

Mechanical Motion and Body Movements in Early Cinema and in Hungarian Film Theory of the 1920s

Absztrakt

The paper traces a trajectory of changes in the concept of movement. The starting point is the beginning of the 20th century, when scientific innovations and theories forward the notion of movement as a master concept, and cinema is accounted for as an “art of movement”, while the end point is the 1920s, when movement is theorized as the proper “matter” of cinema and abstracted into different forms. The celebration of mechanical motion and technology’s unifying and integrating power is demonstrated in the discourses on the automobile as a machine forwarding new forms of movement. In Octave Mirbeau’s 1907 novel the experience of driving is described in similar terms to that of viewing cinema. Both generate images which convert depth into surface, stillness into motion, translating mechanical motion into visual terms. The second part of the paper deals with Hungarian film theories of the 1920s, where movement is conceptualized as a creative force, a medium-specific sensorial experience characteristic to cinema. Both Marsovszky and Balázs seek various modes through which the body becomes meaningful as a site of visibility and a vehicle of movement at the same time. While early cinema used mechanical motion as intensification of its spectacular character, aesthetic writings of 1920s sought for the form which could counterbalance mechanical power or elaborate a new aesthetic experience. In creating the aesthetic premises of an “art of movement”, Marsovszky and Balázs turn to the body: the former is looking for the “resistance” through which movement can be animated, the latter takes the body and the face as models for the elaboration of cinema’s visual semiotics. Balázs’s semiotics of the body is rooted in complex signifying relations and a temporality of becoming. Images do not possess clear-cut boundaries, but they constitute passages between different sign relations or meanings through which the viewer can enter the stage. Dienes’s orchestrics, based on body movement conceived as a “medium”, develop a body culture and practice which stand for the absent film practice of Balázsian ideas of the body.

Szerző

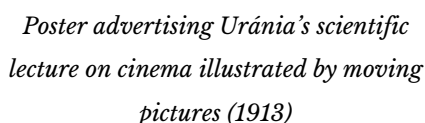
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The terms “movement” and “motion” are the master signifiers of the turn of the 20th century, capturing the spectacular changes in the perception of space and time, as well as changes in their scientific and technological accounts.^[1] By the end of the 19th century the concept of motion became a master term in physics, giving a unifying frame of reference to phenomena previously considered as imponderable and invisible, such as light, heat, electricity and magnetism.^[2] The most frequent topics debated in *Uránia*, a “scientific and popular journal” started in 1900, are the new means of transportation ‘in water, on the ground and in the air’ (bicycle, automobile, tram, underground, railway, seafarers and torpedoes, airships and airplanes), new means of communication (phonograph, telegraph, telephone, optophone, typewriter), physical phenomena and technical innovations related to motion (radiation, the nature of light, space and time, optics, spreading of diseases, the motion of planets and of animals, magnetism, etc.). These inquiries reflected the profound changes of modern life, inflected by a new rhythm felt as a general acceleration of time, and new modes of work and production.

Contemporary with these developments was another technical innovation which relied heavily on the notion of movement and the new meanings attached to it. The novelty of cinema, the “moving photographs” – as Jenő Klupáthy designates it in *Uránia* in 1901 – consisted in the reproduction of (the illusion of) movement. It was a commonplace in the contemporary discourses on early cinema to promote the new medium by establishing a dividing line between what was considered on the one hand *moving, animated, living*, and on the other hand *still, inanimate, inert*: “The moving picture is the photography of movement which presents to us the moving and animated life – or rather produces its illusion. Everybody feels the significance of what we can see in front of us as the course of past events in their complete vividness instead of lifeless and stiff pictures...”^[3] The animation, movement, liveliness produced by cinema suddenly made all other media the requisites of a by-gone world.



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*Photograph of one venue of the Millennial Exhibition
(1896)*

The first public projections of moving images in Hungary were displayed with the occasion of the Budapest Millennial Exhibition in 1896 celebrating 1000 years of the establishment of the Hungarian state. Shorts like *Corbett and Courtney Before the Kinetograph* (1894), *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots* (1895), *The Kiss* (1896) were exhibited in a separate pavilion built for the Edison kinetoscope, while at another location half-hour spectacles were shown using the Lumière cinematograph.^[8] Among the many spectacles, exhibitions (panoramas, dioramas, wax-works, etc.) and the bustle of the millennial celebrations the moving picture shows went relatively unnoticed in Budapest: the shows were advertised in newspapers and the mechanism of recording and projection described in photographic trade journals. Starting with 1908, however, writers, public figures began to deal with the workings and effects of motion pictures, the common ground of these discussions being the centrality of movement. Ernő Bresztovszky described the process of viewing cinema as a “nerve stimulating” and agitating experience derived from the quick and exciting presentation of the events: “during five minutes trains collide, the father dies, the family lives in penury, the child sent to beg is kidnapped, then it is found, the bandits captured, the lottery ticket bought in better days turns up, moreover top prize is won, the mother gets medication and recovers, the child sits in the chair in new clothes and he has picture books”.^[9] Frigyes Karinthy, a renowned writer, explained his enthusiasm about cinema in terms of movement and motion: “I had enough occasions to get used to the motion pictures or get bored with them, but I feel a rapturing wonder, the admiration of the invention every time the living and thrilling screen, on which a living life swarms and bustles, appears before my eyes.”^[10] In an article published in 1913 Artur Bárdos lists the most cinematic, “beautiful, vivid, and sweeping” objects of films: nature’s lively realities, the rolling sea, steamboats and waterfalls, the train exiting the tunnel or entering the station, the train from inside as the landscape tears away, polar expeditions, airplanes, and above all the human figure in motion.^[11]

If early cinema celebrated movement by presenting objects possessed by it, subverting a stable spectatorial position by astonishing views, magic tricks and sensations addressed to the eye and reaching to the body, the centrality of movement is still on the agenda in the 1910s and 1920s, but already in an aestheticized and more abstracted sense. In the middle of the 1920s major works offer different ways to theorize cinema’s special relation with movement. The argument that

cinema is the art of movement is inscribed in a two-fold logic or frame of reference:

1. motion, movement, and speed attest to cinema's actuality and modernity;
2. movement expressed or represented in cinema constitutes the medium-specific feature which differentiates cinema from all the other art forms.

It is the specificity of Hungarian film theoretical writings that in explaining the new medium's novelty they resort to aesthetic terms, and aesthetics is a primary interpretative model instead of social or cultural ones. The stake of these writings as early as 1908 is to acknowledge the threat cinema posed for the traditional division of arts and to take part in the redistribution of the domain of arts. Movement in this context testifies to the modernity of cinema, and the claim that cinema could become the only art form embodying and representing movement is repeated over and over again. In reality, movement, speed and deconstruction of space were general tendencies in contemporary art: montage and collage techniques in visual arts and literature, as well as theatre, made reception of the artworks a reconstruction of their movement, following possible routes and trajectories by juxtaposing multiple moments in time and several viewpoints. Insisting on the idea that cinema holds precedence in the representation of movement is another variation on the rivalry between various media and art forms, which has been known for centuries.^[12]

Cinema and movement can be connected on many levels, from the physically perceived motion which is accessible to our senses, to the more abstract categories as change, development, or contingency. This latter, figurative sense implies that movement is not restricted to the perceivable world, and what we perceive as motionless can still be changing, as in Heraclitus' aphorism, "Everything changes and nothing remains still" (*Cratylus* 402a). What follows is a proposal to investigate the changing meanings and valuations of the terms "motion" and "movement" in correspondence to the changing forms of cinema.

1. Mechanical power and motion: the automobile and early cinema

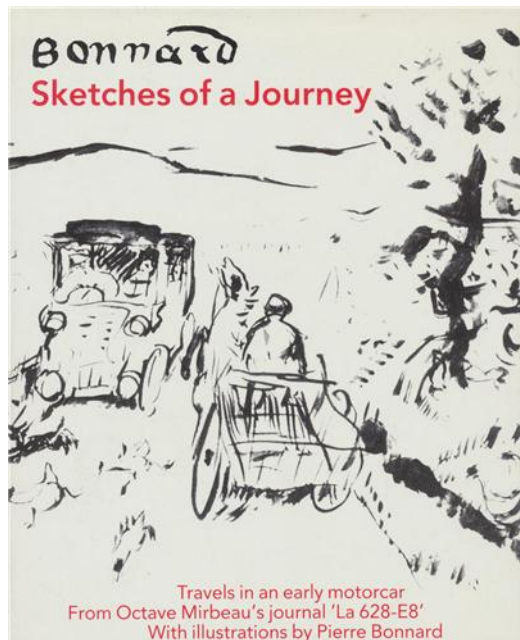
"The rhythm of our lives has changed overnight. We are rushing towards
an unknown and new world and our nerve fibers are filled with the expectation of the new."

(Miklós Marsovszky: *A dráma válsága*, 1928)

One of the recurrent statements in the discourse on film characterizing the first decades of the 20th century in Hungary is the centrality of movement, the ability of cinema to translate, express or show movement in a way earlier media and art forms were not capable of. The turn of the century witnessed a "cult" or "culture of speed", while the efforts to "conquer time and space"^[13] were felt as imperative in order to keep pace with the new rhythm of a new life. A French statesman and

historian, Gabriel Hanotoux summarized this fear of not losing touch with anything new or of becoming isolated in time and space in a way that many of us can identify as symptomatic of our present anxieties: “We are burning our way during our stay in order to travel through more rapidly.”^[14] Taking the spatial figure of the road or path as a starting point, this formulation suggests that life becomes the speed with which one runs through it, involving space and time in a vicious circle; speed aims to overcome space but at the same time annihilates it, and the feeling that there is no place to stay generates a continuous flight into the future.

