



MOVING IMAGE ARCHIVISTS THE MOVING IMAGE

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# HOME MOVIES, FOUND IMAGES, AND "AMATEUR FILM" AS A WITNESS TO HISTORY

CATHERINE PORTUGES

Péter Forgács's

*Private Hungary*

Why do I find private footage so attractive after many years of work? The best answer I've found is from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: "Everything we see could be otherwise. Everything we can describe . . . could be also otherwise."

PÉTER FORGÁCS

Since the tumultuous decade of transition in East Central Europe after 1989, film and video have become a critical discursive site in debates on the reformulation of national history, collective memory, and personal identity. Long noted for its major role in articulating dissent through representational strategies that knowingly communicate with audiences, cinema in postsocialist culture enables Central Europeans to sort through the unfinished business of the past,<sup>1</sup> as filmmakers engaged in this project of integration and reclamation explore the legacy of twentieth-century history from fascism to Stalinism and beyond. At the same time, the reopening of sealed archives permits encounters with previously censored documents through which artists and audiences alike gain access to the visual archeology of the past.

Like literature and the plastic arts, documentary, experimental, and narrative film addresses the often traumatic consequences of the cold war epoch that distorted and falsified national memory.<sup>2</sup> Some films produced during the postcommunist transition evoke vibrant cultures enjoyed by multiethnic communities in rural and urban areas in the prewar period; others speak of the aftermath of migration and exile; of professions and livelihoods lost, books banned and censored, native languages suppressed, landscapes obliterated; of guilt and sadness toward families and friends departed. These narratives in turn engage public debate over long-suppressed information such as the existence of labor camps under socialism, prompting intergenerational confrontation with anger, guilt, and loss that were previously relegated to private, domestic space.<sup>3</sup> As one historian puts it, "Hungary participated in the great transition from state socialism, and many were fully aware of this while the actual events were taking place. It would undoubtedly be much more difficult to recognize what has stayed with us, inside us, and what has changed and when, in the world below or alongside politics, on the level of lifestyles, customs, everyday life."<sup>4</sup>

Personal memoirs and "private" films composed primarily of home movies play a central role in the act of reparation and restitution that constitutes the unfinished past. Often working retrospectively through a montage of snapshots and portraits from family albums, second-person voice-over narrative, and direct first-person testimony, they evoke the internal and historical experience of "lost" families and individuals whose dreams and expectations of a multigenerational future were permanently disrupted.<sup>5</sup> Amateur film and home movies increasingly serve as a focus of discourse in the public sphere that enhances our collective understanding of individual, familial, and national historical circumstances previously shrouded in secrecy.

The Hungarian film- and video maker Péter Forgács explores this material in the multipart video series *Private Hungary (Privát Magyarország)* and in related works in sev-

eral media, particularly the moving image. By transforming private documents of everyday life into haunting narratives of twentieth-century Central Europe, he recontextualizes archival home movies, found footage, and film diaries, creating a tapestry of longing and recollection suffused with the ordinariness and elegance, the suffering and desire of vanished times. Without imposing ideological or psychological conclusions upon its viewers, *Private Hungary* proposes ways in which such image-texts enhance our capacity to interrogate our own—and others'—personal and national identities. Here, I focus on several segments of Forgács's series, especially *Free Fall*, a chronicle of the impact of the enactment of the Jewish Laws on a bourgeois Jewish family during the Nazi occupation; *Land of Nothing*, based on family and frontline war footage shot by a Hungarian soldier; and *Kádár's Kiss*, an exploration of the terrain of "everyday erotics" during the multidecade communist regime of János Kádár.

In what has become his signature style, Péter Forgács evokes fragments of life stories, intercut with minimal explanatory material, by using home movie footage in much the same way as psychoanalysis creates a narrativized intertext of continuities and discontinuities, of transference and countertransference, of resistance and free association. The result is not merely a reassembled reconstruction of historical images, refashioned by technical manipulation and reprocessing from archival discoveries, but rather an original, independent work. To achieve his objective, Forgács deploys techniques of cutting, slow motion, freeze-framing, and subtitling, together with original sound, in a style that recalls that of the Hungarian experimental filmmaker Gábor Bódy, whose film *Private History* (1978) was constructed from some of the same material as one of Forgács's films, using the same amateur footage.<sup>6</sup>

