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Nation-Building Across Media: Lumière Films' Intervention in the Hungarian Visual Sphere

Abstract

One of Hungary's major mediatized political events was the procession organized on June 8, 1896, as part of the Hungarian millennial celebrations intended to express national progress, pride, and unity. Captured by professional and amateur photographs and represented in drawings, paintings, and a cyclorama, as well as actuality films recorded by the Lumière traveling operators, the political event of the procession reached a much larger audience than the actual public present. The article aims to show the differences between the staged event of the procession intended to bolster the image of a unified nation and its visual mediation — for example, by means of moving images accessible to a potentially global audience. The analysis proceeds by comparing contemporary accounts and visual representations of the event, confronting different models of spectatorship and identity in experiencing and representing the celebration.

Keywords

early cinema, Hungary, Lumière, 19th century, nation-building, visual sphere

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In June 1896, Charles Moisson, an employee of the Lumière company, arrived in Budapest, on his way home from the Tsar's coronation in Moscow.¹⁾ Moisson timed his visit to the Hungarian capital to coincide with a series of ceremonies celebrating the 1000th anniversary of the Hungarian conquest, lasting from May to October that year. On June 8, a

1) The article is a revised and abridged version of the 4th chapter of my monograph published in Hungarian, *From the Fairground to Cinema: The Emergence of Visual Mass Culture in Hungary (1896–1914)* (Szeged: Pompeji, 2022), 85–107. The original text was revised and expanded with explanations for an international readership.

carefully choreographed procession was organized to mark the 29th anniversary of the coronation of Emperor Franz Joseph as King of Hungary. The 1867 coronation was part of a political compromise (*Ausgleich*) establishing the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy. The 1896 commemorative parade was a ritual of power relying on the participating and witnessing role of the viewers, covered by lengthy newspaper accounts, represented in drawings and paintings, and recorded on photographs and moving images shot by the Lumière traveling operators. How did these short actuality films enter the field of the Hungarian public sphere characteristic of the era? Are there any differences in how a plethora of textual and visual media dealt with this symbolic event? Analyzing the Lumière films in the context of the political representation of the era raises the more general question of how the moving image, as a new means of technical recording, storage, and presentation, entered the visually constructed public sphere and what its role in transforming this sphere might have been. In this article, I specifically examine the ways in which the procession films intervened in the visual representation of the Hungarian festive public sphere.

At the end of the 19th century, Hungary was part of the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary ruled by the Habsburgs. In a multi-state and multinational empire torn by social and ethnic tensions, the nation-building process was especially complicated. The Hungarian political space was divided across two recurring and burdening issues: 1. the establishment of the nation-state that would mean achieving total independence from Austria, and 2. the question of the minorities. Since the nation was defined mainly by ethnic and cultural criteria, the formation of a unified nation was hindered not only by dependence on Austria but also by the fact that more than half of the population belonged to different ethnic minorities (Romanians, Germans, Slovaks, etc.). The millennial celebrations were part of the Magyarization process, a cultural assimilation that offered members of minorities the prospect of acquiring wealth and education as preconditions for achieving bourgeois status.²⁾ “Magyar” is the Hungarian word for “Hungarian;” Magyarization refers to the process of transforming a mixed-ethnicity population into a unified nation based on a Magyar historical narrative. Although the Austro-Hungarian compromise in principle gave equal rights to minorities, after 1860 assimilation proved more and more successful, especially among the urbanized (Jewish and German) middle classes.³⁾ The main tool of assimilation was the development and strengthening of the Hungarian national consciousness, while the loyalty of the subjects to the monarchy and the king could not have been openly questioned.

In contrast to the abundance of international examples, there has been very little research on early cinema in Hungary. Hungarian silent film histories⁴⁾ discussed it in rela-

2) András Gerő argued that the goals and means of Magyar nation-building were interconnected with the process of embourgeoisement and dismantling of the feudal structures characteristic of the era. See András Gerő, “Towards a civil society,” in *Modern Hungarian Society in the Making: The Unfinished Experience* (Budapest – London – New York: Central European University Press, 1997), 3–107.

3) On the “forced Magyarization” see László Nagy, “Le nationalisme hongrois et les célébrations du millénaire de 1896,” in *Les nations européennes entre histoire et mémoire, XIX–XX siècles*, eds. Francis Démier and Elena Musiani (Nanterre: Presses universitaires de Paris Nanterre, 2017), 101–108.

4) Bálint Magyar, *A magyar némafilm története* (Budapest: Új Palatinus, 2003); Zsolt Köhát, *Tovamozduló ember tovamozduló világban: A magyar némafilm 1896–1931 között* (Budapest: Magyar Filmintézet, 1996).

tion to the evolution of national film history, thereby narrowing the issue down to the beginnings of Hungarian filmmaking. Contrary to this approach, in my recent works I argue that early Hungarian cinema played a significant role in shaping public opinion with a new type of visual address; different uses of moving images participated in public debate and consensus-building and included people from different social backgrounds that had not previously been part of the public. The first moving images recorded in Hungary by the Lumière cameramen intervened in a public sphere on the road of embourgeoisement yet still dominated by feudal reminiscences. In addition to the press, other means of democratizing the public sphere were the visual media and different models of spectatorship through which the values and questions attached to nation-building were spread.

Within the influential revisionist film history paradigm, early cinema as a global phenomenon has mostly been studied in the context of turn-of-the-century visual mass entertainment practices as part of the modern industrialized and urbanized social transformations. However, to account for how cinema created new national and local audiences, it is imperative to demonstrate the links between old and new media and differences between their models of spectatorship. Since there are no Hungarian written sources documenting the actual forms of reception specific to these Lumière films, I will concentrate on comparing the visual representations of the procession in different media in order to show that the official cultural position, which exalts the unity of the nation, is always relying on the representative power of the media, which create different spectatorial positions and identities, and thus fragment the experience and communal character of the celebration. Event photographs, drawings, panoramas, and actuality films posit in different ways the shared “we” that the celebration intends to address. In this article, my guiding question in mapping the public sphere of early cinema in Hungary is to what extent the earlier visual media contributed to the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere that superseded forms of feudal representative publicity, and how various visual media experiences shaped the image of the nation and the sense of belonging to the nation.

