Archival Hauntings in the Revenant Narratives from Home in Péter Forgács's *Private Hungary*

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Abstract

The paper discusses the haunting narratives of amateur home movies in Péter Forgács's multipart project *Private Hungary* (1988-2002), reading found-footage documentaries as a spectral repetition of a past era. It suggests that the tool-character of 'revenant' narratives may provide a new interpretative dimension for the archival collection of Central European micro-narratives, presenting photographs, freeze-frames and colour filters as an innovative form of reiteration. The project's found footage films employ re-personalize film form, re-writing forgotten archival stories over a backdrop of the *grand récits* (and national upheavals) of the Holocaust and 'goulash' communism. In particular, I read two Jewish stories, *Dusi & Jenő* (1989) and *Free Fall* (1996), in terms of their intermingling historical narratives, which 'doubly occupied' time, and formed the plurality of revenant visions. This 'aesthetics of ruins', which is presented as an effect of the coalescence of time, attempts to pose new questions and redefine our understanding of the visual heritage of past generations.

Introduction

In the last decades, there have been growing debates on images that change across space and time, within an interdisciplinary context. In the history of visual culture, discussions of contemporary Europe, according to Thomas Elsaesser, have been 'doubly occupied, indeed haunted: first by its recent history and historical catastrophes still not worked through or laid to rest (Nazism, the Holocaust and the failure of Socialism), and secondly, Europe is pre-occupied with the consequences of colonialism — reluctantly reminded of economic exploitation, colonialism and slavery, precisely by […] hyphenated Europeans'.[1] In other words, today's socio-political situation reflects the unique tendency of two

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[1] Thomas Elssaesser, 'Real Location, Fantasy Space, Performative Place: Double Occupancy and Mutual Interference in European Cinema', in *European Film Theory*, ed. by Temenuga Trifonova (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 47–61 (p. 51).

driving forces, both of which aim to re-evaluate a new form of indigenous media content, and return to forgotten sources and commemorative practices. Without little doubt, some amateur home movies and archival footage may require extensive aesthetic analysis in this regard, making visible the 'ghosts' invoked of past eras. In modern societies, such content is predominantly embedded in a broad 'crisis of representation', that is, a loss of faith in the possibility of historical and visual truth. In other words, this epistemological claim marks the transition away from 'formal experimentation, attention to dialogical context of fieldwork, incorporation of multiple authorial voices'.[2]

The essay focuses on these questions, specifically by reflecting on the comparison of theoretical statements and newly invented, modern paradigms and formal experimentation techniques that are 'in disarray', with 'problems intractable, and phenomena only partly understood'.[3] It investigates the content of what I call 'revenant hauntings' as a possible framework to analyse Péter Forgács's found-footage project *Private Hungary* (*Privát Magyarország*, 1988–2002). To establish this claim, I recall the 'revenant' aspects of space and time that trace the ordinary lives of people faced with national upheavals. In this process, previous generations invert the bridge between the past and the present in certain films, instead building a dialectical tension between the two periods, in order to reanimate the memory of a previous era.[4] The principal aim here therefore is first to develop the importance of archival findings as research tools, following Jacques Derrida's theory. Second, I will focus on the broader context of those found footage documentaries that employ 'haunting' as a means of revealing forgotten media stories. As such, I hope to refine the 'theoretical landscape' by posing the questions posed by what I define 'flux archives'.

Theoretical Landscapes of Haunting

In the following section I analyse the co-presence of old and new materials in one artistic project, using a theory of ghosts as a research tool. Generally such phenomena could not be investigated without referring to two time-ontologies based on Karl Marx's concept of spectrality and Martin Heidegger's concept of the ghost, which lend the metaphor characteristic shape and properties. An emergent method of haunting is hence inseparable from the effects of iteration.