*Private Hungary* encompasses a wide spectrum of Hungarian experience, constituting at once a valuable contribution to the growing archive of oral history and a cinematic representation of formidable artistic originality. These image-texts—home movies shot by amateur photographers in the context of daily life, primarily by bourgeois families—thus acquire new life and become instrumental retrospective narratives in the dynamic process of interrogating personal and cultural memory. The collectively held images circulating through these films invite the spectator to distinguish between the construction of national "selves" and "others"—the ways in which identity coalesces around a set of affirmative images and in opposition to images of the other against which the self (and the nation) may be distinguished.<sup>7</sup>

Péter Forgács (born in 1950) was an art school graduate and media artist at the Budapest Academy of Fine Arts before studying cinema. In the early 1970s he was influenced by the Hungarian Fluxus and conceptual art movements, as well as by experimen-

tal theater and filmmaking. Forgács began his career as an independent film and video artist at the Béla Balázs Film Studio in 1978 where he created his first films, *Children's Movie* (16mm) and *I See That I Look* (video). Throughout the 1980s, he exhibited video performance pieces and video installations, including *Hungarian Totem* (1993), *The Case of My Room* (1992), and *Pre-Morgue* (1996).<sup>8</sup> Forgács has since become a dynamic presence in international film and video milieus, and a frequent guest at film festivals, museum and gallery presentations, and psychoanalytic institutes. He has been a researcher at the Hungarian Sociological Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (1992–2000) and head of the Private Film and Photo Archives, a collection of Hungarian amateur films and snapshots for artistic and cultural studies, which he founded in 1983 and which is supported by the Hungarian Moving Picture Foundation, the Soros Foundation, and the Hungarian Historical Film Fund. His work clearly represents a major intervention in the history of the Hungarian amateur film movement from the 1920s and 1930s through the 1960s.

Forgács's projects over the past decade include journeys into philosophy, as in his 1992 film *Wittgenstein*, a visual essay that fuses this philosopher's concepts with vintage black-and-white amateur films, voice track, and a lyrical musical score by his frequent musical collaborator Tibor Szemző; into psychoanalysis, with his *Conversations on Psychoanalysis I–V* (1993); and into documentary, with his *Meanwhile Somewhere . . . 1940–43/An Unknown War (Private History, part 3)*.

The amateur filmmakers and family collections that serve as the basis for Forgács's *Private Hungary* series evoke the history of the Hungarian amateur film movement that involved a substantial number of practitioners during the interwar period: much of their work has since been destroyed or lost. These film works created a community through their new organizations, festivals, and close contacts with foreign colleagues. Although generally of variable quality in terms of production values, some competed favorably with the standard of production set by contemporary professional Hungarian cinema of the period. After World War II, the Stalinist system of the 1950s imposed enforced collection of 16mm cameras even from amateur filmmakers, and the 9.5 and 8mm stocks were in short supply. It was not until the 1960s that such activity could again thrive in Hungarian culture, which now engages devotees in collection and restoration.<sup>9</sup>

As a political dissident, Forgács was forced to leave the Hungarian College of Arts in 1971, where he had been studying sculpture. He initiated links with the Hungarian underground art movement and undertook intensive photography and teaching in an experimental class in an elementary school. Performance was of central importance to his practice; his methodology sought to emphasize students' experiences in the present rather than depending upon abstract, theoretical analysis. From 1979 to 1985, the film-

maker participated in performance art events, and often worked with the musical studio of a group known as "180." At the same time, he worked in conjunction with the renowned Hungarian social psychologist Ferenc Méri, utilizing archival material as a correlative of his performance pieces. In 1988, he created his first complete film constructed entirely of archival footage, *The Bartos Family*, which constituted the basis (and part 1) of the *Private Hungary* series. Over the course of numerous interviews, the director emphasized elements of his work including the "magical" power of the archival image, the creative role of editing, and his sense of himself primarily as a pictorial artist rather than solely a filmmaker, expressing the wish that his films be read as visual artworks rather than as feature films or documentaries.<sup>10</sup>

*Private Hungary* is composed entirely of a collage of home movie footage contributed by families and individuals throughout Hungary in response to Forgács's published open call for material from personal and family archives. The overwhelming response from ordinary citizens prompted Forgács to refashion and edit hundreds of hours of footage covering decades of home movies from the 1920s through the 1940s into a diary of elegiac portraits, a poetic ethnography that draws as well from personal photographic archives and provides unforgettable images of ethnographic, historical, and cultural importance.



Figure 1. *The Bartos Family* (*Private Hungary*, part 1) (1988). Courtesy Péter Forgács.