This sensation of moving forward while devouring space corresponds to the new experience of traveling by automobile; this new machine in Octave Mirbeau’s novel published in 1907 (and dedicated to Fernand Charron, one of the first cars constructors), acquires the status of a protagonist, serving, at the same time, as the “vehicle” of the story, too. The narrative structure of the novel comes close to the travelogue and picaresque in the sense that the journeys by car are punctuated with different kinds of digressions (anecdotic stories, depictions, meditations, satirical accounts, etc.). Narrative is fueled by the obstacles which bring the linear movement of the car and of travelers to a stop. The sensation of driving and speeding is accounted for by vivid descriptions of bodily and emotional experiences. In this way the text is torn apart between perception and narration: the sensory experience of being in motion and the fixed perspective from which a story is recountable. Therefore traveler and storyteller are mutually exclusive postures of the autobiographical first person. The motorist traveler cannot offer the narrator’s comprising perspective of the journey, he is rather overwhelmed by it, struck by continuous sensations and “a sickness of the mind”, that of speed: “Life comes hurtling at him and buffeting him from every direction, as in a mad cavalry charge, only to melt flickeringly away like a film [*cinématographiquement*] or like the trees, hedges and walls that line the road. Everything around him, and inside him, dances, leaps and gallops, in inverse proportion to his own movement; not always a pleasant sensation, but powerful, delirious and intoxicating, like vertigo or fever.”^[15]



*The English translation of Mirbeau's novel,
illustrated by Bonnard*

Linking the experience of driving with cinematic viewing, Mirbeau here anticipates Paul Virilio's theory on "dromoscopy" (from the Greek *dromos* meaning "course" or "track"): the car for Virilio is a picture-making and transforming machine.^[16] Through the movement of the automobile all the visible things from the outside come with a great speed from the opposite direction, crushing themselves on "the film of the windshield"^[17] and disappearing into nothingness. Like cinema, the scopic machine operating during driving produces the illusion of movement, transforming depth into surface and stillness into motion.

Designed for purposes of human transport, the car gradually took the place of carriages drawn by horses in metropolises in the first decade of the 20th century. Ernő Bresztovszky in his article published on cinema in 1908 discusses the influence of technology on arts and aesthetic beauty, and recounts that when he first met the automobile on the streets of Budapest, he saw it as ugly, as a supplement become independent, but still lacking something. Later on, the carriage without horses and running by itself, which was first perceived as "frightening, unknown and repulsive", became a "proud, sentient, and above all beautiful" (18) object, defined in an aesthetic context, substituting the harmony of nature for the artificiality of human design. According to Bresztovszky the unnatural harmony of technology can offer new objects to arts and a new way of looking by organizing and subordinating the many parts of the machine ("wheels, cylinders and shafts") into "a single purpose and will" (18-19), demonstrating the unifying and integrating power of technology.



Transportation and traffic at the turn of the century

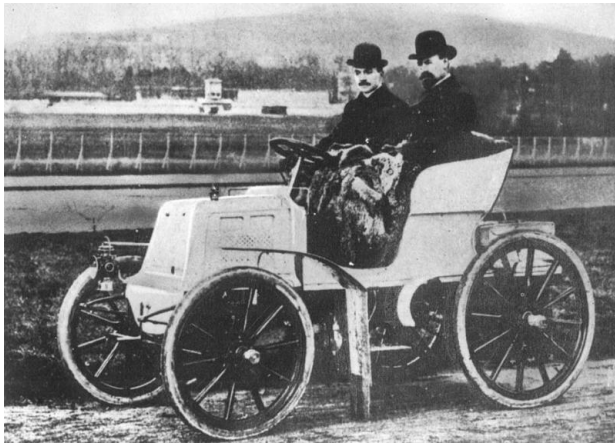


Transportation and traffic at the turn of the century

While Bresztovszky is interested in the car from an aesthetic point of view, Mirbeau's reflections on the automobile advance at least three senses of the concept of movement strongly related with the artistic and social preoccupations of the era – 1.) the animated self-motion of the automobile; 2.) the transformative movement of the outer world into new meanings, and 3.) the bodily, physical experience generated in the driver (or passenger). The automobile is not only a vehicle of locomotion: while these three movements all pertain to it, they define motion according to different criteria, values and characteristics. Bresztovszky conceives the automobile as an object of art inasmuch it testifies to the overpowering of nature by technology: it is the unique power of the machine to impose a new order freed from the contingencies of nature and governed by its own physical laws. However, Mirbeau's machine shares the attributes of nature by appropriating the qualities of a living organism: "...cet admirable organisme qu'est le moteur de mon automobile, avec ses poumons et son coeur d'acier, son système vasculaire de caoutchouc et de cuivre, son innervation électrique" (Mirbeau 2003: 45).^[18] Equating the engine with a living body is not uncommon in the era. Marinetti's first futurist manifesto (1909) speaks of "electric hearts" and "the belly of rogue locomotives". Describing the machine as a living organism and the body in mechanical terms, i.e. "the anthropomorphism of machines and dehumanization of humans"^[19] leads to a chiastic inversion and interchangeability of biology and technology, and pointing to new modes of perception in modernism. The anthropomorphism of the car in Mirbeau renders the

concept of movement as pertaining to the qualities of life – the pumping veins, the sensitivity and conductivity of nerves. The same qualities account for a self-regulatory and circular motion suggested by the name of the “automobile” itself (from the Greek *autós* and the Latin *mobilis*), meaning self-movable.

Besides the quality of moving itself forward, the automobile can transform the outside into a moving *and* living world. Like the first writings on cinema, Mirbeau, too, discards with older media, making the automobile a machine which transforms the immobile and ossified world into life and movement. While books and paintings in Mirbeau’s argument give fixed and dead knowledge, the automobile is a “moving library”, animating everything into an experience “remuant, grouillant, passant, changeant, vertigineux, illimité, infini”.^[20] Books convey dead information, while the skies and trees of the paintings come to life while driving along. In this way the automobile is not only a machine converting energy into mechanical motion, but a machine that is always in confrontation with what is outside and transforming this outside into its own “language”: “mécanisme, qui transporte l’énergie motrice, la chaleur, la parole, l’image, par des minces réseaux de fils métalliques, ou par d’invisibles ondes”.^[21] Moving forward is not a neutral movement, but always implies the idea of transforming and transporting meaning.



Cars constructed by F. Charron

Mirbeau’s glorification of the car can be associated with the futurists’ obsession with speed, technology and the machine, but his interest lies, first of all, in mapping out the conditions of perception altered by the automobile. The automobile becomes the vehicle of a new way of life, influencing and altering the human perception and the body on several levels. In his lively descriptions man becomes an extension of the car, participating in the driving experience both on physical and psychic levels:

“The speed of travel confuses impressions, batters the mind and upsets one’s balance. When you get out of the car after a twelve-hour drive, you feel like a patient recovering from a fainting who gradually resumes contact with the outside world. Objects are distorted and refuse to stand still. Your ears hum as though assailed by hordes of buzzing

insects. With an effort, your eyelids blink open to reality, like a curtain slowly rising to reveal a stage set. So what has been happening? You retain only the vaguest impression of empty spaces, of an infinite whiteness lit by innumerable tiny tongues of fire. You have to shake and pinch yourself to make sure there is solid ground underneath, that you are surrounded by buildings, by people talking and going about their business. Only later in the evening, after dinner, do you really come to. Even then you still feel somewhat restless and uneasy, and these sensations return, more violently than ever, to trouble your dreams.”^[22]

“Motoring, it must be admitted, is a disease, a sickness of the mind. And it has a very pretty name – *la vitesse*. [...] Not the mechanical motion that carries the car along roads and across frontiers, but the quality of speed itself – you could call it neuropathic – which animates all the motorist’s actions. He cannot keep still – quivering, nerves taut as springs, impatient to be off again the moment he arrives, in agony to be somewhere else – anywhere – else. His brain is a racetrack around which jumbled thoughts and sensations roar past at 60 miles an hour, always at full throttle. Speed governs his life: he drives like the wind, thinks like the wind, makes love like the wind, lives a whirlwind existence.”^[23]



Cars constructed by F. Charron

Speed for Mirbeau does not represent a mechanical relation (i.e. the direct proportionality between the amount of energy and speed), but a “neuropathic” quality, a “disease” with the sense of addiction. The experiences of the “voyeur-voyager”, as Virilio recounts them, are generated by the dromoscope, the picture-making machine which converts depth into surface, stillness into mobility, persistence into transitoriness. Speed indulges the voyager in the illusion of “an end to space”,^[24] the world becomes contracted by a vantage point that remains forever unreachable. Distance is translated into the memory of fleeting images, as the landscape advances and literally overwhelms the driver. But this is what generates the paradox of “motoring” too: “immediate proximity means little. All that counts is what holds itself at a distance”.^[25] In this way the car, as a vehicle for conquering distances, becomes a distance-generating machine.