Cinema and the Visual Public Sphere

The notion of the public sphere has been interpreted in many different and divergent ways, which is why it is necessary to briefly recall the original context of Habermas’ explanation. I will then define the notion of the visual sphere through a critique of Habermas’ conception of the role of media in the constitution of publicity. In the early 1960s, Jürgen Habermas introduced the powerful concept of the public sphere to denote the historical process of mediation between private individuals and state power.⁵⁾ The public sphere is emancipatory in that it opposes the rule of authority and all forms of power in general with a horizontal relationship of equals based on debate and negotiation. However, it is also exclusionary in that, although in principle accessible to all those who acquire the wealth and literacy required for entering the bourgeois society, it generalizes the interests of one class

5) Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989). The book was originally published in German in 1962.

of society as the public interest. In the bourgeois public sphere, people, as private individuals (i.e., representing themselves), publicly contest and criticize the decisions of the authorities, which only through this legitimation can become public power. In this debate, everyone is equal, and no one has the role of arbiter. A radically new feature of the bourgeois public sphere is that its members do not participate as representatives or agents of power, as in the case of the earlier representative public sphere characteristic of the feudal society, but express their opinions on political decisions as private individuals, in the same way as they express their opinions on a literary work or a theatrical performance.

This model of the Habermasian public sphere was, as many have noted, far from being a historical reality; it is rather an ideal that draws on the values laid down by Kantian philosophy. The notion of rational "reasoning" and its various aspects have been the subject of much criticism. In the 1990s, it was criticized for lack of pluralism, that in no historical period has there been a single public capable of totalizing the many "voices," but that there are plural or counter-publics whose strength lies not in consensus-building but in disagreement, in dissent.⁶ And since the 2000s, the point has been increasingly emphasized that the public sphere is not media-independent, nor can it be confined to the privilege of speech, but is shaped by the mediality of mass communication. Relevant to the present paper are those critiques that point to Habermas' ignorance of mediality and draw attention to the power of the mass media to shape the public sphere. More specifically, the question is how technical and mass media, such as cinema, create modes of mediation between the private and public spheres and forward ways through which the exercise of power can be discussed and consensus-building carried out.

The studies that introduce the notion of the "visual (public) sphere" or the "public screen" to counter Habermas' "medium forgetfulness" largely use cases of civic activism to exemplify the recent restructuring of the public sphere in a changed (digital) media environment.⁷ At the same time, these approaches emphasize that the civic gaze must be present not only in the making of images but also in the activation of viewing, in the formation of critical spectatorship. The visual sphere, however, does not exclude verballity; on the contrary, spectatorship is often accounted for by verbal texts: a plethora of press texts deal, for example, with how to view spectacles staged on the occasion of political events or with the role of technical media that have transformed the field of visuality.

In addition to problematizing the role of media, it is also worth considering that Habermas defined the structure of the social public sphere too strictly, and thus limited it to a discursive arena that is separate from, but mediating between, the spheres of the state, the market, and the family. Miriam Hansen, who has done the most to conceptualize the public sphere of early cinema, argues that in its most general sense, the public sphere is "a

6) For a summarizing account see Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, no. 25–26 (1990), 56–80.

7) For a theoretical discussion see Paolo Carpianno, "The Shape of the Sphere: The Public Sphere and the Materiality of Communication," *Constellations* 6, no. 2 (1999), 177–189; for the definition of the "visual sphere" through specific examples see Cara A. Finnegan and Jiyeon Kang, "'Sighting' the Public: Iconoclasm and Public Sphere Theory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 4 (2004), 377–402; E. Cram, Melanie Loehwing, and John Louis Lucaites, "Civic Sights: Theorizing Deliberative and Photographic Publicity in the Visual Public Sphere," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 49, no. 3 (2016), 227–253.

discursive matrix or process through which social experience is articulated, interpreted, negotiated and contested in an intersubjective, potentially collective and oppositional form.”⁸⁾ According to Hansen, the public character of cinema can be accounted for in two ways: one is the public sphere of the moving image itself, shaped by “specific relations of representation and reception;” the other publicity pertains to a larger public sphere, as “part of a broader social horizon shaped by other media, by overlapping local, national, global, face-to-face and deterritorialized structures of public life.”⁹⁾ Hansen argues that early cinema (and to some extent silent film culture) acted as a melting pot for multiple publics, not only by bringing new, peripheral social strata into the public sphere but also by mediating between global, mediatized forms of mass culture and local, performance-centered modes of reception.

In a 2022 monograph on early cinema in Hungary, I explored in detail the problem that arose from the fact that cinema audiences were the first “mixed” audiences, where members of different social classes and ethnic backgrounds sat side by side and watched the same program. The threat of social homogenization was narrativized in the early 1910s along with two different social conceptions: on the one hand, the reformist-progressive narrative that cinema enabled democratic equality for viewers from different social backgrounds, and on the other hand, the conservative-paternalistic narrative that cinema was a means of “uplifting” and “ennobling” the lower classes.¹⁰⁾ However, there are no Hungarian accounts of the way audiences encountered moving images in this early period examined here.¹¹⁾ That is why the paper aims to reconstruct the impact and reception of the earliest moving images by contrasting them with the visual representations of the procession in other media.

The Procession and Competing Narratives of the Nation

Perhaps the most spectacular event of the millennium year, according to contemporary accounts, was the procession taking place on June 8 to celebrate the coronation of the King in 1867. The parade of over 1,000 men riding and marching from Vérmező (Field of Blood) to Buda Castle paid homage to the King, who received the tributes on the palace balcony along with the royal family. The symbolic purpose of the march was the transportation of the crown and coronation badges to the freshly built Parliament, where the first parliamentary assembly held in the new building took place. Finally, the crown was escorted back to the Castle on another route, where the King responded to the eulogies.