The series' concept arises from the suppression in 1981 of the Polish Solidarity Movement when the filmmaker understood the need "not to live my life through Russian eyes."<sup>11</sup> Consequently, he turned his talents to editing episodes about "life before and during the war, footage shot by different families—middle class, Christians and Jews. I advertised on television and in the newspapers, offered free video transfers, bought the rights from the families, and interviewed their descendants. Since then, I have been running an archive of 500 hours of home movies. The purpose of the archive is cultural and social/historical studies, like weaving a carpet. I don't let families into the editing room, with the exception of *Free Fall* they have their own reading, and I don't ask for their interpretations. I try to construct from documents, and have never gotten negative responses from anyone, only questions, or comments such as: we didn't know our lives were so interesting!"<sup>12</sup>

The award-winning *The Bartos Family* (*Private Hungary*, part 1, 1988) draws on the home movies and musical compositions of Hungarian businessman and popular composer Zoltán Bartos during the period from 1928 to 1965. Using footage shot by the eldest of three sons, Zoltán, from the time of economic crisis through the period of history that ends with Stalin's death in 1953,<sup>13</sup> the filmmaker edits his material to reveal a textured, multigenerational life of considerable privilege, interlaced with charming scenarios enacted by family members on special occasions for the benefit of the seemingly ever-present camera.<sup>14</sup>

*Dusi and Jenő* (part 2, 1989) is a secret film diary shot between 1936 and 1966 by Jenő, who, according to Forgács, "might have been the best cameraman of our age, had he not worked until 1945 as the senior clerk of General Mortgage Credit Bank." Set in an old Budapest neighborhood, the Tabán, the film focuses on the city itself in its varied moods, from snowy landscapes to rain and misty fog, to each of which he manages to give a post-siege atmosphere through highly sensual yet precisely composed photography. Jenő's wife appears less interested in shooting film than in the couple's basset hound, object of their lavish attention. Yet this poetic portrayal of a couple whose meticulously documented lives are punctuated by domestic rituals—meals taken on a terrace, regular promenades with the family dog—becomes a deserving memorial to the vanishing representatives of the middle classes, most of whom disappeared without benefit of such documentation.

In contrast, *The Diary of Mr. N* (part 4, 1990) contains disturbingly violent shots of the reannexation of the northern part of historic Hungary, which followed the first Viennese-German-Italian-Hungarian Treaty of 1938. Nonetheless, the film is a love story of its protagonist, Mr. N, and his loving wife Ilona, at once a dramatic and ethnographic record that allows the viewer to imagine what might have happened had love and world

war not converged so fatefully in their lives. Through the lens of a 9.5mm camera owned by Mr. N, a Catholic military engineer, we follow events as they occurred in "real" time, both in the family home and at the factory, all within the tragic shadow of official history. The jovial form director—Mr. N's boss—bears an uncanny resemblance to the communist dictator of a later period, Rákosi, yet his message carries documentary significance, encompassing as it does thirty years of Hungarian history (1938–1967), including visions of terror and dictatorship, childbirth and revolution. This Hungarian family's gaze travels from its own members toward the drama beyond: as we look at them, the hidden similarity of things emerges, whereas the families in *Either-Or (Vagy-Vagy, part 3, 1989)* seem rather to seek refuge from the terrors of socialism in the private sphere and in secular human dramas. Through scarcely visible yet perceptible signals, their subtle emotional relationships are discerned as if perceived in a meditative state, while in civil society life goes on, indifferent to their haphazard attention. Perhaps the most private of the pieces in the series, *Either-Or* reveals nearly imperceptible sensual connections rarely portrayed on screen. In that sense, it resembles *The Notes of a Lady (Egy Urinő notéza, part 8, 1992–1994)*, which features sequences of a beautiful Jewish baroness's life in Hungary in the 1930s and 1940s that resignify and mourn personal, familial, and historical loss.

An entirely different ambiance is set by *Private War 1: Land of Nothing (A Semiországa, part 9, 1996)*, which is described by the filmmaker as a "private film eye with no ideological filter or entertaining mood," and is composed of material distilled from 9.5mm family films shot in 1938 by László Rátz, ensign in the Second Hungarian Army, First Battalion of the Eighteenth Szekszárd Infantry, who recorded, for his personal use, from June 1942 through the long Ukrainian march, images of civilians and the final approach to the Voronezh front. Rátz filmed until the eve of the Hungarian Army's catastrophic encounters at the river Don, bringing back the footage during his Christmas leave, which is why this unique chronicle has survived, revealing extraordinary family pictures.