In the experience of driving, motion is stripped of the human qualities which are manifest in movement: direction, expression or reason – the single motivation for driving is the longing to be ‘elsewhere’. The dominant physical and psychic experiences are of an abandonment described in terms of addiction in which the senses loose direction and swarm, and the reality becomes a spectacle, ‘like a curtain slowly rising to reveal a stage set’. The disembodied physical involvement in driving, which separates the body possessed by motion from its senses, makes reality unreal and distorted as a prolonged afterimage of an outstanding experience.



Jacques Henri Lartigue: Grand Prix de Circuit de la Seine, June 26th 1912

Cinema as a technical invention is deeply indebted to mechanisms transforming energy into motion. The movement transporting the celluloid in the projector or in the camera renders possible what is experienced by the viewers as cinematic movement and time. It has been suggested that the similarity between the moving mechanisms of vehicles and that of the recording and projecting apparatus could have influenced the predominance of moving vehicles (trains, automobiles, trams) on the screens of the early films.^[26] Many have argued that the role of the frame in this period is to direct the attention at a space where “a play of appearance and disappearance” unfolds.^[27] While the first actualities capture movement by placing the camera to frame motion and by using depth and perspective to their extreme point,^[28] the very first camera movements, especially tracking or travelling shots, increase the sensation of movement and function “as a display of camera’s ability to mobilize and explore space”.^[29] Mounting the camera on moving vehicles was an early film practice beginning with 1896, which created a new genre of travelogues called “phantom rides”.^[30] The hypnotic and uncanny perspective of the moving machine accounts for the name of the genre, while the exclusive use of the tracking camera movement in one-shot moving images creates an absolute point of view (*View From an Engine Front – Train Leaving Tunnel* [1899], *Trip Down Market Street Before the Fire* [1906], etc.). The incorporation of the tracking shot into multi-shot films generally points to a narrative use of camera movement with a function to relate and integrate departure and arrival (*Romance of the Rail* [1903], *Boarding School Girls* [1905]), or inside and outside (*Hold-up on the Rocky Mountain Express* [1906]), or character’s point-of-view to the larger frame of narration.



Trip Down Market Street Before the Fire (1906)

If multiple-reel or feature films domesticated further the intensity of the single-shot form, it is no wonder that Eisenstein, when theorizing the workings and effects of montage, returned to the metaphor of vehicles. “If montage is to be compared with something, then a phalanx of montage pieces, of shots, should be compared to the series of explosions of an internal combustion engine, driving forward its automobile or tractor: for, similarly, the dynamics of montage serve as impulses driving forward the total film.”^[31]

The automobile is only one of several achievements in technology and natural sciences which contributed to a general and overwhelming experience of being in motion. The speeding up of communication (wireless, telephone) and transportation (bicycle, automobile, railways), the burden of stimuli experienced in the metropolis, new concepts of space and time relativity in science introduce a notion of movement as the sign of a new vitality or, on the contrary, the cause of a new type of nervousness. While the new form of mechanical power and moving forward generated by the engine finds its discharge and translation in visual terms in the sensorial experiences recounted by Mirbeau or a disembodied gaze in one-shot early moving images, the modalities of representation of movement are still on the agenda of film theories of the 1920s.

2. Movement and motion translated into aesthetic terms in the 1920s

While early cinema highlights the sensation of movement in all its possible manifestations, later on, with the establishment of narrative film, the presentation of movement is sublimated. The visceral sensation of movement gives way to more restrained body movements from the part of the actors with the close-up and subordination of camera movements to narrative functions becoming more and more frequent. In the Hungarian film theoretical writings of the late 1910s and 20s, the centrality of movement is still a powerful argument, but it becomes interrelated with another statement to be demonstrated, that of the artistic character of cinema.

In early film theoretical writings the statement that cinema is or could be an art form, is supported by two kinds (and sometimes interrelated) arguments, which rethink questions related to functions and ontology of art. According to the first argument cinema is an art form inasmuch as it gives reality a specifically formed image: it is not reality in itself, but a stylized form of it, which entails new forms of perception, a new “sensory organ”^[32]. Besides this *representational* argument held by Artur Bárdos, Béla Balázs and others, the other argument relies on *materiality*, i.e. the artistic quality of an art form lies in its medium-specific material character. Jenő Török in 1916 argues that “the properties of the matter give every art form the possibilities with which it can

express aesthetic beauty, and which raise us above the physical limits of matter.”^[33] There is a large debate on identifying the special form and matter of cinema, but very early a consensus is reached that these are somehow related to movement. In delimiting what they call a possible, future art form (cinema as art), these early writings take traditional arts one by one and try to rethink their material properties in terms of their aesthetic character. Their method is that of comparing and contrasting, their aim to introduce new arguments through which the field of art is delimited and redistributed.

Jenő Török talks about the “moving light-spots” which induce a temporal effect in the cinema viewer. This moving drawing differs from the construction of a melody out of sound waves insofar as the moving light-spots are not directed towards the eyes (in case of hearing sound waves hit the eardrum), but they are collected and refracted by the screen: the different spatial character of hearing and seeing can be accounted for by the difference in their modes of perception. Light-spots are the means through which the substance of cinema, namely movement, can be perceived. One year later, in 1917, Török theorized that the artistic matter of cinema is composed of the image which captures a moment and the action produced by the change of images.^[34] Similarly, a decade later Lajos Gró claimed that cinema is both movement and reproduction, and has to build things anew from its material properties.

In what follows I would like to delineate two possible answers formulated in the mid-1920s to the question of movement in cinema, both articulated from the perspective of medium-specificity and concentrating on the role of the body. Both theories share the idea that cinema remediated previous media forms, and both are aware of the rivalry between coexisting media. Miklós Marsovszky’s article (1924) insists that cinema’s specificity consists in representing movement, and he returns to aesthetics’ conceptual pair of ‘form’ and ‘matter’ in order to allocate cinema’s place among other arts which lay claim to this territory (dance, pantomime, painting, drama and epic). Béla Balázs (1924) concentrates first on the expressive movements of the human body and cinema’s signifying potential to translate movement visually.

a) Medium-specificity in aesthetic terms: form and matter

The medium-specific argument relies on a concept of matter only rarely elaborated in theoretical frames in early writings. What is the matter of cinema? Is it the light, the screen, the image, the visual reproduction, or movement itself? In a little-known, but I think seminal essay from 1924, entitled *The New Art: The Film*, Miklós Marsovszky^[35] takes on the task to examine more closely the premises and consequences of the statement that the matter of cinema is movement. The aim of the essay is to speculate on the ideal form of cinema and to integrate cinema in the system of aesthetic thought, although this is possible only by a rethinking of its master concepts.

In equating matter and movement, Marsovszky questions the oppositions related to aesthetic production, that of subject and object, animate and inanimate, matter and form. In fact both terms, movement and matter, undergo radical revisions in Marsovszky’s text. Movement in this account is, first of all, an all pervasive irrational force, while matter, contrary to positivism’s

inorganic, dead matter, becomes an animated force. Marsovszky's starting point is that the cinematic apparatus (i.e. the camera) tears out a new form of the matter which legitimates cinema's claim to be a new art form; this new matter is motion or movement [*mozgás*],^[36] which up to this date had been beyond art's reach: movement was symbolized or expressed, but it was not used as a material. Only cinema is able to present and construct movement as an immediate sensation and in its characteristic continuity. This presupposition leads Marsovszky to articulate the process and consequences of how movement determines the matter and form of cinema, but this step necessitates the revision of these concepts.

In aesthetic production, the first step is to delimit the everyday concept of the matter, perceivable in its sensory qualities, from the matter of the art. This is achieved through a violent act of giving form, a tearing out of matter from its "empirical totality". Giving form tears out matter from the world of the senses, but only for a while, because the complete form will take the work of art back into sensory perception. Marsovszky tells a somewhat allegorical story about the origin of sculpture. Man faced with the marble block, first hit the marble out of sheer despair or fear or rage. The marble "cracked along its natural breaking points" and gave form to something new, which retrospectively was called a statue. The hard and solid marble block's initial resistance "gradually relented of its rigidity, softened and became transparent, revealed its inner structure, produced desires, initiated dialogue with man." There are two significant moments in this poetic description: on the one hand, matter has its own "will" and "desires", it does not crack anywhere, only along its natural patterns; on the other hand, "the formative human will" leaves its inscriptions on the matter which through this becomes transparent. Form impregnates matter with a memory of its own – "every new statue inscribed its contours in it [*in matter*] over again, making it more and more rich in possibility". From the solid, impenetrable marble block a "transparent", "rich and complexly textured evolution" emerges – which is the proper matter of art. This is the "material"^[37] the artist is faced with and his endeavor is almost beyond human powers: he has to battle in order to encounter matter's inner structure and to find the form in which matter becomes sensible again. The matter described by Marsovszky is ready to be formed (in the case of sculpture it becomes a surface which can be inscribed or marked); but this same matter is always already written, preserving previous marks and inscriptions. This living and moving, animated matter is in continuous movement, fueled by its resistance to the human formative power and by endless possibilities waiting to surface.