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[2] Michel Renov, 'Domestic Ethnography and Construction of the "Other" Self', in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, ed. by Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 140–55 (p. 141). See George E. Marcus, 'Ethnography in the Modern World System', in *Writing Culture*: *The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography,* ed. by James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 165–193 (pp. 190–193).
[3] Marcus, p. 191.
[4] See Ernst van Alphen, 'Towards a New Historiography: The Aesthetics of Temporality'*,* in *Cinema's Alchemist: The Film of Péter Forgács*, ed. by Bill Nichols and Michael Renov (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), pp. 59 –74.

In general, attention given to iterant forms may help us to identify the ways in which the capacity to repeat deploys various contexts, in a way that is comparable to a form of citationality. More specifically, 'a certain haunting' aims to find descriptive language that 'in our terms comes upon us like the sudden emergence of an apparition'.[5] Haunting procedures can thus be defined as a set of languages that are 'neither dated, nor given a date in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of calendar'.[6]

We can gain further insight on found footage in archival documentaries by considering the 'revenant effects' of memory reanimation, which seek to build a conceptual framework for 'the new speed of apparition of the simulacrum, the synthetic or prosthetic image, virtual event'.[7] In other words, this revenant mark could function as visual data: as Derrida would say, in fact, 'the ghostly would displace itself like the movement of this history. Haunting would mark the very existence of Europe'.[8] Building on the broader context of its use, as is outlined in precedent archiving practices and drawing on the presence of haunting revenants, I would like to focus on 'all things that are neither fully present nor fully absent, neither living nor dead, that occupy the borderland between the perceptible, and imperceptible'.[9] In contrast to common archives, one of the most notable traits of this practice is that the ghost 'forms part of the series of non-things of what in general one claims to oppose to the thing'.[10] It must also be noted that shifting from invisibility to visibility features a 'revenant thing' that 'engineers a habitation without proper inhabiting', therefore evoking a case of prosthetic memory that features spectres.[11] These metaphors allow us to interpret presences as a phantom that 'inhabits without residing, without ever confining itself to the numerous versions of this passage'.[12] The most intriguing passages in this theory deal with open questions. Inevitably, adopting this perspective entails an epistemological point in time that describes feelings, refers to external ideological mechanisms, and analyses 'perceptions, representations/apparitions of things non-substantial'.[13]

Before entering into further detail, it is worth recapitulating several remarks made by Martin Heidegger on the category of ghost. In seeking to develop an instrumental perspective on the ghost and its position in time and space, we must be far more explicit about what these terms mean in each particular context. One

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[5] David Wills, *Matchbook: Essays in Deconstruction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 5.
[6] Ibidem.
[7] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York, London: Routledge, 1994), p. 4.
[8] Ibidem.
[9] Ivi, p. 51.
[10] Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 16.
[11] Ibidem.
[12] Ivi, p. 18.
[13] Ivi, p. 194.

of the most characteristic traits is the tendency of becoming-spatial that describes being-in-space as a situation both of being-in-a-world (*das In-Sein in einer Welt*) and having a spiritual property (*eine geistige Eigenshaft*).[14] A critical evaluation of this argument inspires Heidegger's conception of *Vorhandensein*, that Derrida in turn features as being inextricable from the body-as-thing (*Korperding*) and spiritual-thing (*Geistding*). As emphasized above, the latter emerges after time (*nachträglich*), and in many cases 'transposed, transferred, deported (*versetzt*) into space'.[15] The point — once posed in Derrida's critique of apparitions and phantasmagory — is that it takes place in a certain moment of History 'in its inside, haunted by a foreign guest that occupies the domesticity of Europe'.[16] When it comes to a geopolitical diagnosis, Derrida argues that 'all the resources and all the references return to spirit';[17] and that thinking the earth and the spirit geopolitically consequently raises a question of the '*Weltpolitik* of spirit'.[18]