8) Miriam Hansen, “Early cinema, late cinema: permutations of the public sphere,” *Screen* 34, no. 3 (Spring 1993), 201.

9) *Ibid.*, 206.

10) See the chapter “Publicity of Early Cinema and the Cultural Prestige of Moving Images,” in *From the Fairground to Cinema*, 166–192, [published in Hungarian].

11) One significant exception is the staging of a play entitled *Mozgó fényképek* (Moving Photographs) by the Vígsház in Budapest, in which a screening of a cinema program was incorporated, including a hitherto unknown (Lumière?) film commissioned by the theater. I discuss this early example and the discourse around it in “*Mozgó fényképek*: The scandal and debate around moving images in early Hungarian cinema,” *Early Popular Visual Culture* 21, no. 4 (2023), 451–470.

As visual operations for creating and rehearsing social meanings, ceremonial spectacles were intended to activate the social imaginary,¹²⁾ to visualize and experience the unity of the nation. The parade itself became a marker of national space and national time: the route followed by the procession linked the religious and power centers of the city, the sites of historical memory (Field of Blood, Buda Castle, Matthias Church, Parliament). Contemporary descriptions of the procession saw it primarily as a visual phenomenon, a “dream” or a dazzling “vision” that created a sense of belonging to the national community through the act of looking. Although most of its viewers characterized the spectacle as indescribable and unrecordable, it was “captured” by professional and amateur photographs, drawings, paintings, and later a cyclorama, as well as moving images. In this way, the procession can be seen as the forerunner of mediatized political events, reaching a much larger audience than the actual public present at the event.

Processions were the main spectacles of the millennial celebrations; as theatrical displays of power and as successors of the religious procession, they preserved the characteristics of the “representative publicity” (Habermas) typical of feudal societies. This type of publicity was used as “a status attribute” and staged as “the embodiment of some ‘higher power.’”¹³⁾ The ceremonial nature of the ritual actions, the hierarchical order of the procession, the historical costumes, the nobility marching on horseback, and their military escort offered a form of spectacle through which the audience lining the route of the procession could symbolically identify with the marchers as representatives of the nation. However, the route of the procession, i.e., the transport of the crown and its escort from the royal palace to the Parliament and back, also points to the need for a division of power that no longer sees political authority as merely an “embodiment of a ‘higher’ power” of divine origin, but legitimates it through parliamentary debate among members eligible by heredity, appointment, and elections.

According to contemporary accounts, the parade had three purposes: 1. to pay homage to the King, to reaffirm the constitutional monarchy; 2. to express national pride as a sense of community that underpinned the idea of the nation-state; 3. to showcase the Hungarian national character and consciousness by exhibiting the ancestry of the Hungarian (ethnic) nation as opposed to other ethnicities. The three objectives refer to different models of publicity, mixing elements of representative, bourgeois, and mass publicity, as Habermas distinguishes them. The various interpretations of the procession bring to the fore the differences that legitimize political power and the closely related national idea in the three kinds of public sphere: the procession thus (1) ritually links the idea of the nation with the sanctity of the crown, (2) embodies the idea of the nation in a spectacular way to be experienced by anyone taking part in it, and (3) stages national unity as a performance through the constitutive role of spectatorship.

The procession was reportedly made up of 1200 riders, called a “banderium,” while the total number of spectators on the procession route was close to half a million. Originally,

12) Charles Taylor defined the social imaginary as “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.” Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 23.

13) Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of Public Sphere*, 7.

the banderium was a feudal form of army organization by which “banner-lords” (from the Italian “banderia,” i.e., “banner”) recruited occasional armies, demonstrating both their wealth and their loyalty to the king since noblemen were obliged to fight personally for the king. At the end of the century, the banderium, a reference to the dependencies of the feudal past, was only called up for ceremonial celebrations. The procession of the crown and the coronation insignia recall the religious rite, in this case testifying to the sanctity of political power. Just as religious processions are “an extension of the sacred over secular space,” a “communication channel between the sacred environment and the profane,”¹⁴⁾ whose collective character is provided by participating in the spectacle, the sanctity of the crown is manifested in its embodiment of the Hungarian statehood. For the feudal political power, the crown is not simply an object of coronation but a symbolic equivalent of kingship, an idea and a relic that survives the physical body of the king and guarantees the immortality of divine power.

The political conditions of the dual monarchy did not allow for the assertion of claims to a sovereign nation-state, as they violated the unity of the monarchy and also fueled claims for similar rights of independence for minorities. The crown — and, by extension, the procession — could serve two opposing political ideals at the same time: on the one hand, homage to royal power, the presentation of the loyalty of subjects (“the loyalty and chivalric virtues of the Hungarian nation”¹⁵⁾), i.e., the dynastic tradition; on the other hand, the expression of the claim to national sovereignty and the modern nation-state, which relied on ethno-cultural elements underpinned by Magyar ancestry. In both contexts, the display of the crown and the coronation insignia evoke a religious reverence (piety, silence, uncovered head) from those present, who, like the participants in the procession, become community participants in the rite.

Visual Representations of the Procession: Photography, Painting, Cyclorama

The organizers of the parade did not leave the public impact of the procession to chance. The march was announced by heralds on white horses who played old Hungarian songs, evoking past glories. The procession was led by the Minister of the Interior, followed by the representatives of the counties and the royal towns in alphabetical order, the lords (carrying the historical flags of the Hungarian kingdom), members of the legislature, church dignitaries, members of the government, and deputies in their decorated carriages. Along the entire route of the procession, crowds of spectators lined the queues guarded by police and soldiers, and at the most spectacular points, high grandstands were set up where tickets were required to take a seat. The audience was organized along the route of the procession according to the division between the orders and the bodies: diplomatic corps, relatives of members of parliament, actors of the national theater, etc., were given a separate stand, while merchants, members of charitable organizations, and the guilds were lined up along the route.