*Free Fall (Az Örvény, part 10, 1996)* offers an extraordinary look at the "ordinary" life of Hungarian György Pető, a successful Jewish businessman from a wealthy family in the Hungarian city of Szeged who made continuous home movies of his family, friends, and lover between 1938 and 1944. With a passion for music and speedboats, Pető acquired an 8mm camera at the age of thirty and quickly became an avid and prolific home movie buff. As in previous films in the series, Forgács reworks home movies to illuminate the hidden interstices of mid-twentieth-century Hungarian history: with Hungary an ally of Nazi Germany, the Hungarian Jewish community was nevertheless virtually intact until the spring of 1944. In this tragic and disturbing piece, Pető's images of the banal and tender world of family gatherings, outings on the lake, his thirty-third birthday party, erotic



images of his lover in the bath and even of his early “carefree moments” in the Jewish forced labor camps play disquietingly against radio reports, bits of newsreel footage, political speeches, and the cool language of the ever more elaborate and cruel Hungarian anti-Jewish laws. One of this segment’s most powerful “narrative” strategies is its invocation of erosion of the false sense of security typical of Hungarian Jews who, often ardent patriots, were nonetheless ultimately forced to comply with the instigation of the Jewish Laws of 1938–39, which effectively excluded them from professional and cultural life.<sup>15</sup>

By choosing to focus in this segment on the abstract language of the Jewish Laws and their consequences, Forgács dissects the stages of erosion of identity that was to be the fate of Hungarian Jews. His experimental focus is evident in the postmodern “sound-scape”; we hear the laws chanted in a mesmerizing voice, and the disparity between form and content are evident as the voice invokes legal terminology in hauntingly repetitive clauses that at once echo and mirror experience of the narrowing sphere of life and the unpredictability that characterized the lives of its victims. Completed in 1996 as part 10 of *Private Hungary*, Forgács has called this segment a “video opera,” owing in large measure to the original music composed for the piece by Tibor Szemző: “I heard the Jewish Laws [*numeris clausus*] recited in my mind—in sung voices. Szemző composed a *recitativo* lament, and we collaborated on the whole collection, including postwar footage up to 1970.”<sup>16</sup> In what ways, the director invites us to consider, are the fearful signs of threatening evidence unconsciously suppressed, cumulatively (and inescapably) eroding the illusions of security of a Hungarian Jewish family? Pető was a flamboyant, cosmopolitan personality, an exceptional musician whose temperament is readable in his photographic style; as a Jew and a capitalist, all his property was eventually confiscated.

*Free Fall* requires the viewer to consider why, after so many Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe had already vanished, the Hungarian Jewish community was still mostly intact in the early spring of 1944, foregrounding the radical disjuncture between Hungary’s position as an ally of the Third Reich from the beginning of World War II, and the fate of its Jews at the war’s end.<sup>17</sup> This “paradox,” in his view, arises from the fact that Jews were not threatened until March 1944 with the Nazi occupation of Hungary: “It took me time to understand this interesting and secretive part of Hungarian history. . . . property was confiscated earlier, but lives were not threatened. What was interesting for me was to see how one accommodates to these levels of degradation, how one accepts the degrees of discrimination and still remains a functioning human being, even happy. . . . Hungarian Jews assimilated, they had their illusions like others, such as the Dutch. But they were taken into deportation anyway, and the Szeged Jews were offered up. Anyone who tried to save one person was a hero in those dark days.”<sup>18</sup> Of particular note is the director’s

reading of the deportation of Hungarian Jews, inviting the conclusion that non-Jews also suffered by portraying the links between these groups, both of whose experiences are handled with sensitivity in his avant-garde depiction of history, which lacks any trace of ideological positioning. "My works, he says, are researches in the time archeology of private history."<sup>19</sup>

Can one imagine the indescribable sorrow of being prevented from practicing one's chosen profession from the perspective of those who were active in all spheres of Hungarian life, only to realize finally that they belonged to the exiles—patriotic soldiers in uniform, successful businessmen in shops and companies, active family members, lively children? Forgács takes no ideological or political stance; rather, he chooses to trace this process of "free fall" from an unexpected, intimate viewpoint, akin to that of a dream-state, instead of documenting the bureaucratic mass homicide system from the outside, considering the process as experienced from within the future victims' quotidian subjectivity.<sup>20</sup>

As a whole, *Private Hungary* opens a space for further consideration of filmmakers' use of archival material in filmmaking over the past half century. The typical role of archival footage tends to be an expository one: the ambience of a given historical moment is recalled, drawing the viewer into the film's topos. Other Hungarian directors who have used related archival methodologies include Dezso Magyar, Ferenc Grunwalsky, Gábor Bódy, Márta Mészáros, and Péter Timár, all of whom (with diverse stylistic approaches) have incorporated archival fragments into their feature films.<sup>21</sup>

