

Title: Balázs, Benjamin and the Factory of the Eccentric Actor
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The first film theoreticians, emerging from diverse academic and national backgrounds, pursued a specific goal; in order to write seriously about cinema, they sought to prove that it was an independent art form. Thus, the arguments of Béla Balázs and Walter Benjamin locate cinema at a possible breaking point between traditions. This paper will examine how their insistence on the emergence of the radically new art form and its potential for democratization resonated with the very fabric of modern thought in the artistic avant-garde in Russia during the revolutionary years of early twentieth century, but was augmented by the Russian theoreticians who, in contrast to Balázs and Benjamin, eschewed ideas of medium specificity. An exploration of the members of the Factory of the Eccentric Actor (FEKS), most particularly Grigory Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, will demonstrate that these young filmmakers, while identifying with the rich and revolutionary artistic experimentation that ranged across art forms believed that film could only benefit from fertile and innovative medium commonalities, a view espoused directly by Sergei Eisenstein. The most convenient point of departure for most was a comparison with the theater, that medium which shares aspects of performance, reception, narrative demands, and general existence as spectacle. Soviet filmmakers, for instance, whose contribution to the formation of film language is more than substantial, often owed their discoveries, innovations, artistic successes and inspirations to the fact that they stood at the crossroads between art forms. Thus, this paper will present the first pages of film theory as both crosscultural and interdisciplinary, resonance and conflict, and will elucidate how FEKS and its Eccentric Manifesto arose from those contradictory developments of the avant-garde.