14) Massimo Leone, “Transcendence and Transgressions in Religious Processions,” *Signs and Society* 2, no. 2 (2014), 319–320.

15) N.N., “A hódoló díszmenet,” *Budapesti Hírlap*, June 9, 1896, 1.

The procession of a thousand “knights” in costumes reminiscent of the glorious periods of Hungarian history, the parade of lords and burghers, the crown and coronation badges carried by six white stallions in a glass carriage, the parade of historical flags, all evoked in newspaper accounts the topoi of dream, fantasy, and pictorial splendor. The embodiment of historical figures was a key element in staging the procession. The humor magazine *Borsszem Jankó* parodied the marchers posing as heroic figures of the past with the caption “grandchildren as ancestors”¹⁶⁾ to illustrate this stubborn, clichéd worldview dominated by historicity. By aiming to establish an organic continuity between past and present, the procession linked the mutually legitimating origins of statehood and nationhood. National history was grounded on ancestry possessing a nation-building power that, according to this narrative, only Magyar people held in contrast to other ethnicities. A resolution adopted at the Congress of Nationalities in Hungary held in August 1895 rejected the concept of the millennial celebrations that the nation-building power guaranteeing statehood is appropriated by the Magyar people. They demanded self-government, representation, and a share in the history and achievements of the millennium. Bálint Varga-Kuna argues that the nationalities that have remained furthest away from the celebrations, the Romanians and Serbs, have assimilated the least, while among the Jews, Germans, Slovaks, and Ruthenians, Magyarization has been dominant.¹⁷⁾

The ritualistic interpretation of the procession saw the parade as a formation of the nation created by the unity of viewers and marchers. The spectacle was not only a status symbol of power but also an exhibition of a glorious past and common ancestry, which activates the emotional motifs that bind the members of the nation but excludes those who do not share this common past.

A recurring question in the articles reporting on the event is whether this spectacular event can be recorded and immortalized: is there any medium that can capture and pre-

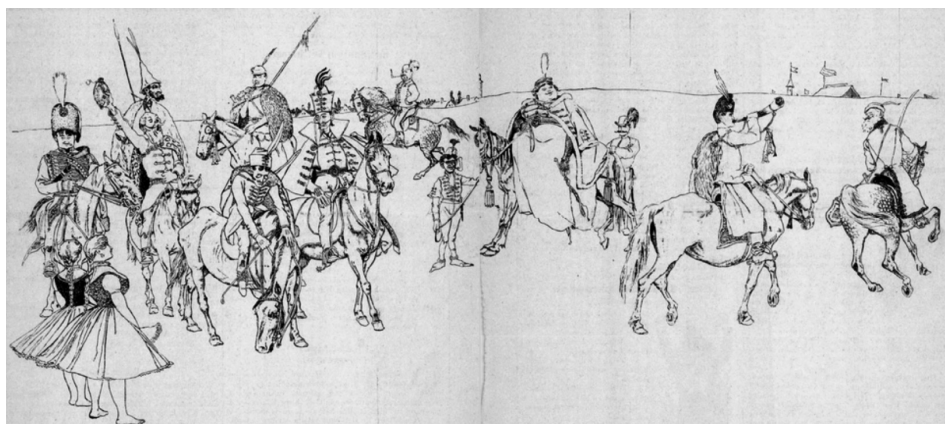


Fig. 1: An illustration from a humor magazine parodying the provincial character of local processions and the participants belonging to minorities posing as ancient Hungarians. Source: *Borsszem Jankó*, May 3, 1896, 8.

16) *Borsszem Jankó*, June 14, 1896, 8.

17) Bálint Varga-Kuna, “A millennium és a nemzetiségek,” *Magyar Kisebbség*, no. 1–2 (2009), 93–105.

serve the experience for the future? The viewer experiences and descriptions of the procession are necessarily partial; the long procession stretching kilometers long is incomprehensible to the viewers overwhelmed by the spectacle. These bodily limitations are made up for by the optical media, which have made perception of these constraints possible in the first place. The procession was captured by a number of professional and amateur photographers, whose presence provoked mixed reactions. According to Mikszáth, a well-known writer of the time, “the grippers and graspers of the modern age, the photographic machines” give only a faint impression of the spectacular fascination.¹⁸⁾ Other articles, however, mention that when photographers asked the marchers to stop to take a picture, it helped the spectators to absorb and capture the spectacle as if the spectators’ bodies themselves had become cameras.¹⁹⁾ In the press organs that also published pictures, especially in the weekly picture magazines, the articles describing the procession were extremely richly illustrated: reproductions of professional and amateur photographs, drawings, and paintings created an almost separate visual register for the presentation of the procession.

Professional photographs of the procession almost invariably fulfilled a representative function: they were taken from high vantage points and aimed to present the procession in as complete and monumental a manner as possible. This type of representation of political events most probably reflected how the weekly magazines perceived the role of photography as illustration. According to Emőke Tomsics, “significant events deemed worthy of visual representation could only be presented to the readers in an artistic, elevated tone.”²⁰⁾ The most typical compositions use the masses of marchers and spectators as compositional elements, i.e., the lines drawn by the masses and bodies of the participants also frame the composition. In the event photographs, the celebrating crowd is represented as “an organized mass,” an “ornament,”²¹⁾ as Béla Balázs would later write about certain shots in *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927). Photographs taken from this distance did not allow the relationship between the spectators and the “performers,” the unity of the common “we” that the celebration was aiming at, to be experienced.

Only in the few paintings published in the weekly *Új Idők* (and in some earlier amateur photographs) does the relationship between participants and spectators in the procession become the subject of the image, representing the moment of encounter. The central element of these images is the anachronism between the spectators in bourgeois clothes and the horsemen in historical costumes. Besides this humorous element, the spectators’ posture and intense attention lend a theatrical quality to the relationship between performers and spectators. The differences in representation between photographs and paintings can

18) Kálmán Mikszáth, “A bandérium,” *Vasárnapi Újság*, June 21, 1896, 414.