Such stylistic marks of the home movie photographer are apparent in each of the series' episodes, from Rátz's sober, even puritanical documentary approach in *Meanwhile, Somewhere* to Mr. N's strong Catholic rigor and engineering precision in *The Diary of Mr. N*. Each episode's particular form of representation and authorship suggests a view of family and self, forming an arc that travels from portrayals of intense erotic pleasure to the strictest rigidity of behavior. Most of the archive's films are from middle-class families, about 30 percent of whom were Jews, exposing the viewer to a culture and a world that have disappeared: "We see signs of cosmopolitan and puritan, Christian and Jew, male and female, but always a complex matrix. The Jeszenky baroness Kató, for instance—the woman behind the camera in *The Notes of a Lady*—is at once a fierce anti-Semite and a feminist filmmaker who changed husbands, loved her son, yet remained completely unconscious of meanings of spontaneous events she was recording, as in the sequence I edited in slow motion, where the baroness is posing in a bathing suit while a boy enters from left background and touches his mother's ass; she pulls his arm, pushes him out of the picture, then poses again like a fashion model."<sup>22</sup> This last segment suggests that, despite the prevailing notion of home movies as instances of a (sometimes

objectifying) patriarchal gaze at the family romance, a woman's gaze may produce a different cinematic space in which to read the family.<sup>23</sup>

In *Kádár's Kiss* (part 12, 1998; *Private Socialism*, part 2), the filmmaker explores the terrain of "everyday erotics," the only sphere of life over which the thirty-year communist regime of prime minister János Kádár ostensibly had little or no jurisdiction. The Kádár era, which ultimately became known as "goulash communism," began brutally in 1956 and ended without bloodshed in 1989. During this time, most of the population experienced domestic privacy as a safe haven. Here, however, Forgács offers a poetic, frankly erotic (and at times arguably pornographic) interrogation of this generally accepted notion by questioning the extent to which private life constituted a counterpoint to the politically sanctioned discourse of the authorities in charge. Playing on the popular socialist dictum that "our homeland was built and beautified," Forgács returns to his psychoanalytic roots by juxtaposing eros with what he views as the *thanatos* of sexual repression in a collage in a fascinating portrayal of the most private arena of *Private Hungary* between 1963 and 1971.

An earlier piece, *The Maelstrom: A Family Chronicle* (1997, not part of the *Private Hungary* series), makes remarkable use of home movies shot in the Netherlands before and during World War II by the Peereboom family. What we see is a Dutch Jewish family first living unknowingly in the shadow of the Holocaust and then trying to cope with it, still unaware of what it will finally mean. A shot of the family cheerfully sewing and preparing for a trip to a "work camp," when their destination was the nightmare of Auschwitz, adds a devastating dimension to our understanding of the Final Solution that no other film—Hollywood fiction or experimental documentary—has been able to offer.

Two subsequent pieces, similarly separate from *Private Hungary*, also warrant mention here: *The Danube Exodus* (1998) documents the Jewish exodus from Slovakia immediately prior to the outbreak of World War II, when a group of nine hundred Slovak Austrian Jews set out for the Black Sea via the Danube River, fleeing toward Palestine. The film is based on footage from the amateur films of Nándor Andrásovits, captain of one of the two boats, who filmed his passengers as they prayed, slept, and married aboard ship. By the end of the journey, it becomes clear that the boats will not return empty, as a reverse exodus is undertaken, this time repatriating Bessarabian Germans fleeing to the Third Reich in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Bessarabia. In *Angelos' Film* (Holland, 1999) Forgács widens the scope of his vision to focus on footage from Greece. Wartime Athens comes to life again in the home movies of the photographer, Angelos Papanastasiou, a Greek patrician, naval officer, successful businessman, and royalist whose secret film diary (an activity carried out under threat of the death penalty imposed by authorities



Figure 2. *The Maelstrom: A Family Chronicle* (1997).  
Courtesy VPRO-TV, Holland.

on an ordinary citizen's attempt to photograph public events) recorded the Nazi-Italian occupation between 1941 and 1945. Apparently on the day the war broke out, Papanastassiou determined that he would chronicle on film the sufferings of his nation. His daughter was born during that period; the film follows her growth within the context of this passionate yet tragic diary.