One may notice that, when returning to Edmund Husserl's question 'How is the spiritual configuration of Europe (*die geistige Gestalt Europas*) characterized?'[19], Derrida argues that the answer was the destitution of Europe and the collapse of German Idealism.[20] As a result of these statements, Derrida defines the revenant as a wide array of possibilities, calling into question Karl Marx's definition of 'the spectral effect [as] a position (*Setzung*) of the ghost, a dialectical position of the ghostly body as body proper'.[21] What is intriguing about this is the fact that the *revenant* (the ghost) and the *Geist*, intended as 'the most fatal figure of this *revenance* [returning, haunting] [emphasis in the original]'[22], cannot be separated from each other. One might say that the combination of these two contexts creates a bridge between the past phantoms and the present, evoking a memorial haunting in accordance with a specific hegemony; this hegemony defines 'spectre' as a form of transmutation, or return of the revenants, and operates in '*madly* spectral compositions and conversion' [emphasis in original].[23]

For Derrida, the spectre illustrates phantoms that represent 'commodities transforming human producers into ghosts. And this whole theatrical process (visual, theoretical, but also optical […]) sets off the effect of a mysterious mirror'.[24] From a different perspective, the transformations of the ghost can be interpreted as plural spectres that defining contemporary media and prevent us from unifying with the human project. Another consequence of this view is that

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[14] Ivi, p. 24.
[15] Ibidem.
[16] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 4.
[17] Derrida, *Of Spirit*, p. 44.
[18] Ivi, p. 46.
[19] Ivi, p. 60.
[20] Ivi, p. 61.
[21] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 161.
[22] Derrida, *Of Spirit*, p. 40.
[23] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 57.
[24] Ivi, p. 195.

these premises involve an ethical dimension, in that, according to Derrida, 'we have a responsibility [justice] to those not present: the dead and the not yet living';[25] using metaphors such as 'living in the past' or 'living in the future', or both, spectrality 'reminds us of our obligations to past and future generations'.[26]

The main point of this theoretical model is that such spectral duplicity takes the form of a haunting ghost's monologue and ventriloquizes it, comparable to Boris Eichenbaum's concept of inner speech in the cinema.[27] All these models of interpretation that imply a double condition of the material (there and now) are interwoven with each other. These archival proclivities enable a more precise definition of the way in which we can observe past generations, and moreover offer a conceptual framework to a retrospective gaze on documentary practices that are brought back to life.

Home Movies as Revenant Archives

Looking back at Péter Forgács's early works, one may note that they effectively inaugurated the use of home movies as found-footage in late-1970s Hungary. More specifically, his first video *I see that I look* (1978) can be considered the starting point of this innovative technique, focused on the tensions between collective and personal historical narratives. Forgács's 'archive fever'[28] began when he established the Private Photo & Film Archives Foundation (PPFA) in 1983 in Budapest; since then, Forgács has been studying twentieth-century Hungarian visual collections as an outset of institutionalization of collective memory. Forgács first experimented his technique with private archives from the 1930s. The author gathered more than 300 hours of home movie footage, then collecting an additional forty hours of interviews provided by amateur filmmakers and shot in the 'anachronistic' format of 9.5 mm. Forgács himself then filmed the relatives and friends of the individuals who shot the original footage.[29] The new dynamics established by his work with found footage imply a new dimension of speed and produce a 'new structure of the event and of its spectrality'.[30] Among the results of disclosing time as a pure form of documentary filmmaking are 'revenant effects', triggered by the use of specific techniques of cutting, slow motion, freeze-framing and narrative ellipses.

A key inspiration for this film is *Private History* (1978), conducted by experimental filmmakers Gábor Bódy and Péter Timár. The film was composed of amateur

[25] Simon Tormey, Jules Townshend, *Key Thinkers from Critical Theory to Post-Marxism* (London: Sage, 2006), p. 194.
[26] Ibidem.
[27] See Ronald Levaco, 'Eichenbaum, Inner Speech and Film Stylistics', *Screen Magazine*, 14-15.4 (1974–75), 47–58.
[28] See Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
[29] See Bill Nichols, 'Introduction', in *Cinema's Alchemist: The Films of Péter Forgács*, ed. by Nichols and Renov, pp. VII–XXII (p. XI).
[30] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 79.