19) N.N., “A hódoló díszmenet,” *Budapesti Hírlap*, June 9, 1896, 2.

20) Emőke Tomsics, “Az eseményképtől a riportfotóig: A fotográfia a képes sajtóban az 1880-as és az 1900-as évek között,” *Folia Historica*, 31 (2016), 205–206.

21) Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, ed. Erica Carter (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009), 150. For a detailed reading of the figure of the mass in cinematic representations, see Erica Carter, “The Social Body of Béla Balázs,” *New German Critique* 47, no. 3 (2020), 7–20; and my writing “Face or Ornament of the Masses? Balázs with Kracauer,” in *Wissen — Vermittlung — Moderne: Studien zu den ungarischen Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften um 1900*, ed. Csongor Lőrincz (Köln, Weimar, and Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2016), 365–389.



Fig. 2: The coach carrying the crown and the Crown Guard on Széna Square (photo by Antal Weinwurm). Source: *Vasárnapi Újság*, June 28, 1896, 428.

be traced back to the illustration practices of weekly newspapers. Tomsics describes the division of labor between the „two illustration-producing professions” in this way:

As a general tendency, photography tended to be descriptive, while news drawings gave a narrative account of events. The former captured the events more totally, showing the size of the crowd, the surroundings, the beauty of the scenery [...] But the moving crowd could be blurred, faces could be difficult to recognize in the photographs. The climax of the events, the solemn, dignified moments, were therefore mostly captured by draughtsmen.²²⁾

The impressions that the articles assumed to be indescribable were presented by the event photographs in extremely wide shots composed in the spirit of monumentality. These photos portray the appropriation of the world through an objectifying gaze, a homogenous space, and a timeless, frozen moment, ultimately creating a disembodied point of view. Surprisingly, it is the drawings (as opposed to the photograph, which created an abstract spatio-temporal unity) that capture the elusive moment: these images create instantaneity, and present the encounter between the marchers and the spectators as a peculiar and singular event.

Technical limitations of photography at the time meant that the event was not only difficult to capture, but the spatial and temporal structure of the parade presented the

22) Tomsics, „Az eseményképtől,” 227–228.



Fig. 3: Reproduction of a painting by László Pataky (?). Source: *Új Idők*, June 21, 1896, 614.

photographers with seemingly insurmountable challenges. While textual descriptions provide a long list of the marchers, their costumes, weapons, and behavior, and meticulously document the route, the photographer has only a single moment to take a picture as the procession is constantly in motion. The bird's-eye view images make the national space created by the procession comprehensible while depriving the viewer of the experiential quality that the articles emphasize and describe in their plastic images. The abstract moment of transcending the whirl of the procession, which creates spatial divisions and compositions using the participants' bodies, corresponds to a disembodied point of view that constitutes space as homogenous and time as a frozen and immortalized moment.

In contrast to the homogenized space-time of photographs, the cyclorama promises a double perspective: to give a comprehensive view, guaranteeing legibility, while also representing the event in its immersive details through a multiplicity of sensory impressions. Such a painting was commissioned by the Feszty Hungarian Cyclorama Society in early 1897. According to the surviving contract,²³⁾ the company commissioned the academic painter Ferenc Eisenhut to depict the procession of June 8, with all the participants marching at a specific place and moment in front of the Royal Castle of Buda and the royal family. The viewing platform of the monumental circular painting was set in one of the towers of the palace. The moment when the lords with flags pass the king and fly their flags in

23) The text of the contract was included in Olga Ninkov's dissertation "Eisenhut Ferenc élete és munkássága" (PhD diss., Eötvös Loránd University Budapest, 2009), 225–228.



Fig. 4: The main scene of the cyclorama (illustration based on a photograph by Károly Divald). Source: *Vasárnapi Újság*, August 14, 1898, 560.

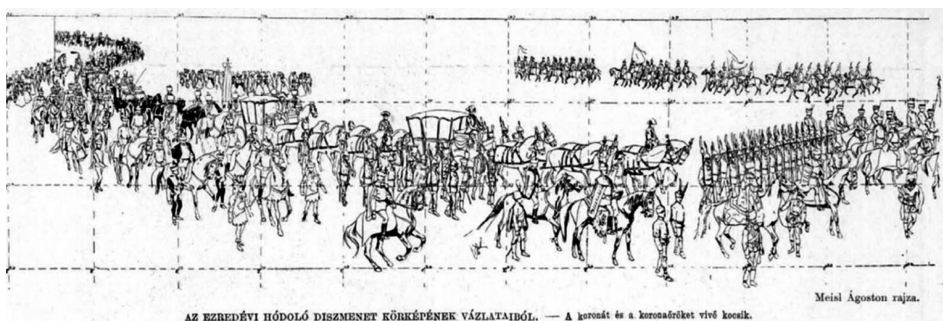


Fig. 5: Detail of the cyclorama's sketch in the form of a grid, to be projected and transferred to the canvas (drawing by Ágoston Meisl). Source: *Vasárnapi Újság*, August 14, 1898, 562.

homage was highlighted as the main scene.²⁴⁾ However, to capture all the important moments of the one-day event, Eisenhut had to change the actual arrangement of the procession: the spatial compression carried out in the circular image necessarily showed the participants at different moments as opposed to the actual procession. Transforming the linearity of the procession into a totalizing unity was considered by the critics a compositional feat achieved by the painter of the cyclorama.

24) The panorama painting is preserved at the Hungarian National Gallery; it was not exhibited since its original display for the public.

