

Habent sua fata libelli - Books have their own fate.

Today this statement may be considered valid for films and audiovisual assets as well. I believe it is especially true regarding the fate and protection of the works of the Hungarian film history.

As regards the traditions of Hungarian culture, it was primarily verbal not only for several centuries but also up to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The social historical reasons for that may be the subject of another presentation. Education in schools concentrated first of all on literature. Film has only become an integral part of Hungarian culture since the 1950s, even though in his essay, *A pamphlet about Hungarian cinema*, (1945) István Szóts already expressed new ideas and requirements in connection with the Hungarian film and so did Béla Balázs, who returned from emigration in 1947. Neither of them was paid any attention to by anyone.

When film finally became part of the national values, the notion of film culture was still almost equivalent to feature film production.

The necessity of protecting and restoring films was recognized by only a few even among the members of the profession, as the majority thought that the expenses would have to be taken away from film production. Unfortunately, this was another proof of the short-term vision of the profession.

The employees of the Hungarian Film Archive recognized already at the end of the 1980s that if they do not start restoring the Hungarian films right away, their long-term protection will be endangered because of their gradually worsening technical condition.

It was not easy to find support either for the idea or for the expenses. Naturally, at the end of the 1980s only the traditional restoration of the films could begin. It should be noted that by now even the traditional technology of restoration has developed and changed considerably.

From the very beginning of the restoration every type of the films found in the film archive has been involved in the process. Besides feature films, the systematic restoration of Hungarian newsreels has been considered very important as they are the carriers of the visual memories of the past century.

Due to our cooperation with archives abroad we have received great help from Amsterdam and Bologna as well as the Lumière Foundation established in 1955, at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of film. Their support was professional and financial, for example in finding and restoring Hungarian silent films.

What aspects were considered at the selection of the films to be restored?

The colleagues working with Hungarian films have the necessary film historical as well as technological knowledge to make suggestions. The primary aspect is always the technical condition of the given film, its film historical and esthetical value comes second. Great caution has to be exercised at the selection, lest subjective and personal points of views may prevail over historical importance.

Besides traditional restoration, the digitalization of the films began in 2005. It has been continued every since. The digitalization of feature, documentary and animation films as well as newsreels is included in the programme. Digitalization makes it possible to distribute the films on digital carriers as well, but only films which have been restored with traditional methods and which are in good technical condition will be digitalized. This process does not simply mean transferring the image and sound onto digital carriers. Direct scanning from negatives and so called reproductive film materials help preserving

the best possible quality of both image and sound to be distributed over television channels, DVDs and other carriers. This phase of the work is done by cinematographers in the laboratory.

It was in 2004 that digital film improving technologies were first applied during restoration by the National Film Archive. However, because of its high cost, this technology can only be applied when absolutely necessary.

The first instance where this technology was used was three colour scenes of the *Talking Caftan* made in 1941. Its original colors were restored with the help of the Agfacolor negative that has survived. The rest of the film is black and white. The first complete film which has been restored with digital technique is *Mattie the Goose-Boy*, the images of which almost totally lost their colour since 1949, when it was made. Due to digital image processing, the 2-3 percent colour content of the images of the camera negative has been raised to 100 percent. Where it was impossible, the images had to be coloured again based on the colour samples that survived. The result, however, was fully compatible with the restored images. The first colour documentary *May 1, 1949*, made after 1945 was also restored within the framework of this project. The only available source was a print much used in bad quality cinemas. All three films needed complete sound restoration which was also carried out digitally. First the sound tapes which were deemed the most original were digitalized, then the disturbing noises were removed with various softwares, the recordings were cleaned and the additions and faults due to the old technologies repaired.

Digital sound restoration has been done since the 1900s in the Archive. The sound of several feature and documentary films has been made audible this way. After professional reading of analogous soundtracks, they will be transferred onto hard discs, then, after several months of software cleaning and laser scanning to film.

One of the biggest project of the National Film Archive during which the image and sound of *Hyppolit, the Butler* made by István Székely in 1931 was restored for the coming generations finished in 2008. It was the first great hit of the Hungarian talkies, which can also be considered as emblematic from a film historical point of view. Several people worked on its 11 000 frames in the Archives, the scanners of the Film Laboratory and the Baselight timer. The result is a print which is a great pleasure to watch.

It was digital restoration which helped make *Man of Gold*, a feature film made in 1936 literally visible. The original camera negative was not suitable for projection as too many parts were missing. It was made visible and audible by combining a 16 mm print for cinema projection with a 35mm fragment with Croatian subtitles.

Keeping the restored final product on film is the only satisfying solution for any archive.

About distribution: publishing the film on digital carriers also serves as the protection of archive copies. It also makes the films available for a wide audience.

Based on the above, some believe that films should only be stored on digital carriers. Traditional film storage can be closed down, as DVD disks do not occupy as much room as the reels of film. "Let's throw out the prints kept on celluloid film - we'll have less trouble and less expenses." However, the professionals' view, even internationally is that under favourable conditions the films can be kept on celluloid for over a hundred years. Many people do not know that storing and copying digital material also involves considerable expenses after a certain period of time. It is the responsibility of all countries to protect their films and not to allow them to perish. The fact that not only production, but the protection and restoration (with any kind of method) of the already existing values involves considerable expenses must be accepted.

Hungarian National Archive restored the black and white films in their own workshop. The restoration, digitalization and digital restoration were primarily done in the Hungarian film Laboratory. These processes need not only modern film technological equipment, computer development and skills, but also knowledgeable people who are familiar with film history. Each film carries different values and different problems. Those who participate in their restoration must always keep that in mind.

A few excerpts from our digitally restored films will be presented:  
The Talking Caftan by Géza Radványi,  
Mattie the Goose-Boy by Kálmán Nádasdy and László Ranódy,  
May 1, 1949, documentary film  
Hyppolit the Butler by István Székely

Some figures about the restorations:

### **Films restored since 1989**

**Feature films, silent:** 30 restored

**Feature films, with sound, made before 1945:** 130 restored, 8 digitalized, 3 digitally restored

**Feature films: 1945-1988:** 311 restored, 196 digitalized, 1 digitally restored

**Short, documentary, animation films made before 1944:** 131 restored, 28 digitalized

**Short, documentary, animation films 1945-1988:** 232 restored, 86 digitalized, 1 digitally restored

**Newsreels:** 2 313 restored, 847 digitalized

**Total:** 147 restored, 1 192 digitalized, 5 digitally restored

### **Films to be digitalized in 2011:**

47 feature films

53 animation films

123 documentaries

326 newsreels

Finally: the number of the films kept in the Archive waiting to be digitalized and restored is finite. They need a long time and money. It seems that the restoration of films will last till the end of times because the newly developed technologies will always provide better results than before. The 4:3 size films have to be converted into 16:9 because of the HD format. In 2005 when digitalization began, films were not yet made in that format. Thus, film restorers who come after us must not be afraid: they will have work, provided they also have the money. By restoring them, the films are not only saved and kept for future generations but they are also made accessible for the present ones. More and more often do we hear and experience that the number of people interested in film history is diminishing even in film museums. This has several reasons but one of them certainly is that film history can only be accessed through worn and bad prints. However, visual experience, which is the essence of cinema, can only be achieved with good prints.

It is no accident that in the programme booklet of the American Film Academy remarks regarding the condition of the prints, whether they are restored, digitalized or digitally restored are always included.

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