footage that playfully narrates the story of a 'private' nation through fragments of the national past. Bódy's work at the Béla Bélazs Stúdió (BBS) and his experimentation with the borderline between fiction and found-footage documentaries had enormous influence on Forgács's work. Deriving inspiration from the aesthetics of 1980s video-clips, Gábor Bódy marked the advent of video experimentation in Hungary, paving the way for the use of superimposing layers on images. Bódy's short video *De Occulta Philosophia* (also known as *Philo-clip*), for instance, 'must in all likelihood have had an effect on Péter Forgács's *The Back-Drive of Spinoza* [1985]'.[31]

The director's most impressive project of archival research is *Private Hungary*, a found footage compilation that has been transformed into a colossal epic saga. This project, as well as most of Forgács's recent works, is based on the restoration of home movies produced in Europe from 1918 to the 1960s. This collection comprises thirteen parts (*The Bartos Family, Dusi & Jenő, Either-Or, The Diary of Mr N., D-Film, Bourgeoisie Dictionary, The Notes of a Lady, The Land of Nothing, Free Fall, Class Lot, Kádár's Kiss, A Bibó Reader, The Bishop's Garden*), all of them focused on the broad spectrum of the experiences of two subsequent Hungarian generations, observed from different angles. Among their characteristic traits, the most endemic to home movie storytelling is the fact that these short movies offer at once a valuable contribution to the growing archive of oral history — also emphasised by voice-over commentaries — and a cinematic narrative built from the original documentaries and 'reassembled' *ex post*. In other words, shifting the emphasis on newly 'reframed' narratives, Forgács attempts to refine a certain revenant vision of 'haunting history' in documentary found-footage of a country shattered by the rise of Nazism and the Anschluss (annexation), the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the arrival of Stalinist Russia. By 'recycling' forgotten private stories, Forgács allows memorable excursions into places and moments that are unavailable to 'official' histories of the period spanning the interwar to the post-war communist era. The process of re-assembling archival home movies and making them resemble newsreels allows the author to present haunting narratives of everyday life in twentieth-century Hungary as the result of a specific use of post-production practices that transform private documents into collective history.

Jewish Revenant Narratives

One of the main questions posed by Forgács's compilation is how to reiterate the backstage of Jewish life in a time of such terrible national transformations. In order to fulfil this aim, *Private Hungary* employs standard devices of non-fiction film such as 'visual text, narration, music, where each of them uses unusual inventiveness to contextualize Jewish lives within international political events'.[32] Howe-

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[31] János Palotai, 'Visual Revolution – Change of the Political Regime', *Filmkultura* [n.d.] <http://www.filmkultura.hu/regi/articles/essays/visual.en.html> [accessed 15 September 2016].
[32] Scott Macdonald, 'Péter Forgács: An Interview', in *Cinema's Alchemist: The Films of Péter*

ver, the very intimate story outlined in the second part, entitled *Dusi & Jen* (1988), focuses on a micro-narrative that illustrates the death of a dog in the background of the deportation of the Jews and the devastation of Budapest. The whole life of the couple is measured in terms of the vicissitudes of their dog's life, which becomes a central aspect of the story in the face of the upheavals of war. Thanks to the constant intermingling of these two spheres, this movie represents a

> moving portrayal of a Jewish couple whose carefully documented, ordinary lives punctuated by domestic rituals — meals taken on a terrace, regular promenades with a beloved dog — evoke the lives of thousands who perished and whose lives vanished without benefit of recorded images.[33]

Further insight into the Jewish question is provided in the tenth part of *Private Hungary*, entitled *Free Fall* (*Az örvény*, 1996), which offers a historical 'glimpse into a culture about to vanish'.[34] More specifically, the question raised in the above 'video opera' seems to be

> 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, suggesting 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?[35]

Based on 8-millimetre amateur footage registered by the musician, photographer and businessman György Pető, who filmed his family members in their everyday life 'enjoying high times in neo-Proustian style',[36] the film

> traces this process of "free fall" from an unexpected, intimate viewpoint, rather than documenting the bureaucratic mass homicide system from the outside, thereby focusing on the process as experienced from within the future victims

quotidian subjectivity'.[37] According to Catherine Portuges, Forgács's experimental drive is mostly evident in the postmodern sound-design that characterizes

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Forgács, ed. by Nichols and Renov, pp. 3–38 (pp. 5–6).