Marsovszky envisions the relation of matter and form as a dynamic and ongoing process: formalization triggers the resistance of matter and invests it with a memory of possible embodiments. In this way the completed work of art – which repeats the trauma of the first encounter between form and matter – can become a form rendered sensible through matter. It is ironic that Marsovszky illustrates the dynamic and animated relation between form and matter by sculpture, the least mobile of all the art forms.^[38] Sculpture testifies to the massiveness and resistance of the matter, but even the heavy and solid marble can become movement by the inscription and the memory of different "trajectories", a kind of palimpsest preserving the traces

of previous struggles between giving of form and the inhumanity of matter.

If the relationship between matter and form is a “living and developing” one, according to Marsovszky cinema occupies a special place among art forms inasmuch as it renders possible this primal movement in its “sensory continuity”. Previous media and art forms, including the cognitive apprehensions of movement, domesticated movement by investing it with the categories of the intellect: goals and causes, thereby forcing movement to move along predetermined circuits and trajectories and quantifying it by measurings in space and time. Up to this point, Marsovszky takes a similar position to Bergson’s view regarding the primary character of movement and the dismissal of scientific approaches to it. In evaluating the role of the cinema and cinematograph in representation of movement, however, Marsovszky takes a different position: the camera, a machine without consciousness, can abstract movement from its “empirical totality” and this is achieved without the confines of the intellect. As he explained by the example of sculpture, every art form takes its matter or material from a sensorially perceived empirical reality. We experience movement in everyday reality, mediated by our bodies or other objects in motion: “As the immediate and unbroken continuity of our bodies, and as the ceaseless sensation of all our senses do we perceive the world lying outside us.” From a sensory perspective, movement is strictly related to existence, but art begins when matter is “torn out” from this reality and invested with a form, “an organizing principle”. The camera accomplishes this task by separating movement from existence and construing movement as virtual:

“The cinematograph only grasps motion and loses its hold on existence; it is a machine, it does not have a world view, and it achieves complete and perfect abstraction. Movement isolated in this manner speeds up and makes its own way. Film’s raw material is the movement separated from the existence of things in its full terribleness and inhumanity.”

The positive role of the machine in abstracting movement and eluding rationalization creates at the same time an “inhuman” and “terrible” perspective, a principle which was freed from the confines of matter, a possibility to “bring a new order into the chaos of the world”. By arguing that movement in cinema is not a simple reproduction of movement perceived in real life, but its reconstruction along a formative principle, Marsovszky asserts that cinematic movement becomes a creative force free from the predetermined categories of our understanding and from the laws governing our physical existence, too. It was Georges Méliès’ cinematography which used movement in this sense for the first time, moving objects which did not move in reality, or arresting movement (appearances and disappearances, enlargements, etc.). Méliès used the camera and its technique to render movement by the illusion of continuity to deconstruct this illusion. Using this raw material, namely the creative potential of movement, means to channel it into forms which will not subordinate movement to other forms of articulation.

Based on this argument Marsovszky gives the critique of film genres which took on false paths by imitating drama, epic or pantomime. Drama (which stands in his text for the theatrical performance) concentrates movement into the category of the plot – “the fullest and the most

consistent intellectualization and registration of movement in human consciousness” – composed and torn apart at the same time by the words constituting an “already-completed form” and the movement of the actors’ body. The spoken words in the theatrical performance restore the temporality and liveliness of the drama, but they can never do justice to it, because bodily acting deprives words of their formative character “degrade[ing them] to a melodramatic accompaniment of the actor’s movement”. The resistance between the moving body and the written word of the drama, between form and matter is not a balanced one: the actor is either the mouth-piece of the written text, or his acting casts words into a secondary role. In both cases this relation is a subordinating one, not an encounter of equally powerful forces. This same relation characterizes dance and pantomime, too, in Marsovszky’s view, namely subordinating the body to the status of an instrument.

While in the drama body movement is restricted by “diction”, in pantomime the body itself becomes diction, gestures are translations of words, and the body “a writing instrument”. Although dancing is not a direct translation of words into movement, the problem with dance is that it lacks a fundamental dimension of movement, that of time. In what constitutes a provocative move, Marsovszky denies the temporality of dance: what is missing in dance is “not chronometric time, but time as the reality of maturation”; instead he views dance performances as spatial ornaments which use movement as a filling out of space. This perspective on dance is forwarded through a radical separation between the dancer’s point of view and dance as a visual spectacle. While the dancer believes his performance to be the unfolding of affects and emotions, in fact, his body becomes a most inhuman thing, an “abstract ornament”, a body occupying space and spreading over it. The use of the concept of “ornament” in Marsovszky anticipates to some extent Sigfried Kracauer’s 1927 essay on “mass ornament” where Kracauer himself uses the dance of Tiller Girls to put forward a critique of dismemberment and dehumanization effectuated by mass culture using the same term, “ornament”.



91. The Tiller Girls in Berlin, 1920s

Tiller Girls in Berlin (1920s)

The performance of the Tiller Girls aims at creating straight lines and the most perfect geometrical forms by machine-like precision and discipline. Kracauer argued that separating the individual from the collective, consciousness of producers from the product amounts to the logic of capitalist production: the ornament uses the masses as building blocks, without giving a chance to think through what they are used for. What is interesting from the point of view of Marsovszky’s text is the visuality of the ornament and the position assigned to the

spectator/participator: “Like the pattern in the stadium, the [capitalist] organization stands above the masses, a monstrous figure whose creator withdraws it from the eyes of its bearers...”^[39] The monstrosity encountered in the patterns created by the Tiller Girls (the spectacular character of which can be best viewed from above, Kracauer likens this view to “aerial photographs of landscapes and cities”) and the capitalist organization can be accounted for by a perspective which arises in total independence from the perspective of those who take part in it. Likewise in Marsovszky’s interpretation, dancing cannot be separated from an encompassing gaze which suppresses individual efforts by making them part of a totality, if not according to the laws of capitalist production, but through the fixed and bound rhythms of movements. In Marsovszky’s sense all kinds of dancing become ornament, a visual pattern filling out space and disposing of the dancers’ bodies by transcending them into something else. This force, which is independent of the actual expression or will of dancers is, here too, described in terms of monstrosity: “The ornament is the most awesome, most inhuman and most clearly transcendent form of forms that have materialized in the medium of human existence up to this date.” The inequality of forces implicated in dance is what makes Marsovszky to discard dance as an art in which form and matter are shaping each other through movement.

Drama, dance, pantomime are all examples of such forms which suppress the “resistance” of matter conceived as movement – by totalizing it into stable forms. Consequently the question arises: What is the form of cinema? How can movement be made sensible by the moving image? What are its resistances? Marsovszky takes an already existing pictorial form, the tableau as a point of departure. This form is itself “dangerous” for film, since in the history of visual representation the tableau always strived for equilibrium, stiffening into motionlessness the most important elements of the image. Furthermore the tableau is relying on space by separating background and foreground, whereas film has to deny and demolish space in order to liberate movement from every possible bidding and fixing form. To set the tableau in motion means to suppress its spatial character and to foreground its temporal character:

“The tableau draws closer and moves away, but never realizes itself completely; and yet this movement of the tableau from near to far lends rhythm to these lines of movement drawn in time, each of which has a definite direction, tempo and dynamics. Direction, rhythm, tempo and dynamics: these four attributes of inexhaustible potential give life to the lines of movement: they embrace and they break apart.”

The passage describes the effort to resist the tableau’s self-enclosed totality by using cinematic movement as a counter-force: to keep the image in an ever developing movement means to conceive the cinematic image as a field of forces organized along the axis of time, like “direction, rhythm, tempo and dynamics”. Deconstructing the spatial totality and comprehensiveness of the tableau, the potentiality of cinema lies in animating, energizing the image in a continuous movement and favoring change, process, and continuous development.

The tableau, nevertheless, has an “exemplary visibility”, which could inspire film in “fold[ing] man

into an embrace with all that is outside and above him". The comprehensive power of the tableau's form makes possible to encompass man and his visible body into a mobile configuration of which Marsovszky can give only one existent example, that of the slapstick comedy. In slapstick the human body enraptured by constant movement figures the resistance of the matter: the body in slapstick is possessed by a force of its own, which does not allow for compelling the body into a pre-existing pattern as in the case of dance. However, Marsovszky's objection to slapstick is that the body behaves like a "mass" and does not have the counter-force to oppose movement. Its inertia testifies to the fact that the matter in case of slapstick has not yet found its true form, "its capacity for resistance is not yet animated". In this way slapstick "remains only a game, a playful fancy without deeper human meaning", however, it is still "the first experiment in the consistent outlining of a line of movement" in the history of cinema.