The unity of space and time characteristic of a panorama, the encapsulating power of the moment, was in fact used by Eisenhut to provide an encyclopedic account of millennial Hungary, displaying all the major figures of the Hungarian elite and all the iconic sites in Budapest that reinforced the link between the millennial past and the present. This was also the purpose of the guide to the panorama, which provided the key to deciphering the numbered arrows placed in the viewing area, listing cities and counties and mentioning each person who appeared in the picture by name. The “faithful” portraits of more than a thousand men on horseback, two companies of hussars, dozens of carriages, hundreds of horses and spectators were not only painted from life, as the contract stipulated, but also using portrait photographs. The listing of the prominent figures of contemporary Hungary, identified by name by the guide, complemented the immersive mechanism of the panorama in that it not only kept national memory alive but also archived the present.

The legitimization for the creation of the panorama was the need to remedy the “only defect” of the procession, that it “disappeared, passed away, irretrievably receded from our sight.”²⁵⁾ The panorama did not only capture the transitory event but gave a totalized image of the nation that could be seen as complete and closed. In achieving this effect, the panorama was described as a combination of the advantages of two new and rival media — the comprehending effect of photography and the lively evocative effect of the moving image: “The panorama is nothing more than the *photography* of the millennial Hungarians [...] which captured with *cinematographic* excitement the most colorful day of the millennium.”²⁶⁾

Enter the Lumière Films

Of the six unnamed Lumière films mentioned by Hungarian sources,²⁷⁾ three have survived.²⁸⁾ The first two, in the order of the Lumière catalog, are *Cortège de la couronne* (No. 271) and *Cortège du sceptre royal* (No. 272), described as “two pictures taken at the celebrations of the millennium of the Hungarian kingdom.”²⁹⁾ The first shows a procession of four carriages, the second a procession of horsemen and footmen in historical costumes. The third surviving film, *Pont suspendu* (No. 273), is an unstaged street scene re-

25) N.N., “A hódolat napja,” *Pesti Hírlap*, June 9, 1896, 4.

26) N.N., “Az új körkép,” *A Hét*, August 7, 1898, 511, [italics mine].

27) Géza Paur, “Élő fényképek” [Living Photographs], *Vasárnapi Újság*, February 7, 1897, 90–91.

28) The Hungarian National Film Archive acquired the 3 Hungarian-themed Lumière shots from the Budapest coffee house owner József Vanek, from which copies were made in the 1960s. In 2021, the original camera negatives were obtained from the French film institute, scanned with a 4K scanner and presented at the Ludwig Museum’s exhibition on Hungarian film history commemorating 120 years of Hungarian filmmaking. (An online version of the exhibition in Hungarian and English is available here: *Wide Angle — Visual Exhibition on Hungarian Film History*, accessed August 31, 2023, <https://wideangle.nfi.hu/>). However, the restoration of the Lumière films is not yet complete, and further image restoration work could make the image even sharper and clearer.

29) Michelle Aubert and Jean-Claude Seguin, eds., *La production cinématographique des Frères Lumière* (Paris: Bibliothèque du Film, Diffusion, CDE, 1996), 60.

corded at the end of the Chain Bridge, focusing on pedestrians, the movement of vehicles, and the use of urban space.³⁰⁾

How do the procession films enter the textual and visual space outlined above? In the Lumière catalog, there is a whole series of moving images with the terms “cortège” or “défilé” in the title, meaning “procession” or “parade.” Most of them show official, courtly, or state parades as part of feudal or military ceremonials, but there are also some recordings of carnival and sports parades. The most intensively filmed parade in this early period was probably the jubilee procession of June 22, 1897, celebrating the 60th anniversary of Queen Victoria’s reign, which was attended by 50,000 soldiers from all over the British Empire and displayed the grandeur, power, and exotic spectacle of the colonial empire. Filmmaking companies had bought advantageous vantage points along the route of the march well in advance, and among the 40 cameramen representing 20 film companies were also the Lumière operators.³¹⁾

Actuality films like these, showing political events, served as newsreels while also spreading the image of a country, region, or place worldwide. The parade itself was a planned and marketed event, but its cinematic recording and distribution could propagate it globally. It was designed to foster Hungarian national pride, and hence watching the Lumière films was considered a patriotic duty in Hungary, as one advertisement of the Lumière screenings suggests:

At the Royal Grand Hotel, the procession of June 8 is producing a constant and great interest in the cinematograph owned by August and Louis Lumière. The holy crown bearer and the ornate carriage in which Prince Eszterházy and Kálmán Tisza are seated are a real spectacle. None of the true Hungarians should miss to see it.³²⁾

Here, national pride and consciousness are nurtured by the spectacular character of the films. Apart from this blurb, no other description of the films’ reception has survived.

However, other readings of the procession films were opened up by their global circulation for different audiences.³³⁾ Actuality films transformed the local into global spectacles and thus translated national specificities into marketable images. Frank Kessler describes one way the “national” is constructed in early film in terms of the circular “logic of tourism,” according to which “the authentic has to correspond to the cliché, and thus the cliché determines what can appear as authentic.”³⁴⁾ The picture of the Hungarian procession published in the Parisian magazine *Illustration* could have functioned as such an exotic image, the “typical authenticity” of the “oriental” grandeur admired also by the for-

30) I am dealing with the specific aesthetics of the early street film in my chapter “Street Images: The Public Space of the City in Photographs and Moving Images,” in *From the Fairground to Cinema*, 115–140.

31) Ian Christie, “A very wonderful process: Queen Victoria, photography and film at the fin-de siècle,” in *British Monarchy on the Screen*, ed. Mandy Merck (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 23–46.

32) *Fővárosi Lapok*, July 12, 1896. (The surviving films do not show the carriage carrying the crown).

33) One source reports that the Hungarian films are screened in New York (Paur, *Élő fényképek*); they are also programmed in Lyon on June 28 and July 5, 1896 (see note 29).

34) Frank Kessler, “Images of the ‘National’ in Early Non-Fiction Films,” in *Early Cinema and the ‘National’*, eds. Richard Abel, Giorgio Bertellini, and Rob King (Eastleigh: John Libbey Publishing, 2016), 24.