[33] Catherine Portuges, 'Hidden Subjects, Secret Identities: Figuring Jews, Gipsies, and Gender in 1990s Cinema of Eastern Europe', in *Writing New Identities: Gender, Nation, and Immigration in Contemporary Europe*, ed. by Gisela Brinker-Gabler and Sidonie Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 196–215 (p. 208).

[34] Portuges, 'Memory and Reinvention in Post-Socialist Hungarian Cinema', in *Cinemas in Transition in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989*, ed. by Catherine Portuges and Peter Hames (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), pp. 104–134 (p. 123). It should be noted that Forgács found the footage employed in *Free Fall* accidently, in an attic in Budapest owned by a Jewish family. I would like to thank the participants in the panel 'Experiencing the Space' at the NECS 2015 Conference 'Archives or/for the Future' (Łód , June 18–20) for this information, where I presented a preliminary version of this article.

[35] Ivi, p. 124.

[36] Ivi, pp. 124–25.

[37] Ivi, p. 124.

this work, and especially the discrepancy between form and content: focusing on the abstract language of Jewish law, the director — together with the composer Tibor Szemz — presents Jewish legal terminology

> being sung in hauntingly repetitive clauses that echo and mirror the experience of the narrowing sphere of life and the unpredictability that characterized the victims' lives. […] This elegiac, silent visual mode accompanied by voice-over instills in the viewer as sense, however fleeting, of the tragic fate of these subjects, revisited and rehistoricized, from the perspective of a director born after World War II.[38]

I argue that these works could exemplify the differential role that visual archives could play in an educational context, as well as in the development of a new theoretical perspective. Shedding new light on the history of Jews during World War II, archives created by amateur filmmakers illustrate daily, ordinary life, primarily of bourgeois families involved in historical *grands récits.*

Visual Archives as Catalogues

Having defined the genre of amateur visual archives, it is worth noting that similar associations define the starting points of such amateur documentary practices. As a form of complex, para-documentary structure made of pre-existing footage, *Private Hungary* exerts the tension between the 'pioneers of the family' involved in the upheavals of public, historical events related to the Holocaust and the objectification of narrative visual archives. More specifically, as the average citizens' family activities and public events were shot against varied backdrops of social-political turmoil in 1930s Europe, it seems to suggest that family-made home movies can effectively be considered as archival material. As a titanic labour that innovatively juxtaposes different 'temporal' dimensions, Forgács's work transforms our perception of time and movement according to the life 'embodied' in these images. Notably, Catherine Portuges stresses that

> Forgács has been reworking issues of European memory in an archival experimental format that, drawing on an era of predigital photography, allows him to reappriopriate materials from the private past of family memory.[39]

These specific home movie archives differ from other forms of archiving. Home movies are a specific genre, which has specific 'souvenir' properties, for events such as anniversaries, weddings, family outings, the birth and growing up of children, although these personal elements are selective.[40] Retrieving visual

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[38] Ivi, pp. 124–25.
[39] Ivi, p. 125.
[40] See Portuges, 'Intergenerational Memory: Transmitting the Past in Hungarian Cinema', *Spectator*, 23.2 (special issue *Quo Vadis European Cinema?*, ed. by Luisa Rivi, Fall 2003), 44–52 (p. 51).

materials from home movies as multifarious sources of historical reconstruction therefore sits between the private and the public. As Derrida puts it, it is

> thus in this *domiciliation*, in this house arrest, that archives take place. The dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public, which does not always mean from the secret to the non-secret'.[41]