*Private Hungary's* roll call of family members is reminiscent of the grand and ghostly survivors assembled at the party of the Prince de Guermantes as described by Proust in the final volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, dining together, sharing good times, romance, intrigues, jealousy. Because suppressed memory eludes direct address, this elegiac, silent mode with voice-over is Forgács's solution to the tragic fate of those who lie at the silent heart of books and films produced in this postcommunist moment. "I wanted neither to be sentimental, nor to construct worlds only of those under repression and segregation. I don't know how I would behave in such circumstances. . . . the account is there, you have to face it—it's burning, still, in me—not ash, but fire. I wanted you, the audience, to be hurt, too. The lamentation is somewhere, nowhere, everywhere—it's more universal. I love it when an audience is silent after this film—then I know it's worked."<sup>24</sup>

A part of the filmmaker's quest for continuity reexamines a brutally ruptured twentieth century through an allusive art form. His edited film-texts traverse the bound-



Figure 3. *The Maelstrom: A Family Chronicle* (1997).  
Courtesy VPRO-TV, Holland.

aries between imaginative fiction and personal history, eventually constituting an album of the past century

poised at the millennium, set with haunting images of its victims and survivors. Confronting these images as spectators, we may feel as if the dead were returning or as if we were on the point of joining them: "I waited seven years for this [*Free Fall*] from a friend who had suppressed this period of her life, not liking home movies about happy childhood. It was a challenge to represent what's behind the happy shots (such as the realities of Jewish forced labor). How to find an art form to show the real drama behind the images? I spent four to five months editing. . . . For the Bartos film I had nine hours of footage for one hour of film, a ratio of 1.5:1."<sup>24</sup> Immersed in the history and literature of the modern era, these works gain

power through their obsessive engagement with the past, as if to warn unwitting protagonist, narrator, and audience alike to carry on with the work begun—in this case, remembering, writing, reading, and filming. Forgács's current project, *Rereading Home Movies:*



Figure 4. *The Danube Exodus* (1998).  
Courtesy VPRO-TV, Holland.

*Cinematography and Private History*, investigates forms of remembrance and recollection in private films and the relationship of photography and cinematography to the original objects that they reproduce.

In these fragments, historical and narrative truth converge through the filmmaker's layering of visualized text with music—an "acoustic mirror"<sup>26</sup> so integral to the project that the composer is named as codirector, so that interior and exterior, past and present, meld with self and other in the cinematic text, illuminating at once the process of visual representation and its impact on the spectator. In tracing these movements, Forgács creates an end-of-century meditation that explores the most delicate, most painful, most anxiously repressed and carefully concealed lesions of the last one hundred years, coinciding with the centennial of the birth of the moving picture. These related stories exploring the personal past in historical circumstances constitute a record of investigations into the mysterious memories of others preserved in visual narratives that dramatize the sometimes treacherous enchantment of memory itself.<sup>27</sup> This shaping of film narrative reflects the irresistible retrospective circlings of the cultural complexities of modern Europe as it pursues a postmodern fictional inspection of the relationship between memory and history. "Interpretation pushes the dreamer to an internal answer—not to tell the meaning but to try to ease the dreamer's path toward meanings that are unclear, contradictory, multiple, layered, resulting not in a deduction of the home movie's meaning, but an emotional, affective experience."<sup>28</sup>

At the start of a new millennium, the conflict between the desire to forget, deny, repress, and the simultaneous impulse to witness, remember, uncover, and record a century's experience, poses profound challenges to the limits of visual representation—the very possibility of recalling, describing, and portraying that which is judged by some to be unrepresentable. An artist engaged in these major explorations of national, cultural, and psychological identities and the dilemma of their multifaceted representations within history and memory, Péter Forgács, in his work of visual images, fiction and documentary, film and video, in turn challenges and extends ongoing studies of primary documents, testimonies, and memoirs of survivors, bystanders, and perpetrators. As a performative act of mourning and reparation, his layering of home movies, found footage, and amateur films merges and condenses past and present, reconstituting lost objects in memory. Private film footage thus becomes a vehicle for narrativizing individual and national—hence public—memory, and an agent in the integration of subjectivity and historical confrontation. One person—the filmmaker in his multiple roles as analyst, interpreter, guardian of memory—telling multiple stories, enables the visual and the verbal to merge, becoming a textual mosaic of fragments that reveal the centrality of representation and narrative—

imagistic and lexical—to human experience. In a dialogue of presence and absence, these truncated screen memories incorporate lost others, countering the falsifying narratives imposed by national, political, racial, religious borders, by catastrophic loss and death. Thanks to images preserved in private and public archives, Péter Forgács's ongoing dialectic with himself and with his spectators explores the psychic space of knowing and being known by the other, enabling the past to be mourned, and the cinematic narrative of lives to endure.