Fig. 6: The drawing published in *Illustration*, a *Parisian magazine* (reproduced in *Magyar Gépíuszt*, June 28, 1896, 440).

eign diplomats.³⁵⁾ In this image, the spectators in the background are hardly visible, while the main subject is the “oriental” splendor of the lords and their footmen riding in front of the royal palace.

Moving pictures of the procession may have reinforced such stereotypes, both for domestic and foreign audiences. Yet, I would like to argue that in the Lumière filmmaking paradigm, the official pathways for social imaginary and collective identity that prevailed mainly in newspaper reports were not necessarily characteristic, and that procession films also created a visual register different from that of professional photography and the cyclorama.

Both shots were taken from approximately the same location, from slightly different angles close to the spectators. The scene is Dísz [Parade] Square, part of Buda Castle, with the present-day Korona coffee house in the background. The windows of the building were decorated with flags and draperies. In the first shot (*Cortège de la couronne*), four ornate carriages pass by, and the horses are led by footmen dressed in historical uniforms. Prior to the carriages’ appearance, there is a temporal gap when the film viewer can scan the audience on the opposite side of the square — some of them have taken refuge under the shelter of parasols, move their fans, and someone blows smoke from a pipe. It is not quite visible, but there appear to be uniformed police officers or soldiers with swords standing every few meters in front of the lines. In contrast to these mundane scenes, the passengers in the carriages are not visible, although a few moving figures can be seen through the windows of the carriages. (In the panorama painting, the lords traveling in closed carriages were included in the middle of spectators in order to make them recognizable.)

The movement of the procession in the second shot (*Cortège du sceptre royal*) is less solemn, more focused on unexpected moments. The lords, carrying banners or weapons, march on horseback, accompanied by cavalry and footmen. Between the spectators on the

35) x-y [Kálmán Mikszáth], “Némely észrevételek a bandériumról,” *Pesti Hírlap*, June 10, 1896, 1–2.



Fig. 7: The parade is leaving the Buda Castle towards the Matthias Church (photo by the Dunky brothers). Published in *Új idők*, June 21, 1896, 616. Source: Budapest History Museum

opposite side and the marchers is a waiting line of chariots. At the beginning of the shot, one of the horses rears, the footmen try to restrain it, and then it dances out of the frame. In the foreground, a mounted police officer steps in front of the spectators' line, then turns back and passes the camera once more, swinging with one hand on the hip. A single man dressed in bourgeois clothes can also be seen on the edge of the procession line. The approximate hour of the recording can be deduced from the direction and location of the procession. On the morning of June 8, the procession passed through Dísz Square on its way to Matthias Church to take the crown on display to the Parliament. A professional photograph of this scene taken by the Dunky brothers (later court photographers) has survived, which in many ways is a counterpoint to the Lumière shots.

The photograph gives an "establishing shot" to the Lumière films, which are shot from eye level and whose point of view is located in the crowd of spectators (somewhere in the lower right corner of the photograph). From the abstract, disembodied position of the bird's-eye view, a summary, overall visual image of the procession emerges in the photograph, which frames the space and freezes time, obliterating the moment, the sense of instantaneity. In contrast, the film frames and samples the space, presenting the procession not as a frozen moment in a timeless order but as a succession of random and unpredictable moments. The film camera embodies the physical position of the audience, which is almost never shown in professional photographs but only in amateur ones.

The challenge faced by the Lumière cameramen was not only to frame the space in order to highlight physical movement but also to compose movement in time. In response to the material-formal question of how to use the approximately 50 seconds of shooting time available in order to maximize the spectacular movements in the frame, Lumière operators used depth of field afforded by the wide-angle lens. In almost all of Lumière films, the fixed-frame shots offer dynamic compositions in movement. In order to organize and control movement in time and space, it was also necessary to anticipate the course of possible movements. This is presumably why actuality films often turned to such pre-arranged and controllable movements of social choreography as parades or movements con-

trolled by traffic rules.³⁶⁾ In this way, the procession films re-choreographed the festive event within the terms of cinematic space and time while offering new ways of spectatorship.

In the films, the procession enters from the left and leaves on the right. The compositional role of the procession's direction is reinforced by the fact that in the first shot, at the beginning of the film, most of the space is empty, filled with movement as the procession members from the left pass in front of the camera. The route, as in the overhead shots, is delineated by the line of spectators, but the contrast between the movement of the marchers and the standing spectators in the moving image is striking. The spacing between the marchers, which is a compositional element in the Dunky brothers' photograph as well, is expressed in the moving image as a visual rhythm, a dynamic of movement. In the filmed procession, each figure is a continuation of the line, its appearance characterized by a mixture of predictable and unpredictable, random moments. By composing the direction of the procession from left to right in the image and choosing a framing that makes the individual marchers visible, the filmmaker has subordinated the procession to the temporal process in which the "reading" of the figures entering the frame unfolds.

In *Cortège de la couronne*, the only marchers visible are the footmen. There is a plethora of casual and incidental details catching the eye: the footmen are all wearing similar uniforms and mustaches, but each is "marching" differently, some with wide stances, some in a soldierly way, others are measured, some of them comic, some serene; the horses are



Fig. 8: Still from *Cortège de la couronne* with the small-stature footman in the center (1896)

36) For an excellent discussion of the Lumière cameramen's role and problematizing the opposition between the "spontaneity thesis" and "complete mastery," see Livio Belloi, "Lumière and His View: the cameraman's eye in early cinema," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 15, no. 4 (1995), 461–474.



Figs. 9–10: Stills from *Cortège du sceptre royal* (1896)

twitching their reins, held tight or loose; the small-stature footmen accompanying the last carriage gives a quirky impression, and so on. In contrast, the dignitaries in the closed carriages are not visible, while the mirrors in the receding carriage-windows sometimes gleam with a wall of spectators.