Here, the focus is on the use of home movie sources that are inscribed in the process of archive institutionalization: 'documents, which are not always discursive writings, are only kept and classified under the title of the archive by virtue of a privileged *topology*'.[42] A detailed classification concerns 'the intersection of the topological and the nomological', and shows that 'a scene of domiciliation becomes at once visible and invisible'.[43]

Although home movies were not associated with any specific competences, 'amateur cinema was considered an elitist practice reserved for the bourgeoisie,'[44] who could afford expensive film stock: the home movie soon became a hallmark of weddings, birthday celebrations, and holidays. However, during the war years, the 'archive fever' related to the creation of 'compilation films'[45] has to some extent demonstrated that collection is

> the imaginative process of association turned material'[46], meaning that 'production is no longer performed automatically and unconsciously but is intentionally externalized and materialized. The ordering of objects collected and archived is ultimately a form of association, that is, a form of connecting and joining together.[47]

This system of associations might seem to some extent reassuring, in that it introduces 'meaning, order, boundaries' in otherwise 'confused and contingent' material; however, 'this production of coherence and meaning has a price', because it entails the 'paradoxical effects of archiving'.[48] This is, 'because at a cer-

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[41] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, pp. 2–3.
[42] Ivi, p. 3.
[43] Ibidem.
[44] Kristian Feigelson, 'Cinematic Archives and the Rereading of European History in Forgács's Cinema: A Filmmaker of the Anonymous', in *Just Images: Ethics and the Cinematic*, ed. by Boaz Hagin and others (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. 142–57 (p. 145).
[45] According to Àngel Quintana, the practice of making 'compilations films' was introduced during the 1940s. In those films, the creator did not have to make images, constructing the story on the basis of pre-existing images. One of the most famous examples of such films is *Paris 1900* (1947), directed by Nicole Védrès, which is composed of archival images made between 1900 and 1914. See: Àngel Quintana, *Virtuel? À l'ère du numérique, le cinéma est toujours le plus réaliste des arts*, trans. by Esther Fouchard (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 2008), p. 118.
[46] Matthias Winzen, 'Collecting, so Normal, so Paradoxical', in *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing, and Archiving in Art*, ed. by Ingrid Schaffner and Matthias Winzen (Munich: Prestel, 1998), p. 22.
[47] van Alphen, 'Archival Obsessions and Obsessive Archives', in *What is Research in the Visual Arts?: Obsession, Archive, Encounter*, ed. by Michael Ann Holly and Marquard Smith (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute; distributed by New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 65–84 (p. 66).
[48] Ibidem.

tain point the individual components are deemed to be only another expression of those objects that surround it', thereby destroying '[u]niqueness, specificity, and individuality […] within the process of archiving'.[49] This is what Matthias Winzen calls 'protective destruction': in other words, '[i]n many cases, the transplantation of a concrete individual piece into a collection means that this piece partly or completely perishes in favor of its documentality'.[50] This idea presents many traits in common with Walter Benjamin's renowned formulation: we could argue that the archival impulse expressed by 'compilation films' in the age of mechanical reproducibility deprives home movies and amateur films of the past of their 'aura', that is, of their natural context and of their original function.[51]

Home vs. Heimat

As has already been pointed out, these 'home movies archives' are to be considered a specific form of narrative playing a special role in the area of collective memory. The most particular aspect of home movies is the fact that they encompass two different dimensions, inherently related to the structural ambiguity of the term 'home': '[f]or home in the literal sense […] is essentially private. Home in the wider sense, *Heimat*, is essentially public [and] by definition collective. It cannot belong to us as individuals'.[52] However, David Morley (quoting Ann Oakley) argues that 'home' and 'family' have become 'virtually interchangeable terms' since the 1960s.[53]

The main focus of home movies is effectively the observation and recording of family gatherings such as those mentioned above. The registration of personal familial moments appears limited – especially in the interwar period, due to the low quality of celluloid – and relies on selectiveness, that is, on a composition of happy memories. However, as I sought to demonstrate earlier, home movies are also central within the construction of collective memory, creating an overlap between the home as family and the home as *Heimat*, especially in the production of 'compilation films'.