## NOTES

1. See Catherine Portuges, *Screen Memories: The Hungarian Cinema of Márta Mészáros* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); András Bozóki, *Intellectuals and Politics in Central Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999); and James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000).
2. Useful references on Central European experience of prewar and cold war repression include Ezra Mendelsohn's *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Csaba Teglas, *Budapest Exit: A Memoir of Fascism, Communism, and Freedom* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998); Anton Kaes's *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Miklós Haraszti's *The Velvet Prison: Artists under State Socialism* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); and Sándor Márai's *Memoir of Hungary 1944–1948* (Budapest: Corvina/Central European University Press, 1998).
3. See Robert Sklar and Charles Musser, eds., *Resisting Images: Essays on Cinema and History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); and Hamid Naficy, ed., *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place* (New York: Routledge, 1999).
4. For a photographic record of this period, see András Gerő and Iván Pető's *Unfinished Socialism: Pictures from the Kádár Era* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999).
5. Photography has become the family's primary mode of self-representation, inviting analysis of private collections that open up spaces for public discourse. Among the most important recent analyses of home movies and family photography are Michelle Citron's *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Patricia Zimmermann's *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); and Marianne Hirsch's *Family Frames: Photography Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).
6. András Forgács, "The Destruction of Closed Gardens," *Metropolis* (summer 1999): 58–74.
7. A nation of multiple ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities—speaking a language of Finno-Ugric origin with elements from Turkish, Slavic, Latin,

French, Italian, and German—Hungary has, throughout its thousand-year history, been the site of a mosaic of migrations including Serbs, Czechs, Romanians, Slovenes, Germans, Croats, Bosnians, Gypsies (Roma), and others.

**8.** His video installations have been exhibited in Antwerp, Tokyo, São Paulo, New York, Rome, Warsaw, Amsterdam, and Vienna, among many other venues. Exploring personal photographic and film history from a combination of visual, social, aesthetic, and cultural-anthropological perspectives, and widely exhibited in solo and group exhibitions, installations, and performances, Forgács's professional activities include international residencies at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Chicago Art Institute; Netherlands Film Museum, Amsterdam; University of California, Berkeley; and the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

**9.** Márton Kurutz, "Revolving Pictures," in *Metropolis* (summer 1999): 101.

**10.** "Borderline Cases: A Conversation with Péter Forgács," *Metropolis* (summer 1999): 108–28.

**11.** Author's personal interview with Forgács, Budapest, February 1998.

**12.** From the filmmaker's discussion at Museum of Modern Art screening of *Free Fall* for Robert Flaherty seminar, New York City, August 1998, and from personal interviews, Budapest, Hungary, 1996–1999.

**13.** Documentation courtesy of the Getty Center, Los Angeles, and Sally Berger, Museum of Modern Art Video Gallery, New York City, August 16, 1998.

**14.** During discussion of *The Bartos Family*, screened at the Getty Center in Los Angeles (March 2001), the director explained that his original intertitles were destroyed and replaced by a second version.

**15.** István Deák, "Strangers at Home: István Szabó's *Sunshine*," *New York Review of Books* (March 23, 2000). See also my review of *Sunshine* in *American Historical Review* (April 2000): 656.

**16.** Author's personal interview with Forgács, Los Angeles, May 2001.

**17.** See K. Frojimovics, G. Komoróczy, et al., in *Jewish Budapest: Monuments, Rites, History*, ed. Géza Komoróczy (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999).

**18.** Personal interview, Museum of Modern Art, New York City, Robert Flaherty seminar, August 1998.

**19.** F. László Földényi, "Historical Therapy in Film," *Metropolis* (summer 1999): 102–7.

**20.** The annihilation of Hungarian Jewry took place in Hitler's final year with the German invasion on March 19, 1944. Mass deportations were effected at the rate of 10,000 to 12,000 per day, and within a few months some 450,000 Jews were sent to Auschwitz and other camps, resulting in the extermination of 75 percent of the Hungarian Jewish population.

**21.** Klára Muhi, "Under the Spell of Found Images," *Metropolis* (summer 1999): 90–91.

**22.** Personal interview, Budapest, February 1999. I am grateful to Zsolt Kézdi-Kovács and Katalin Vajda of the Hungarian Filmunió for invitations to screenings of Forgács's films at the annual Hungarian Film Week, and to Forgács for additional screenings.



