

Statement of the Research Team under the Programme of National Cultural Identity (NAKI) at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague.

Art becomes a value precisely thanks to its permanent effect on the viewer, reader or listener. A significant financial investment in the digitisation of films is justified by selecting those films that have been classified as works of art and therefore merit to be preserved for future generations.

An unprofessional and incompetent confusion of this true reason for preserving a film leads to different ideas on how to approach digitisation. Costly digitisation is not done in order to prove, by a specific film, technical possibilities for the contemporary film expression, but to maintain that film's artistic value and effect. An artistic film is a work that continues to be living and this fact is not related to its contemporary technical perfection or imperfection. It's the ability of artistic films to appeal to the audience even years after being shot that is their highest cultural value and is the real reason for respect and for the efforts to preserve them for future generations.

While the constant, living appeal of an artistic film is independent of time, its technical aspects and material substance depend on time as they are constantly evolving. The physical aspect of the film is not art, but just a way of contemporary presentation of the work.

Digitisation of film works in the form of digital restoration must thus be understood as expert adaptation of previous technical presentation and reproductive options to current ones. It must be implemented so that the current technical and technological possibilities are fully utilized to communicate, in good quality, the film work and to preserve its artistic effect in its original form, identical with the effect it had at the time of its première performance.

Digital restoration thus is not remastering, which it is sometimes insinuated to be, because remastering means such an intervention in the work, which allows for significant change from the original, improving it or deteriorating it, depending on the taste or intentions of the entity that ordered the process. Remastering thus is a gross interference with the copyright of the work. Digital restoration, unlike remastering, reverently adheres to all of the artistic parameters of the original work and only adapts the old technical convention which, today, causes damage, to the current convention. The reason is that today's reproductive opportunities, because of their sensitivity to the subtleties of the film work, improved so much that mere mechanical application of digitisation techniques could damage the artistic expression of the original work. Digital restoration is a sensitive adaptation to the contemporary perception using current technologies in order for the work to remain equally appealing as it had once been. Such an attitude does not change anything in terms of the essence of the author's work; it is only its technical, material quality that is adapted to the current technology in order for the work of art not to deteriorate.

The basic source of today's misunderstanding of digitisation is the fact that actions intended to maintain the artistic quality and appeal of a film are mistaken for preservation of the value and time documentation of the physical appearance of the work, that is a relic of the old distribution copy. However, digital restoration should not serve the purposes of historical/technical documentation but it should be a service in favour of maintaining a living work for a future living world. The digitisation process, offered as an alternative, consisting in the copying of the existing degraded copies, does no service to the authenticity of a film work but represents a counter-productive mistake. It is more of a conservation work rather than restoration work. It does not match the original intentions and reasons which led to film digitisation. Qualified digital restoration – although also being an instrument of potential intervention – follows very responsibly the author's side of the work. Therefore, it requires the presence of filmmakers authorising the digitised film copy or a justified transfer of competencies to execute authorisation to a professional restorer by the means of an Expert Group from the ranks of experienced cinematographers, sound engineers and film directors. A digital restorer then, in addition to using the opportunity to get support from such an Expert Group in the form of consultations, must also be equipped with a professional digitisation methodology.

Members of the Expert Group – members of artistic film professions – create films and understand their essence, not only in terms of knowledge of artistic procedures, but also in terms of understanding the artistic intentions of the authors of these works. Therefore, their knowledge is the

basic starting point for the work of a digital restorer. A digital restorer is a new profession that grows, like in fine art disciplines, from the foundations of artistic work. By the means of zeros and ones, the author's original work is separated from the material information substance, the old film support materials and emulsions which are subject to destruction, degrade and gradually get destroyed. The authorship substance of the work transferred to new carriers and expressed using new technological means, is still the same, but resists better the destruction caused by time. The result of the restorer's work then is a work unmodified, unmanipulated from the authorship point of view.

The reason is that a living film work and its screening has always suffered when the old, photochemical copying preserving intervention, necessary to restore the film carrier, was applied. This is so because it is not possible to transfer technical information from the old carrier to the new one in an unchanged form. Many times, a mere preview information about the defunct work came into being. Tools of a traditional film restorer did not make it possible to correct the artistic appeal of a film work and therefore the participation of authors in the restoration process did not make sense. Authors were not invited because they could not influence this process. Today, the time has changed. The new profession of a digital restorer has new tools available and, with them, also new opportunities. Old artistic film works thus can once again become living art.

A proper procedure of correct digitisation leads, after having analysed the work, to restore its visual and audio expression so that the original emotional effect of the work remains unchanged. This is a task for an art workshop which can be, legitimately and competently, the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague whose work is, in analytical, methodological as well as professional terms, of a high standard. Such an institution is used by the teachers to teach profound understanding of films in all contexts and, by researchers, to search for further manners and options of maintaining the timeless effects of films as a living art.

Digitisation, in any case, opens the possibility of intervention in the work of art and, as such, it must be conducted professionally and only in accordance with the author's intention while respecting the copyrights as much as possible. Spectators, distributors and authors of cinematographic works have an inalienable right for their films to be presented as living art without degradation deposits, i.e. in the highest quality achievable today.

An often asked question, whether the spectator recognises that a film work was restored well or poorly, should never be asked. Is a living film work merely some "funfair entertainment" never comparable to traditional fine art? Does anybody question the fact that works of art made by the recognized Masters of the past cannot be confused with their digital copies or sculptures produced by 3D printers? In such cases, the situation is absolutely clear. It is for the above qualities that, during the war, it is precisely living works of art that are among the first valuable objects to be hidden in order to be saved! Why then do we have to be witnessing today the decline and the appalling consequences of digitisation due to the failure to comply with ethics and professionalism of digital restoration? Digital restoration should not be subject to any amateur judgement of the viewing public, including purposeful interpretations provided by some film historians or arbitrary activities of inexperienced technicians in the existing archival digitisation department of the NFA, not to speak about the dictate of the "beneficial prices" of poor quality conversion of films.

**Living film – a living work of art – should be, even in its digital rebirth, taken care of by those who practically create film and are able to authorise its new existence in the form of the original creative intention and in the authentic form of its first presentation – the film première. This is the objective of the DRA Method.**