According to Ernst van Alphen, Forgács's use of the home movie archive resists this dichotomy between public and private:

> [h]is archival films do not provide information, they do not tell history, but they show us that the experience of time in personal history is something that cannot be integrated in or translated into collective or official history. As Kaja Silverman argues […], his films are based on strategies of re-personalization instead of objectification or catego-

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[49] Ibidem.

[50] Winzen, p. 24.

[51] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. by J. A. Underwood (London, New York: Penguin Books, 2008).

[52] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction', in *Home: A Place in the World*, ed. by Arien Mack (New York, London: New York University Press, 1993), pp. 61–64 (pp. 63–64).

[53] David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 25; see Ann Oakley, *Housewife* (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 65.

rization […]. Whereas the archival mechanisms of objectification and categorization strip images of their singularities, Forgács's archival footage keeps insisting on the private and affective. Silverman writes that this is first of all done through the many direct looks with which people face the camera. This seems to be a defining feature of home movies as such.[54]

Evidently, home archives of past generations acquire new life and provide a retrospective glimpse into narratives that interlock memories and stories performed by people. This tool leads to the constitution of a dynamic process that explores both personal and collective memories of the past era.

Having outlined an impulse of reiteration in found footage compilation films, I wish to stress that Forgács's main aim is to gather and assemble old film materials. On the one hand, then, the project consists of personal narratives created by amateur filmmakers and their nature of leisure practices; on the other, he manipulates and reprocesses these fragmented archival discoveries, to some extent creating a reconstructed historical temporality. These practices, however, might cast doubts on the ethical aspects of media transformation, especially since these life stories were taken out of their original context (the home) and 'partially intercut with minimal explanatory material'.[55] Intercutting and eradicating archival discoveries can be considered a result of re-personalization, as opposed to that of 'objectification or categorization'.[56]

In this sense, Forgács's personal touch appears in his significant manipulations of the temporality of such documents. Slowing them down, producing a movement back and forth, stopping the movement for a few seconds, thus generating a rhythm, Forgács almost creates a haptic experience; his films somewhat give the impression of a 'revenant effect' that characterizes the 'genre' of home movies found footage as well as Forgács's own 'intensification of qualities of the medium of the moving image as such'.[57]

One of the results of the interplay between the personal and collective dimensions concerns the aforementioned dynamic of reiteration, which 'exposes' the method of re-personalization of archival footage, at the same time offering fresh insight into many direct representations of 'real' people. By the same token, this psycho-ontological aspect of 'amateur effects' is highly visible when the individuals recorded in those home movies look directly into the camera. Breaking with the cinematic illusion brings into the present forgotten Hungarian stories of war upheavals. This meticulous documentation of social life is enriched with

[54] van Alphen, 'Visual Archives and the Holocaust: Christian Boltanski, Ydessa Hendeles, Peter Forgács', in *Intercultural Aesthetics: A Worldview Perspective*, ed. by Antoon van den Braembussche, Heinz Kimmerle and Nicole Note (Dordrecht, London: Springer, 2009), pp. 137–55 (p. 152). See also Kaja Silverman, 'Waiting, Hoping, among the Ruins of All the Rest', in *Cinema's Alchemist: The Films of Péter Forgács*, ed. by Nichols and Renov, pp. 96–118.
[55] Portuges, 'Home Movies, Found Images and "Amateur Film" as a Witness to History: Péter Forgács's *Private Hungary*', *The Moving Image*, 1-2 (Fall 2001), 107–24 (p. 109).
[56] van Alphen, 'Visual Archives and the Holocaust', p. 152.
[57] Ivi, p. 153.

the soundscapes composed by Tibor Szemző. More specifically, the Hungarian composer turned these home movies into a new aural sphere, pulling them out of the home and transforming them into something that feels 'defamiliarized'.[58]

