

**Katica**

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### SENSATION – PERCEPTION – MEDIATION

#### Jens Schröter: The Complexity of Technological Images. The Four Optical Series

The role of perception or, to be more precise, theories of perception for the understanding of the history and aesthetics of media is often discussed in an undifferentiated way. One example: Kittler's famous claim – quoted in the exposé for the conference in Szeged – that 'technical media build on overwhelming our senses' presupposes that knowledge about the senses is implied in the genealogy of technical media. But generalized in this way the claim is problematic. There are indeed imaging technologies, which are built to overwhelm our senses – in presupposing knowledge (at least in an empirical sense) about them – e.g. film and stereoscopy. But there are also imaging technologies which do not at all presuppose knowledge on perception, e.g. photography and holography. These media presuppose physical (geometrical or wave) optics, and not physiological optics (Crary). They presuppose knowledge (at least in an empirical sense) about the behavior of light. In the first part of the text these differences are reconstructed by criticizing Crary's approach. In the second part holography is discussed as an important imaging technology from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that is not based on physiological optics. Also, there are forms which do not fall in either of these categories. Coming from a long history from drawing and painting and re-emerging in digital images, there are parallel-perspectival representations, which neither accord to human perception nor to the behavior of light. In addition to approximately simulating visual and optical media, digital computers also include non-optical forms of imagistic representation and even combine all the different forms. This point is made in the third part of the paper. Finally, the argument shows that the complexity of contemporary technical imagery cannot be reduced to physiology, optics or non-optical forms alone. Perception is just one element among others.

#### Christoph Ernst: The Mediation of Perception in Mythological Thinking – On Diagrammatic Explication, Speculative Reasoning and the Myth of the Martian Civilization

The text discusses the role of diagrammatic reasoning as a speculative type of thinking. With regard to the well known stories of the Martian canals at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the so called 'mars-face' in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it can be shown that diagrammatic reasoning is an integral part in the interpretation of ambivalences and ambiguities of the perceptions provided by modern technical media, such as the telescope and photography. Diagrammatic reasoning, thus,

plays a central role in the cultural phenomenon of mythological thinking.

#### György Fogarasi: Teletrauma: Distance in Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*

This paper seeks to trace the notion of distance in Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*, by first indicating how the critical distance between Burke and Kant can be rethought in terms of an intrapersonal distance within both; then, as a second move, by looking at Burke's general theory of the passions (Part 1) as it differs from that of Locke; and thirdly, by moving to the more specific question of how the passion of fear or terror is related to both pain and the sublime (Part 2 and Part 4) – an investigation, which in turn necessitates a focus on the way attention figures as a duplicitous shifter between an-aesthesia and suffering (Part 4). Interestingly enough, while Burke conceptualizes the sublime as a passion based on mediation or distance, and therefore distinguishes it from “simple” fear (underlining that the subject must not be in immediate danger, and that he or she must be spatially or temporally distanced from the source of the passion), later it turns out that fear itself is far from being a “simple” notion for immediacy, since immediate danger or threat still presupposes a mere apprehension of pain, rather than pure pain itself. This double distance (between fear and the sublime, as well as between fear and pain), puts fear in an intermediate position, which is more traumatic than that of the sublime, but which contains an element of distance with relation to pain, and is therefore a form of “teletrauma”, an amalgam of an-aesthesia and suffering. Being thus positioned between the sublime and pain, fear appears as the site of contamination, where detachment and involvement merge. In this respect, it may serve as a conceptual tool for a critical rethinking of the problematic nature of both aesthetic distance and perceptual immediacy.