23. See Tamar Mayer, ed., *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation* (London: Routledge, 2000); and *Women, Family, and Politics in Central Europe, 1945–1998*, ed. Andrea Pető and Béla Rasky (Budapest: Central European University Program on Gender and Culture/OSI Network, 1999).
24. Personal interview, Budapest, February 1997. *Free Fall* has since been adapted for the stage and performed as a live oratorio in San Francisco, April 2000.
25. Kenneth Turan, "The Most Personal Filmmakers," *Los Angeles Times*, December 1998. Personal interview, Budapest, February 1998.
26. Kaja Silverman's term, while elaborated within the context of gender and visual representation, is nonetheless useful here. See *The Acoustic Mirror: Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
27. See S. Antohi and V. Tismaneanu, *Between Past and Future: The Revolutions of 1989 and Their Aftermath* (Budapest: Central European Press, 2000).
28. Personal interview, Budapest, July 2000.

## **PÉTER FORGÁCS: SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY, INSTALLATIONS, VIDEO PROJECTS**

- 1978 *I See That I Look* (20 min., video)
- 1979 *Children's Movie* (25 min., 16mm film, BBS)  
*Children's Theatre* (20 min., 16mm film, BBS)
- 1985 *Golden Age* (music by Tibor Szemző; 20 min., video)  
*Iron Age* (music by Tibor Szemző; 50 min., video)  
*Spinoza Rückwerz* (5 min., 35mm color film, BBS)
- 1986 *Portrait of Leopold Szondi* (60 min., video, Hungarian TV)
- 1987 *Episodes from the Life of Professor M. F.* (portrait of Ferenc Mérei, 110 min., video, BBS)
- 1988 *The Bartos Family (Private Hungary, part 1)* (60 min., video, BBS-FMS)
- 1989 *Dusi and Jenő (Private Hungary, part 2)* (45 min., video, BBS-FMS)  
*Either-Or (Private Hungary, part 3)* (43 min., video, BBS-FMS)
- 1990 *The Diary of Mr. N (Private Hungary, part 4)* (51 min., video, BBS-FMS)
- 1991 *Márai: Herbal (INTERLUDE series)* (30 min., FMS-HTV)  
*D-Film (Private Hungary, part 5)* (45 min., video, FMS-BBS)  
*Photographed by László Dudás (Private Hungary, part 6)* (45 min., video, FMS-BBS)  
*Arizona Diary* (with poet György Petri, 53 min., video, FMS-BBS)
- 1992 *Wittgenstein Tractatus (INTERLUDE series)* (codirected with composer Tibor Szemző, 32 min., FMS-HTV)  
*Bourgeois Dictionaries (Private Hungary, part 7)* (49 min., video, FMS-BBS)
- 1993 *Culture Shavings* (43 min., video, FRIZ-HTV)  
*Domweg Gelukkig (Simply Happy)* (46 min., Lumen film, The Hague)  
*Conversations on Psychoanalysis: A Documentary Series* (FMS HTV-BBS, 1988–1993):

1. *Freud and Vienna* (53 min.)
  2. *Sándor Ferenczi and the Budapest School of Psychoanalysis* (53 min.)
  3. *The Psychoanalytic View of Man* (55 min.)
  4. *Psychoanalysis and Society* (53 min.)
  5. *Psychoanalysis as Therapy* (58 min.)
- 1992-1994 *The Notes of a Lady* (*Private Hungary*, part 8) (48 min., FMS-BBS)
- 1994 *Meanwhile Somewhere 1940-43... (An Unknown War series 5/3)* (52 min., BBS-HTV)
- 1996 *Land of Nothing* (*Private Hungary*, part 9) (62 min., video, BBS-HTV)  
*Free Fall* (*Private Hungary*, part 10) (75 min., BBS-HTV)
- 1996-97 *Class Lot* (*Private Hungary*, part 11) (*Private Socialism*, part 1) (52 min., Quality Pictures kft-BBS-HTV production)
- 1997 ...otherwise (with Zoltán Vida, video, 1 hour 30 min.)  
*The Maelstrom: A Family Chronicle* (*De Maalstroom*) (60 min., Lumen Film production for VPRO-TV, Holland)  
*Kádár's Kiss* (*Private Hungary*, part 12) (*Private Socialism*, part 2) (52 min., Quality Pictures, kft-BBS-HTV)
- 1998 *The Danube Exodus* (produced by Cesar Messemaker, 60 min., Lumen Film for VPRO-TV, Holland)
- 1999 *Angelos' Film* (produced by Cesar Messemaker, 60 min., Lumen Film for VPRO-TV, Holland)  
 "Hungarian Totem," 1949-99 Central European Avant-Garde, Ludwig Museum, Vienna
- 2000 "The Visit," video installation, 56 Gallery, Budapest  
 "Free Fall Oratorio," with Tibor Szemző, twentieth San Francisco Jewish Film Festival (premiere)