**Balázs, Béla (4 August 1884 - 17 May 1949)**

Béla Balázs was a Hungarian-Jewish writer, filmmaker, and important early theorist of the cinema. In a series of texts aimed at film critics, practitioners, and audiences, Balázs argued that the new medium should be treated as a serious art form. He thus created a vocabulary for describing its visual properties, which Gilles Deleuze would revive in the 1980s, and which remains influential to this day.

Born in Szeged, Balázs studied in Budapest, where he befriended composers Zoltán Kodály, and Béla Bartók. He later wrote the libretto for Bartók’s opera *Bluebeard’s Castle*(1912) and the story for his ballet, *The Wooden Prince* (1917). After completing doctoral studies in Paris and Berlin, and briefly serving in the First World War, Balázs returned to Budapest. With his friend, the philosopher György Lukacs, he became involved in the Hungarian left.

After the failed socialist revolution of 1919, Balázs fled with his wife to Vienna, where he began reviewing films for *Der Tag*. These articles became the basis for two seminal works of film theory: *Der sichtbare Mensch* (*The Visible Man*, 1924) and *Der Geist des Films* (*Spirit of Film*, 1930). Through *Der sichtbare Mensch*, he argued that cinema deserved recognition as an art. Its new technologies reasserted the expressive powers of the visible world and of the body that print and literary culture had suppressed for centuries. Widely celebrated, the book was translated into eleven languages. *Der Geist des Films* further developed its themes.

Balázs also worked on films, including G. W. Pabst’s adaptation of Bertolt Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera*(1930),and Leni Riefenstahl’s *Blue Light*(1932). When the Nazis came to power, he fled to Moscow, where he taught at the State Film Institute. In 1945, he returned to Budapest, where he continued teaching and struggled to work in the film industry until his death. *Theory of Film*(1952)*,*which incorporated parts of the earlier two books, appeared posthumously in English.

**Further reading**

Balázs, B. “Visible Man, or the Culture of Film,” *Screen*48(1):91-108. 2007.

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