The constraint and difficulties of illustration constitute a burden for every speculative thought: Marsovszky, like many of his contemporaries writing on film, restrains from giving specific examples. Given the emphasis on the line, "the line of movement", one tends to connect his thoughts with the idea of the "plastic film" foregrounded by Viking Eggeling and Hans Richter, in which the line constituted a plastic and temporal form realizing a cinematic movement uncontainable on paper. *Symphonie Diagonale* was shown for the first time in the same year when Marsovszky's text was published, in 1924, and gave palpable form to all four attributes of movement: direction, rhythm, tempo and dynamics. However, according to Marsovszky, the abstraction of form is only the first step in the dialogue between matter and form, and perhaps he would have discarded the avant-garde artists' method because of its desire for immateriality. For him the specificity of cinema lies in the movement "embodied and made visible through the human body", penetrating and inscribing itself on the body of the filmmakers and of actor's as well. Describing dance and pantomime as modes of using the body as "abstract ornament" or a "simple writing instrument", Marsovszky's expectation from cinema is the unity of movement and body in a sensory and immediate perception. The expressive potential of the body coupled with the signifying potential of the cinematic image is the central question of Béla Balázs' film aesthetics.

b) The body: movement, gestures and expressivity, language

Perhaps it is not too audacious to assert that in the silent film era (which is in no way a monolith formation) the (moving) body was a more important building block of cinematic language than in later periods. Béla Balázs argues that "in film the basic material, its poetic substance, is the visible gesture".^[40] Following Marsovszky's insights on the dynamics of cinematic form and matter, of which one possible manifestations is the relation between the image and the body, I would like to argue that the moving body served as an example for theorizing questions related to the segmentation and construction of a film language conceived in visual terms. Hungarian film theoretical writings of the 1920s stress the importance of the cinematic body based on two interrelated values: 1. visibility as the hallmark of a new visual culture as proclaimed by Béla Balázs, and 2. movement conceived as a new, artistic quality, specific to cinema (Miklós

Marsovszky). Cinema, defined as movement and (recorded) image at the same time, involves complex and sometimes contradictory arguments at the intersection of which we find regularly the human body, both as a site of visibility and a vehicle of movement.

In the first chapter of *Visible Man* (1924) Béla Balázs sums up the history of western culture beginning with the appearance of printing. As a medium of transmission and storage, printing is understood as the repository and the propagator of a conceptual culture, in strong contrast with a visual culture, the latter being hallmarked by the new cinematic medium as the vanguard of a new way of perception and thinking. While *legibility* based on the printed word 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” (11). How can the body become visible in terms of cinematic representation? For Balázs the important question is not what the body or the face means as an entity, rather he strives to make them into meaningful sites, surfaces where a signifying relation emerges. The body and the face are complex signifying configurations, given the fact that they are at the intersection of nature and culture, individual and collective, past and present, immediate and mediated, shaped equally by bodily traces and cultural conventions. The body for Balázs is therefore a multiple site of passage: in Foucault’s terms the body described by Balázs is a “heterotopia”, a locus gathering multiple contrasting efforts of signification:

1. the surface of unconscious inheritance (our gestures reflect “the spirit of ... ancestors”);
2. a product of culture, in which culture itself can materialize;
3. the expression of personal traits, the token of individuality;
4. a means of communication, a possibility for surpassing the gap isolating people from each other (“the redemption from the curse of Babel”);
5. a catalogue of “standard forms”, the manifestation and product of a learnable body language (13-14).

As a site of signification, the body is the hallmark of the new visual culture – by expanding the signifying potentialities of the body, Balázs makes room for the introduction of the new visual language of film. The guarantee of this language is a deep semiotic connection and similarity between the body and the film: through the film the body acquires a highly expressive character, while turning to the body, and especially to its synecdoche, the face, will provide a pattern by which to account for the workings of cinematic language. At first, acting and directing are considered two juxtaposed modes of cinematic communication,^[41] but with the detailed analysis of the role of facial expressions and the close-up, the importance of the body as a structuring and signifying element increases, until finally it can be said that it becomes one paradigm of the cinematic image. What are the logical steps which grant the common ground for a language of gestures and of cinema? In what way can it be said that body movements constitute a language, or a form of communication? There are two important qualities of the body which will serve as

common denominators: the definition of the body's visual dimension as pertaining to the surface, a site giving occasion for multiple sign relations, and the temporality of its movement described in terms of simultaneity, a living and organic movement. These features of the body conceived as an image and taken as starting points when describing the new visibility of cinema, will constitute a model for the definition and interpretation of the cinematic image; on the other hand, cinema makes man "visible" – this mutual reinforcement sums up the main thesis of *Visible Man*.

First of all, cinema, like the face or the body, is conceived as a surface: Balázs insists that film, contrary to theatre or literature, is "a single-layered reality", "texture" (18), and cannot trespass the two-dimensionality of images ("the image, unlike the word, cannot be 'looked through'", 20):

"A good film does not have 'content' as such. It is 'kernel and shell in one'. It no more has content than does a painting, a piece of music or indeed – a facial expression. Film is a *surface art* and in it whatever is inside is outside." (19, emphasis in the original)

Identifying the image, the film, and facial expressions as pure surfaces has multiple consequences. The formulation "film is a surface art" forwards a new way of communication which is concrete, immediate, in contrast with more abstract, conceptual communication. Asserting that the film "does not have 'content' as such", it seems that Balázs merges the two planes of "inside and outside", threatening to surpass their difference. However, the relations between inside and outside, surface and depth, spirit and body, soul and flesh remain a site of articulation used throughout his film aesthetics. There are many formulations in his writings, indeed, which contradict the idea of a sheer exteriority. The logic of concealing and showing, references to a "bottomless depth" (35) or to the "invisible countenance": the visible dimension bringing forth something which is invisible – all these point to the fact that the formulation "whatever is inside is outside" does not designate an interchangeable relation between the inside and the outside. It is not the logic of the fold or pleat^[42] – a figure which makes these distinctions impossible – governing Balázs's argument, but on the contrary, a deep semiotic relation between an inseparable inside and outside.

To read something as a surface means on the one hand to single out relations of contiguity and juxtaposition between adjacent parts, to view it as a site. This analytical approach gives us a structure establishing relations between heterogeneous elements. On the other hand, the surface can be read as a "cover" onto which something other intrudes or finds expression in it. Based on the examples given in *Visible Man*, the body and the face as surfaces can enter in three types of relation: a) as "standard forms" or conventions (similar to verbal language), b) as expressions alluding to a whole which cannot be expressed otherwise, and c) as indices pointing to something other than themselves. These relations outline three distinct, but interrelated realms or aspects of images: that of the learnable (the cognitive dimension), of the ineffable (the expressive dimension), and of deixis. In establishing a kind of visual semiotics of cinema, Balázs turns to the body as a model for signification.

In arguing for the necessity of a “thick description” in case of interpretation of cultural phenomena, Clifford Geertz gives the example of Gilbert Ryle who describes two boys closing one of their eyelids: the first one is twitching, the second winking to someone. Ryle points out that it is possible that the two movements are identical and “[f]rom a cinematograph-film of the two faces there might be no telling which contraction, if either, was a wink, or which, if either, were a mere twitch”.^[43] While one is unconscious and unintended, the other is meant to be a message, and it is subject to a number of factors if it will succeed or fail. For stating their difference, it is necessary to know the code by which one can produce or interpret the contracting of an eyelid as winking. However, simply knowing the code is not enough: to wink one has to contract the eyelid and this act to be visually perceptible for the recipient. Visual immediacy is often contrasted by Balázs to the “dematerialized, abstract and over-intellectualized” (11) culture of the words. However, while arguing against verbal culture which abstracted and drained out the human soul, “atrophied” the body, Balázs admits that in order to communicate the expressive, immediate and universal language of the body or of cinema this language itself cannot escape abstraction, and standardization. Since bodily gestures must be comprehensible for everyone, all individual and national varieties are to be eliminated, “[w]e may say that the language of gestures has become standardized in film” (14).

Balázs’s formulations suggest that this standardization is achieved through adopting the model of verbal language (“we should turn to the cinema so as to compile a lexicon of gestures and facial expressions on a par with our dictionaries of words”, 12; “facial expressions have their own vocabulary of ‘conventional’, standard forms, so much so that we could and indeed should compile a comparative ‘gesturology’ on the model of comparative linguistics”, 13). This comparison is all the more strange, because the main purpose of the introductory chapters of *Visible Man* is to state the difference between the mediatedness of words and the immediate, concrete nature of gestures. In terms of their linguistic character it seems that the difference between words and gestures is that the latter possess a “vocabulary”,^[44] but lack a “grammar” (“although this language of gestures has its traditions, it is unlike grammar in that it lacks strict and binding rules,” 13). Furthermore, Balázs’s dismissal of the sign language of deaf mutes or of the Morse-code as potential models for the language of gestures reminds us of Barthes’ famous definition of photography as “a message without a code”. Codification as an articulation on the level of entities without meaning would mean in case of images and gestures that they draw their meaningfulness not from the “surface”, but from a deep structure to which they are subordinated. Notwithstanding, Balázs argues that the language of images is still “a complete and seamless system”, like verbal language (12), but its signifying potential does not lie in codification, but in expressivity.

Expressivity is the most essential quality of the face, and of cinema, in the sense that expressions articulate something otherwise imperceptible. For film to be a “surface art”, it is necessary to translate everything in terms of perception, mainly visual perception. According to Balázs the expressivity of the body in film is made possible by the absence of speech which creates a regime

of the senses different from the everyday situation: deprivation of diegetic world's sounds is compensated by the foregrounding of visual dimension. The language of gestures appears when gestures are not mere accompaniment to words, and speaking in silent cinema becomes a spectacle, by which the visual character of movements related to speaking is emphasized. Even objects become expressive by "*shar[ing] with human beings a quality of silence*" (emphasis in the original, 23). The productivity of the absence of speech (and of hearing the noises of the diegetic world) guarantees the expressivity of the body and of cinematic image at the same time: "when an actor has no lines to speak, his entire body becomes a homogeneous expressive space and every crease in his clothes takes on the same expressive significance as a wrinkle in his face" (28-29).