#### Ákos Seress: Playing with blends. Theatre studies and cognitive science

The purpose of this paper is to take a closer look at the relationship between cognitive sciences and theatre studies. First of all I examine if it is justified to speak about a “cognitive turn” in the discourse on theatricality. By examining the major works that are being labelled as “Cognitive Theatre Studies”, I discuss the new methods and theories dealing with theatrical phenomena. I also discuss the relationship these theories have with former studies. One of the most disturbing problems of theatre studies is that despite all the efforts, no sufficient definition has been offered for the term *theatre*. Using the means of cognitive studies, the paper argues that theatre researchers had an opportunity to examine this problem from another aspect. According to them the real question is not what theatre is, but rather what happens to the audience while perceiving a theatrical event, or what processes of the mind make us be able to indulge in a fictional scene. Certain researches try to use neurobiological answers, but these, in my view, have not been able to achieve a real breakthrough. I rather focus on studies that were developed from cognitive linguistics, and try to define theatricality by using Gilles Fauconnier's theory on conceptual blending. This theory not only gives us a good explanation about theatre, but it also opens up the opportunity to examine a certain hybridity of the theatrical medium: productions and dramatic

texts that are blending film, theatre and radio.

## EARLY CINEMA: PRESENCE, MOVEMENT, EXPERIENCE

### Beja Margitházi: “Last night I was in the Kingdom of Shadows...” . The Role of Body and Senses in Various “First Contact” Narratives

If we look at the first descriptions about the early audience’s collective or individual responses to moving images at the turn of the century, we see a picture with many layers. Whether they are refuted myths (like the “train effect”), late interpretations (like “astonishment”, “stupefying effect” by Tom Gunning), or subjective, first-person reports (like Maxim Gorky’s), these “first contact” narratives not only catch the rare, emblematic moments of first encounter, but preserve and reflect the contemporary attitude about how the new medium *should be*. True or not, authentic or not, these nostalgic, mythological or anecdotic descriptions tell us about the desires, fears and guesses surrounding the emergence of the moving image, and offer a rich ground for further investigation. My paper intends to examine some of these early movie-going impressions with a special focus on the role of senses and previous visual experiences shaping perception and body reaction. I will try to explore the mechanisms and patterns working behind these first contact stories, by drawing attention to the importance of the fact that the moving image declares itself a visual *and haptic* medium in a moment when cinematic experience collapses perceptual distance and brings images almost unbearably close to the viewers.

### Izabella Füzi: Mechanical motion and body movements in early cinema and in Hungarian film theory of the 1920s

The paper traces a trajectory of changes in the concept of movement. The starting point is the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

#### Eszter Polónyi: Béla Balázs and the Eye of the Microscope

This study explores the significance of the cinematic close-up to one of the earliest theories of film, produced by Béla Balázs, on the basis of a widespread technique of microscopy in the life sciences, notably in the work of his brother Evin Bauer, a theorist of microbiology.

Balázs imagines that silent film records life in its immanence and spontaneity by virtue of what he calls the “physiognomic” nature of its signs. Rather than generating signs that must be passed through an alphabetic cipher, as had been required under the regime of the written or literary, Balázs presents film as liberating our access to the flow of optical data. Interestingly, however, Balázs retains the need otherwise characteristic of scientific analysis for dividing up the image into semiotic units, what he describes as “atomization.” He insists on returning the real to a symbolic order and making film into a language. Although he rejects the intellect as capable of expressing and comprehending life, Balázs produces a semiotic system for its analysis that anticipates the “errors” that could arise from subjective perception. If cinema’s “language” is both methodical and irrational, both scientific and aesthetic, this is because its images systematically provoke signs in the viewer of a “physiognomic” rather than rational order. And as microscopic studies of the life sciences such as his brother’s had shown in the 1920s and 1930s, the “language” of life could only be known by leaving behind the familiar, Newtonian space-time of visible, “macro” reality.

## DOSSIER

#### Miklós Marsovszky: New Art: The Film (1924)

The essay takes on the task to examine more closely the premises and consequences of the statement according to which the matter of cinema is movement. This is done by speculating on the ideal form of cinema and by integrating cinema in the system of aesthetic thought, although this is possible only by rethinking its master concepts.

#### Béla Balázs: Daydream (192?)

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.

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