a face in the lines of the wallpaper or in the damp patches of a wall, which in the same location changes every time it is put together.

Of course someone might come and say that we do not just see things, but also touch them. We. But the microbes?

Without therefore considering that the majority of living creatures generally take no note of this, we humans convince ourselves that, in between the solid walls of our epidermis, we are special, unique entities. Although we know that we consist of billions of little, self-sufficient cells, we still think that we form a centrally organized system, a sort of absolute monarchy in which everything serves one human. Agrippa Menenius's reactionary-monarchic parable is not last to blame for this presumption, in which he recounts the tale of limbs failing in their revolt against the stomach. Nonsense! What do cells and atoms know about the limbs they constitute, and what of the centralized state that they apparently inhabit as citizens?

This kind of nationalism must remain foreign to them, especially as they have no less need of the air in their surroundings for survival than they do of the fluids at their service inside their supposed bodies.

The life of these cells is connected to the life of every other cell in nature, and the whole body stands as firmly built into this life as are the cells into the body. They stand in a line one after another leaving no distance between them. Arbitrary and illegitimate political boundaries *seemingly* divide this otherwise unified economic territory.

Science has since long dispensed of its presumptions with regards to an anthropocentric worldview. Nonetheless, even today there exists an anthropoperipheral [*antropoperiferikus*] bias, but this can hardly sustain itself for much longer.

What I therefore wanted to say: the world's atoms line up one next to the other in an unbroken, distance-less interconnectedness, and if I perceive certain groupings of individual shapes, this is merely the mosaic-play of my perceptual mode, even as pertains to my own personal groupings of atoms. The small stones of my mosaic are no more firmly interconnected inside a shape than on either side of its contours. And distance is made of the same material [*anyag*].

This idea of distance must still be thought through. For sometimes I had the feeling – and I had good reason for this – that the world is a mosaic of atoms, and that us humans are in fact what constitute distance.

Translated from Hungarian by Eszter Polónyi

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