This logic is underpinned by the metaphors in the above quotation – "kernel and shell in one" – taken from one of Goethe's poems^[45], which point to the theory of the symbol, the unity of image and idea supported by the concept of nature as an indivisible organism. Along with the tradition of Romanticism and Symbolism where the symbolic is favored over allegory, Balázs dismisses every instance of "allegory" conceived as mere "illustration" (20) or ornamentation (30). In describing physical beauty in case of film actors, Balázs dismisses the possibility of beauty as "purely external or 'empty' decoration" (29), because the beauty of actors becomes the beauty of their character, in the way the actor's body and physical appearance cannot be isolated in any way from the acted character. There is a motivated relation here between inside and outside, which in some cases accounts for an indexical quality of the surface ("*everything external testifies to an internal reality*", emphasis in original, 29), in the sense that there is an existential bond between signifier and signified. Indices, as defined by Peirce,^[46] are signs caused by a physical connection which took place in the past, in the case of traces and imprints, or take place in the present, in the case of pointing to a "here and now". In the analysis of cinematic indexicality Mary Ann Doane draws attention to their "singularity and uniqueness" (133), which endows them with a powerful denotative force, but strips them of a connotative power.^[47] Strictly speaking, the index, a testimony of an encounter, does not tell anything about the signified, it only announces the event of a connection between the sign and object. In what way can the body and the face become indices? (Obviously, Balázs does not use the term 'index'.) The relation between the body of the actor and the character he is acting on is an act of exhibiting or pointing: the body of the actor becomes the body of the character with all its contingent elements (hence, according to Balázs, casting is one of the most important decision made by the director, 27). Moreover, the face and the body often become surfaces for exhibiting the symptoms of an "inside": in forms of unconscious and visceral reactions to something unexpected, or in the form of the "unconscious inheritance" mentioned by Balázs. In this sense he argues that "it is not true that our *entire* face is our own" (30), given the fact that social entities ("family, race, class") have already 'cultivated' our bodies and faces.

In what constitutes an extensive move, Balázs draws in all types of sign relations under the terrain of expressivity. Even if there are conventional uses or predetermined aspects of gestures, every movement can become a gesture, every manifestation of the actor a sign. Expressivity widens the

realm of signs: everything can become a sign (in Balázs's view twitching and winking can become equally expressive). "Anatomical" forms, beauty, physiognomy, features related to type, race, class can all function as expressive forms the structure of which is one of becoming or passage between one form or meaning and another. Expressivity relates to a fundamental dimension of temporality. Similarly to Marsovszky, who argued for a temporal rendering of movement through images, Balázs – by forwarding the face and the body – sets up a stage on which this temporal dimension can be acted out. Gestures and facial expressions are signs par excellence because they can give form to this movement. The "ornament" appears exactly when this primary movement is halted and expressions become frozen. He gives the example of beauty as an "impenetrable mask", a decoration through which nothing penetrates and which becomes independent. "This life is not to be found in movement", remarks Balázs and cites Baudelaire's lines from *La Beauté*: "Je hais le mouvement, qui déplace les lignes." (30)

The movement of expression, however, cannot be reduced to the actual body or facial movements of actors in the cinematic image. The expressive movement rather happens between the viewer and the image in the forms of passages between one expression and the other. This movement can be experienced by the viewer as a liveliness arising from the changes between the different figures he assigns to the same sequence. The structure of passages are modeled in terms of *conflict*, when Balázs describes the face as a "struggle" ("between the type and the personality, between inherited and acquired characteristics, between fate and the individual will, the 'id' and the 'ego'" 31), or as a "field of battle" (31). Other times this passage constitutes a kind of *palimpsest*, layering different facial expressions to one another, as in the technique of superimposition, considered later in *The Spirit of Film* (1930) a technology with which "our entire psychic apparatus is revealed" (175). Unlike beauty conceived as an "impenetrable mask", the image does not conceal, but its transparency gives way to other images: "like a translucent mask, type can gradually reveal a hidden and very different face" (31).^[48] The most preferred type of passage is, however, *modulation*, a term taken from music. "Melody" is one favorite simile when describing the sequentiality of facial expressions and images. Modulation is the most Bergsonian term in Balázs: it refers to a continuous transformation in which parts lose their independent role and contribute to a whole which is precisely this interaction of parts. There are no autonomous parts with clear-cut boundaries, as in the case of words' "staccato" rhythm ("isolated snapshots of the feelings"), rather all the parts are present at the same time molding in a simultaneity, "the legato of visual continuity" (34). Modulation is the most valued and exemplified temporal dimension when the juxtaposition of facial expressions, emotions and images generate in the viewer an untranslatable configuration.^[49] Pola Negri's face and look in *Carmen* (*Gypsy Blood*, Ernst Lubitsch, 1918), the changes in Asta Nielsen's face showing "the organic *development of her feelings*" (34), or the "storms that pass" over Lilian Gish's face in *Way Down East* (D.W. Griffith, 1920) all render the face as a temporal site of continuous development, change and becoming.



Facial expressions of Lilian Gish in Way Down East (D.W. Griffith, 1920)

The stake of this interpretation of the face and its possible consequences in establishing a visual semiotics is best underscored by its comparison to the Russian theories and film practices of the body in 1910s and early 20s. In his study entitled *Kuleshov's Experiments and the New Anthropology of the Actor*,^[50] Mikhail Yampolsky demonstrates how Kuleshov's montage theory can be derived from a new concept of the actor and acting, elaborated first of all in the theatrical practice of 1910s. Replacing the Stanislavsky system, and based on the ideas of Delsarte and Dalcroze, two important figures in revolutionizing contemporary dance and movement theories, the new conception of the actor's body relies on the segmentation of movement into "physiological stages" and the study of body parts' expressivity conceived as independent from one another. Gestures and movements, as well as the body, are decomposed and then reassembled as possible combinations (eye expressions combined with facial expressions, for example). Montage as cinematic practice emerges, according to Yampolsky's convincing argument, as the ideal form and expression of these new endeavors. The claim that movement (the actors' body movement) has to be composed in space and time, and rhythm is best understood and rendered perceptible by decomposition and dismemberment (Kuleshov's experiment of "created man"^[51], for example) leads to the favoring and prevalence of the montage. Decomposition and combination during 1920s will be reinforced (but at the same time its origin in acting disavowed) by the mechanization of the body and the machine cult forwarded by Constructivism.



*Illustration of human movement
along different axis of the body*

In Balázs's approach of cinematic language, the moving body and the face have the same role of serving as a model for the study of the possibilities of the cinematic image. Contrary to the decomposition and dismemberment of montage theories,^[52] however, he opts for a conceptualization of the body and of image as something pertaining to a whole, a site for exploring simultaneous relations. While simultaneity is often understood on the diegetic level (as in case of Griffith's cross-cutting technique in order to suggest the simultaneity of story events), according to Balázs the expressivity of the face, the "play of facial expressions" foregrounds a lyrical quality instead of the narrative. Gestures are the most expressive when they do not have "external purposes" (71), but deepen characterization and create a subjective relation with the world, the "mood", "a totality that as such cannot be grasped in a single image" (45). These characteristics of gestures and the face are best exemplified by the interpretation of two cinematic techniques: the close-up and editing. The function of the close-up in Balázs is not one of creating rupture or break as in montage practices, but one of linking and pointing: in close-up a new perspective arises, a "new territory" (39) possessing a life of its own. In close-up everything can behave like a face. Similarly, in theorizing the role of editing, or the "image linkage" in Balázs's terms, gestures function as staples between images or images acquire the function of pointing through gestures.^[53] "Passageways" and "interpolated images" (70) establish a visual continuity which is not subordinated to the story or the action, but through the gestures and movements of characters a lyrical quality and atmosphere emerges, uniting different shots.