Cortège du sceptre royal shows the participants in a more spectacular scene. Individually and as a group, we can observe how they react to being looked at. The interplay between the movements of horses, riders, and footmen and the direction of their gaze (to the right and left, towards the audience, some looking backward as if waiting for something) offers various perspectives for inferring similarities, differences, general and individual, unique characteristics between participants. Here, the marchers, who are seen as representing the nation, are literally given a “face,” but it is not their identifiability that is important — in contrast to the recognizable and numbered, named faces of the cyclorama. Their random or deliberate movements become endlessly repeatable due to the moving image record, such as the rider of a rearing horse trying to react with dignity or the mounted policeman who, occupying the foreground of the image, turns back to pass again in front of the camera. The movement in the foreground eliminates the distance and makes both the viewer’s and the policeman’s bodily presence palpable. The saturated image also makes us aware of the camera’s presence, denying the possibility of the abstract, totalizing external gaze, giving a physical-material occupation of space instead.

Contrary to the text of the Hungarian advertisement, the Lumière films do not glorify patriotic sentiment. Thus, it can perhaps be said that contrary to newspaper accounts, the films are not linked to markers of national identity and fail to express national progress, pride, and unity. Instead of presenting ritual and sublime actions, they foreground a randomly extracted space-time that does not link identity to an organically accessible past nor to the emotional community of marchers and audience. The Lumière films do not aim at representing the procession of history nor the present perceived as an afterimage of the past, as newspaper articles conceptualized the procession.

The visual register of the Lumière films is also different from other visual media. Unlike the image published in the Parisian *Illustration*, they do not orientalize, even if that was the intention of the Lyon-based company. They do not impose a comprehensive view of the event by staging a neutral, homogeneous space and a frozen time, as the aforementioned professional photographs do, nor do they aspire to an encyclopedic synthesis, as the cyclorama does. Rather, the procession emerges as a montage of the participants unexpectedly marching into the frame, as a configuration of arbitrarily chosen moments and cut-out sections of space. The national space and time, symbolically represented by the procession, can be constructed by the film viewer through the specific places and series of chance moments the marchers pass through, in an interplay of continuity and discontinuity, the expected and the accidental. In this way, the actuality film, as a record of a single event that happened in front of the camera, disconnects the visual markers of national space and time of the millennium from the conventions and spectatorial positions used in contemporary media.

In her book elaborating on the many ways in which time was rethought at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Mary Ann Doane argues that contingency and chance served as tools to disrupt and counteract the homogenizing and rationalizing effect of standard-

ized time in modernity.³⁷⁾ In the Hungarian publicity of the time, the rupture caused by modernization was accompanied by many other structural transformations: breaking with a past conceived through an organic continuity with the present, democratizing the concept of the nation as a collective identity to be experienced by anyone, not just those “embodying a higher power.” Although the photographs, the paintings, and the cyclorama showcased some modern features as well, by homogenizing time and space, focusing on a single transitional moment, and archiving the present in an encyclopedic manner, respectively, moving images, I argue, offered a unique visual experience for the contemporary viewer. Recording the procession from an actual point of view, they presented fragments of the event with an overabundance of detail and random moments, making a totalizing or hierarchical view of the event impossible. As James Lastra put it, early moving images, especially in the “parade mode,” brought about a rupture with former pictorial norms and introduced a new mode of image production. Traditional pictorial composition involved highlighting and subordinating elements in order to achieve pictorial unity, whereas moving images presented views as necessarily fragmented: “hunted” and “captured” images of a preexisting world “passing by.”³⁸⁾ Even if contingency was faked, or the operators exerted some control in arranging the visual field,³⁹⁾ this new mode of image production “dramatized the experience of seeing,”⁴⁰⁾ and exemplified an embodied vision characterized by incompleteness, instantaneity, and randomness.

These images of the procession, as others of the same kind, obviously could have been subordinated to different ideological purposes: as sources of national consciousness and pride (as the Hungarian ad stipulated), globally marketable images of national stereotypes (which may have been the intention behind international distribution), markers of immediacy annihilating temporal and spatial distance (according to the modernity thesis), or images serving narrative purposes (as Lastra concludes). However, they also could have served a public function to mediate between the private and the public sphere, which, according to Habermas, is precisely a structural condition for the emergence of political publicity. Audiences had the possibility to compare their reactions and affects to the representation of the procession in different and visual media or, equally, to juxtapose their visual experiences with others who sat next to them in the movie theater. They also had the opportunity to assess the differences between symbolic markers of different nations as presented in films projected in variety programs.

While Habermas insisted that the mediation between the private and the public can take place through an exchange between the privatized moment of solitary and silent reading and publication in the form of debates in social spaces and the press,⁴¹⁾ early cin-

37) Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002).

38) James Lastra, “From the Captured Moment to the Cinematic Image,” in *The Image in Dispute: Art and Cinema in the Age of Photography*, ed. Dudley Andrew (Austin: Texas University Press, 1997), 263–292.

39) For an analysis of one version of the *Arrival of the Train* (1897) as staging the profilmic scene, see Martin Loiperdinger, “Lumière’s *Arrival of the Train*: Cinema’s Founding Myth,” *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 4, no. 1 (2004), 89–118.

40) Lastra, “From the Captured Moment to the Cinematic Image,” 274.

41) “Private reading has always been the precondition for rational-critical debate,” Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 158.

ema, too, participated in the creation of a new type of publicity. Moving images both privatized the viewing experience by embodying vision and made it collective by gathering people from different social backgrounds as an audience. Cinematic spectatorship juxtaposed local, national, and global contexts by connecting face-to-face spectatorial relations and technologically mediated images. By widening the public sphere, it helped to form a national imaginary based on debate and consensus rather than an image of the nation imposed from above.

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Filmography

- Cortège de la couronne* (Auguste and Louis Lumière, operator Charles Moisson, 1896)
- Cortège du sceptre royal* (Auguste and Louis Lumière, operator Charles Moisson, 1896)
- Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927)
- Pont suspendu* (Auguste and Louis Lumière, operator Charles Moisson, 1896)

Biography

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