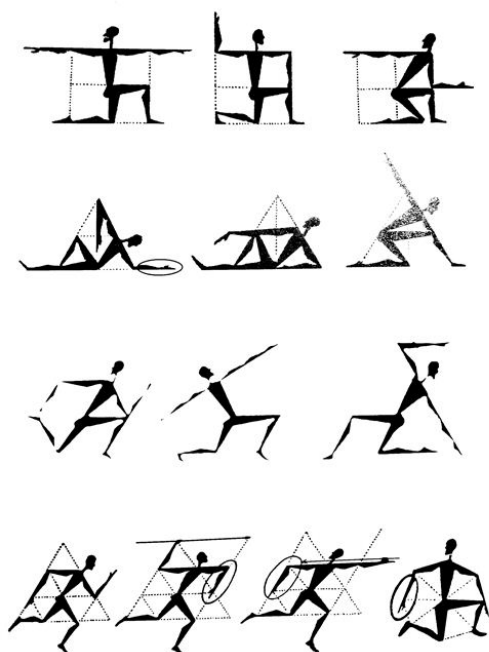
In this way the face and the image truly become "heterotopias" in a Foucauldian sense, being sites without a real physical location, but regulating relations with other spaces and sites. The face is not a fixed point of the body, and everything can become face:^[54] the image understood as face opens up a system of relations with conflicts, juxtapositions, superimpositions and modulations. There is no proof that Balázs's theory on the body and the cinematic image would have influenced filmmakers in the way the new idea of actor and acting had its influence on Russian filmmaking. However, in the 1920 a powerful movement in Hungary strived for making the body an expressive instrument along a similar understanding of the importance of movement as found in

Marsovszky's and Balázs's texts. The 1920s constituted the golden age of the art of movement [*mozdulatművészet*], developed under the aegis of dance revolutions and inception of modern dance, taking place at the 19-20th turn of the century. The beginnings lead back to the first public performance of Isadora Duncan in Budapest in 1902. It seems that this performance had a deep impact on Hungarian audiences, especially actors and writers. One of the most celebrated actresses of the era, Mari Jászai wrote a laudatory article right after the event, describing Duncan's dancing as the coming alive of the ancient Greek statues.^[55]



Isadora Duncan

The next important moment follows in 1912 when Valéria Dienes, the first woman graduating at the University of Pest returned from Paris inspired by the philosophy of Henri Bergson and profoundly touched by Isadora Duncan's Parisian dance performances. A scholar of mathematics, physics, philosophy and aesthetics she founded her own dance school based on a system named by her orchestics (from the Greek *orcheomai* = to move). Taking her inspiration from the postures depicted on Greek urns, she developed a system of body movements which combined the inertia of the body as matter or mass with its possibilities of movement.^[56]



Geometrical sketches according to Duncan's system

The central idea of this system was the signifying potential of body-movement [*mozdulat*], defined by her in Bergsonian terms as “the medium of our being”, as something which has a paradoxical structure. While it is intended and constitutes the realization of an intent or purpose, if we want to examine it at the light of our consciousness it disappears, it becomes a “pose”. The pose is a dead movement, “a pillar of salt”, while the real movement is the living connection between past and future:

“The pose is the death of movement. It is not part of the movement, only the trace of movement’s halting left behind. The movement does not have an image. The film’s series of images laid out do not move, they show only the traces of the disappeared movement. The film has to be rolled in order to move its image. Thus movement is not preserved on film; we cunningly made ourselves believe, using our eyes’ habits, that the movement comes back on the screen. Movement is what never and nowhere rests [*ami nem marad meg soha sehol*], and there is no color or mood with which it cannot catch up, since its dictionary is huge like that of the human soul, it cannot be drawn or preserved.”^[57]

The philosophical stance adopted on the unrepresentability of the movement does not prevent Dienes to systematize and conceptualize all possible body movements and make them into a teachable and repeatable curriculum material used for decades in various institutions she collaborated in. She built up a system consisting of four aspects or territories of movement: kinetics, rhythemics, dynamics, and symbolics, i.e. movement in space, movement in time, movement and energy, and movement and expression.^[58] This systematization requires,

however, the inclusion of the pose as an organic part of movement. Dienes ends up in her account of movement by sketching a similar model to Marsovszky's tableau's which are set up in motion by the temporal movement of the image. Geometrical postures are states of equilibrium "around which human movements gather, likewise the different mobile positions of the pendulum gather around poise".^[59] Between these points the body sweeps into motion by steps, springs, swings, and the lines drawn in this way account for man's inner life: the movement of attitudes, emotion, memory. In this way knowledge is inscribed in and derives from the muscles of the body.

While early cinema used mechanical motion as intensification of its spectacular character, aesthetic writings of 1920s sought for the form which could counterbalance mechanical power or elaborate a new aesthetic experience. In creating the aesthetic premises of an "art of movement", Marsovszky and Balázs turn to the body: the former is looking for the "resistance" through which movement can be animated, the latter takes the body and the face as models for the elaboration of cinema's visual semiotics. Balázs's semiotics of the body is rooted in complex signifying relations and a temporality of becoming. Images do not possess clear-cut boundaries, but they constitute passages between different sign relations or meanings through which the viewer can enter the stage. Dienes's orchestrics, based on body movement conceived as a "medium", develop a body culture and practice which stand for the absent film practice of Balázsian ideas of the body.

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2. "The major theme of the development of physics in the 19th century is the way in which the innovations – the concept of the physical field, the theory of the luminiferous and electromagnetic ether, and the concepts of the conservation and dissipation of energy – were formulated according to the mechanical view of nature, which supposed that matter in motion was the basis of all physical phenomena." Harman, P.M.: *Energy, Force, and Matter: The Conceptual Development of Nineteenth-Century Physics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 2.
3. Kj, "A mozgófényképekről" [On the Moving Photographs]. *Uránia*, May 1901, 120. The acronym Kj probably stands for Jenő Klupáthy, one of the editors of *Uránia*. [Unless otherwise noted, the passages from Hungarian are my translations, I. F.]
4. In English translation: "Early Cinema as a Challenge to Film History," in *Cinema of Attractions*, ed. by Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 365-380.
5. The modernity thesis is more accentuated in Gunning, whereas for Gaudreault early cinema is a corpus on which his theory on the difference between 'textual narration' and 'theatrical monstration' can be demonstrated. See André Gaudreault, *From Plato to Lumière. Narration and Monstration in Literature and Cinema*, transl. by Timothy Barnard, University of Toronto Press, 2009.
6. Tom Gunning, "'Now You See It, Now You Don't'. The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions," *Velvet Light Trap*, 32 (Fall 1993): 3-12.
7. Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* (Fall 1986), vol. 8. no. 3-4. 63-70.
8. Magdolna Kolta, *Képmutogatók. A fotográfiai látás kultúrtörténete* [The Cultural History of Photographic Vision]. Budapest, Magyar Fotográfiai Múzeum, 2003. Zsolt Kőhádi, *Tovamozduló ember tovamozduló világban. A magyar némafilm 1896-1931 között* [Hungarian Silent Film between 1896 and 1931] (Budapest,

- Magyar Filmintézet, 1996), 14-15.
9. Ernő Bresztovszky, "A mozi" [The Cinema]. *Nyugat*, 1908, 16 September, in *A magyar film olvasókönyve*, [Hungarian Film 1908-1943, A Reader], ed. by Zsolt Kőhádi (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Filmarchívum, 2001), 17-23.
 10. Frigyes Karinthy, "A mozgófénykép metafizikája" [The Metaphysics of Moving Pictures]. *Nyugat*, 1909, in *A magyar film olvasókönyve*, 24-28.
 11. Artur Bárdos, "Film-esztétika" [Film Aesthetics]. *Nyugat*, 1913, 1 March, in *A magyar film olvasókönyve*, 44-50. 45.
 12. In the context of the avant-garde the role cinema played in the reevaluation of different arts is examined by R. Bruce Elder, *Harmony and Dissent. Film and the Avant-garde Art Movements in the Early Twentieth Century*. Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2008.
 13. Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space. 1880-19180* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 111.
 14. Gabriel Hanotoux, *L'Energie Francaise* (Paris, 1902), 355. Cited by Kern 1983, 126.
 15. *Bonnard. Sketches of a Journey*. Travels in an early motorcar. From Octave Mirbeau's journal 'La 628-E8'. With illustrations by Pierre Bonnard, transl. by D. B. Tubbs (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 1989), 18. (The English translation is abridged, but reproduces Pierre Bonnard's all 104 drawings made for a special, limited edition of Mirbeau's novel.) "La vie de partout se précipite, se bouscule, animée d'un mouvement fou, d'un mouvement de charge de cavalerie, et disparaît cinématographiquement, comme les arbres, les haies, les murs, les silhouettes qui bordent la route... Tout, autour de lui, et en lui, saute, danse, galope, est en mouvement, en mouvement inverse de son propre mouvement." Octave Mirbeau, *La 628-E8* (1907) (Editions du Boucher, Société Octave Mirbeau, 2003), 55.
<http://www.leboucher.com/pdf/mirbeau/628e8.pdf>. The title of the novel indicates the number plate of Mirbeau's car.
 16. Paul Virilio, "Dromoscopy, or The Ecstasy of Enormities," transl. by Edward R. O'Neil, *Wide Angle* 20.3 (1998) 11-22.
 17. *Ibid.*, 11.
 18. "...this admirable organism which is the engine of my automobile with its lungs and heart of steel, its caoutchouc and copper vascular system, its electric nervous system" (my translation).
 19. Piers Kelly, *The Ghost in the Machine. Science, Mysticism and Italian Futurist Literature*. Doctoral Dissertation. Centre for European Languages and Cultures, Monash University, Clayton, 2001. 86.
 20. Mirbeau 2003, 42: "lively, swarming, passing, changing, dizzying, unlimited, infinite".
 21. Mirbeau 2003, 45: "a mechanism which transports the motor energy, the heat, the speech and the image through thin networks of metallic wires – or through invisible waves".
 22. Bonnard – Mirbeau 1989, 14.
 23. Bonnard – Mirbeau 1989, 17-18.
 24. Virilio, 17.
 25. Virilio, 19.
 26. "Film is moved forward through the camera and the projector by mechanisms which convert the rotation of a motor or a crank into the reciprocating movement of a pin or claw, so as to register duration as, and subsequently reconstruct it from, a series of still photographs." Patrick Keiller, "Phantom Rides: The Railway and Early Film," in *The Railway and Modernity: Space, Time and the Machine Ensemble*, eds. Matthew Beaumont, Michael Freeman (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), 69-84. 71.

27. See Richard de Cordova, "From Lumiere to Pathé. The Break-Up of Perspectival Space," in *Early Cinema. Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. by Thomas Elsaesser (London: BFI Publishing, 1992), 79. See also Tom Gunning, "'Now You See It, Now You Don't'. The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions," *Velvet Light Trap*, 32 (Fall 1993): 3-12.
28. For example: *L'Arrivé d'un train* (1896), *La Sortie des usines Lumiere* (1895), *How It Feels to Be Run Over* (1900), etc.
29. Tom Gunning, "'An Unseen Energy Swallows Space'. The Space in Early Film and its Relation to American Avant-Garde Film," in *Film Before Griffith*, ed. John L. Fell (University of California Press, 1983), 362.
30. Charles Musser, "The Travel Genre in 1903-1904. Moving Towards Fictional Narrative," in *Early Cinema*, 128.
31. "The cinematic principle and the ideogram (1929)," in Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form. Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and transl. by Jay Leyda (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 38.
32. Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory. Visible Man and The Spirit of Film* [1924/1930], translated by Rodney Livingston, edited by Erica Carter. New York – Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009.
33. Jenő Török, "Jegyzetek a film evolúciójához" [Notes on the Evolution of Film]. *Mozihét*, 1916, 11 June, in *A magyar film olvasókönyve*, 52.
34. *Ibid.*, 57.
35. Miklós Marsovszky, "Új művészet: a film," *Nyugat*, 1924. No. 13-14. In English: "New Art: The Film," *Apertúra* (Fall 2012), see this issue. Translated by Izabella Füzi and Eszter Polónyi. Further references are to this translation.
36. There is a slight uncertainty considering the translation of the Hungarian term 'mozgás', as its English counterparts refers both to physical and human motion. However, there is another derived word of *mozgás*, namely 'mozdulat' which refers primarily to the movements of the human body (irrespective of intentionality, consciousness or expressivity of movement).
37. In Hungarian the same word "anyag" (meaning matter, material, substance, fabric or tissue, etc.) and its foreign language counterpart "matéria" is used throughout the text.
38. In 1913 Vera Vikár publishes an art historical treatise on the importance of movement (or gesture) in the history of sculpture, in which the most important hallmark is represented by Michelangelo. In his statues movement [*mozdulat*] unfolds in all three dimensions, a plasticity enforced by the isolation of the statue (from architectural elements), the "momentary constellations" and configurations captured by the sculptor and a stereotomic aspect which makes the silhouettes of sculptures irregular. According to Vikár, in interpreting Michelangelo's figures we can reconstruct the original block of rock from which the statue was carved. This imaginary supplement from the part of the viewer is necessary for apprehending the volume and monumentality of the work achieved by the contrast between the richness of movement and a convergent and closed composition concentrating kinetic energy in the body of the figures. (Vera Vikár, *A mozdulat az olasz szobrászatban. Nicola Pisanótól Michelangelóig* [Movement in Renaissance Sculpture. From Nicola Pisano to Michelangelo] (Budapest, 1913), 46-49.
39. Sigfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," in *The Mass Ornament. Weimar Essays*, ed. and transl. by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 75-88. 78.
40. Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory. Visible Man and The Spirit of Film* [1924/1930], translated by Rodney Livingston, edited by Erica Carter (New York – Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009), 18. Further citations, unless otherwise note, are from this edition.
41. "The artistic nature of film resides in the power and subtlety of its images and its gestural language. [...]"

Now, when it comes to film, what counts are equally the images the director uses to present the scene and what the actors' faces tell us." (19)

42. See: Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Trans. Tom Conley. London: Athlone Press, 1993.
43. Gilbert Ryle, *The Thinking of Thoughts. University Lectures, no. 18, 1968*. Online access: http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/CSACSLA/Vol14/Papers/ryle_1.html.
44. As if following Balázs's proposition, János Bódy compiles a "lexicon" of facial expressions and "artistic" gestures and publishes it in 1929 in two volumes entitled *The system of cinematic art and actor's mimicking* and *The system of cinematic art and the basis of amateur acting*. The books are aimed to help amateur, theatre, and cinematic actors, as well as painters, sculptors, priests, orators to make gestures expressive. The volumes list a series of feelings, emotions or narrative situations and describe the different positions and movements of the body which express them. While many of these descriptions suggest a theatrical overacting, a style that cinema left behind in the 1920s, these lexicons of postures and poses could be considered from the point of view of a standardization of acting in silent film and their systematization as an iconography of gestures and facial expressions.
45. Erica Carter, the editor of *Visible Man and Spirit of Film* identifies the source of the quotes as taken from the poem entitled 'True Enough: To the Physicist', "where the words refer not to art of any kind but to nature itself." (See Goethe, *The Collected Works*, Vol. 1 *Selected Poems*, ed. Christopher Middleton [Princeton, NJ, 1983], 237.)
46. Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*. Vol. 1. Ed. Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992), 226.; and *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Vol. 2. Elements of Logic. Ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1932), 161.
47. Mary Ann Doane, "The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18.1 (2007): 128-152.
48. The model of palimpsest is preferred by Balázs in case of narratives, too, when arranging multiple plotlines: "The spectre of one event seems to shine through another, making the entire surrounding world transparent" (21).
49. "a face can display the most varied emotions *simultaneously*, like a chord, and the relationships between these different emotions is what creates the rich amalgam of harmonies and modulations. These are the chords of feeling whose essence is in fact their simultaneity. Such simultaneity cannot be expressed in words." (34)
50. Mikhail Yampolsky, "Kuleshov's Experiments and the New Anthropology of the Actor", transl. by Richard Taylor, in *Silent Film*, ed. Richard Abel (London: Athlone Press, 1999), 45-70. See Lev Kuleshov, "The Training of the Actor", in *Kuleshov on Film. Writings of Lev Kuleshov*, transl. and ed. by Ronald Levaco (Berkeley/Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1974), 99-115.
51. „the arbitrary combination of the parts of different people's bodies and the creation through montage of the desired model actor", cited by Yampolsky, 58.
52. Montage practices and theories are discussed in *The Spirit of Film* (1930).
53. "This pointing of images in a particular direction can often be achieved by a single gesture, a silent glance..." (73).
54. The real question of what constitutes a "face" arises in the figurative uses of the term, when Balázs speaks about the face of things, of landscape, etc. For more on these inner tensions, the subject-object relations involved in reading faces and images, see my writing entitled "The Face of the Landscape in Balázs' Film Theory", *Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies*, vol. 5. (2012): 69-81., republished in *Raum und Identität im Film. Historische und aktuelle Perspektiven*, ed. by Irma Duraković, Michael Lommel, and Joachim

Paech (Marburg: Schüren-Verlag, 2012), 29-42.

55. Mari Jászai, "A kis táncpoéta" [The Little Dance-Poet], *Új Idők*, 20 April, 1902, in *Mozdulatművészet* [The art of movement], ed. by Júlia Lenkei (Budapest: Magvető-T-Twins, 1993), 13-17.
56. Other schools were founded by Alice Madzsar, Olga Szentpál based on studies pursued abroad in institutions founded on methods of Dalcroze and Mensendieck. Every school had its own theory, style and technique, and they highlighted different aspects of body movement, but all agreed on the socially emancipating character and pedagogical importance of their system, liberating movement from the mechanical Swedish gymnastics, or the achievement-oriented sports, or the stiffened and mannered classical ballet. Even with their differences the various schools and leading figures of the art of movement founded the Association of the Culture of Movement in 1928 to protect themselves from the serial attacks coming from the government or corporations with associated interests in gymnastics and dance schools. On the founding documents of these schools and their contemporary reception see *Mozdulatművészet* [The Art of Movement], ed. by Júlia Lenkei. Budapest: Magvető/T-Twins, 1993.
57. A mozgulatról [On movement] (manuscript probably from the beginning of 1930s), cited by Márk Fenyves, *A mozgulattudomány magyarországi hajnala* [The Dawn of the Art of Movement in Hungary] (Unpublished MA-thesis, Hungarian School of Art Dance)
<http://mozdulatmuveszet.hu/tartalom/mozdmuv/szakdolifom.htm>
58. The physics of movement is characterized by the first three parameters: movement's spatial character is analyzed based on geometry's system of planes, its temporality on audible and visible dissecting of time (prosody, music), its dynamics on the economy of forces. While movement as a basic unit makes perceptible time, space and energy, "spatiality draws movements, temporality narrativizes them, but force relations make them clear in their wholeness by motivating their space and time dissections". (A mozgulatról (1964), in Dienes Valéria, *Orkesztika – Mozdulatművészet* [Orchestics and the Art of Movement]. Budapest, 118-125. 123.) The fourth relation of movement with meaning, expression and communication makes the difference between physical motion and human movement by making movement a bridge between body and soul, mind and matter: "Movement gives body to the soul and fills the body with soul". (Emigráció és migráció (1920-1929), *Orkesztika – Mozdulatművészet*, 108.)
59. Művészet és testedzés [Art and physical training]. *Magyar Építőművészet*, 1915. no. 7-8. Reprinted in Dienes Valéria: *Orkesztika – Mozdulatművészet*, 87-89.

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