This effect of 'strangeness' might be considered as a sort of resistance to the simple idea of 'assemblage' of amateur films and home movies. However, the adoption of strategies of appropriation of found footage can be considered as ethically dubious, since it 'shatters' the original contexts and uses of such materials. This resonates with Derrida's idea that '[i]nheritance from the "spirits of the past" consists […] in borrowing. Figures of borrowing, borrowed figures, figurality as the figure of borrowing'.[59] However, the strategy of re-appropriation adopted in *Private Hungary* opens up a trans-generational look on the Jewish stories being carried from the past to the present: in other words, the appropriation of home movies and their 'extraction' from the family domain generates a sort of counter-document defined by its new function. That is, those home movies somewhat express the logic of 'repeatable' documentation: once meant to document family stories, they are now reprocessed for a different documentary use.[60]

Aesthetics of Ruins

In light of what has been discussed thus far, I would like to stress that such multilayer archival documentaries based on intermingling temporal moments seem to comply perfectly with Jacques Derrida's definition of 'haunting', as a ghost coming from the ashes.[61] Not without reason, Thomas Elsaesser talks about

> new post-realist ontologies [that perform] presence as post-mortem, and thematiz[e] the consequences – positive and negative – of mutually interfering with, mutually sustaining and mutually authenticating each other, as both 'ghosts' and 'real', both actual and virtual at the same time.[62]

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[58] Michel Chion discusses the idea of phantom in the area of the audio sphere, drawing on Marleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. In his book *Audio-Vision* Chion uses the phrase *en creux*, which roughly translates as 'phantom'; as the translator notes, Chion 'is negotiating the territory of transference from one sensory channel to another, which sometimes produces psychological "presences" in the face of perceptual absences'. Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 218. See also: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965).

[59] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 136.

[60] See also: Marsha Kinder, 'Reorchestrating History: Transforming the Danube Exodus into a Data base Documentary', in *Cinema's Alchemist: The Films of Péter Forgács*, ed. by Nichols and Renov, pp. 235–56.

[61] See Derrida, *Of Spirit*, p. 1.

[62] Elsaesser, 'Real Location, Fantasy Space, Performative Place', in *European Film Theory*, ed. by Trifonova, p. 60.

However problematic, however aporetical, these ideas remain: perhaps the most notable consequence of these 'alternative' versions of historical narratives that move from past to present, in the form of archival discoveries of multifarious amateur documentaries, is the actualization of what Catherine Russell has termed an 'aesthetics of ruins'.[63] In his films, Forgács experiments with filmic language to such an extent that he conceptually undermines the 'permanence, stability, and linearity'[64] of previous narratives created by two different generations during interwar period in Hungary. The particular 'tricksterism' of his work is reflected in his practice of partially 'subverting' official history, by uprooting home movies found footage from its original destination.

According to Catherine Portuges, in fact, the Jewish stories included in *Private Hungary* express a 'personal past that has became a record of investigation into the mysterious memories of others'.[65] At a first look, this use of home movies archival materials recalls the notion of found footage as a 'repeatable' form that reflects the dynamics of contemporary media practices. However, this representation of the people of a forgotten era also expresses Jacques Derrida's claim that 'all the forms of a certain haunting obsession [seem] to organize the dominant influence on discourse today'.[66] Drawing on Derrida's work, but also seeking critical revisions of his ideas, this article has first of all sought to demonstrate that the process of (haunting) reiteration comes into play when a transition creates a shift from one moment in history to another one. The genre of 'compilation films' perfectly illustrates the dialectics of overlapping inherent in a narrative mode that is spread between past and present. Thus, home movie documentaries embody the reiteration of a recurrent *Zeitgeist*. The archival 'landscape' stems from the use of temporal ellipses in the articulation of found footage material that shows the private life of two generations. Without giving a straight answer to the question posed by the idea of a 'crisis of representation', *Private Hungary* creates an 'archival' storyline of the vicissitudes of quotidian life for everyday people, observed in the light of an intergenerational timeline of national transformation.[67]

Contrary to what could be inferred from the standard reconstruction of archival documentaries, this collection problematizes the idea of found footage documentaries as a genre. Forgács's saga helps us to understand the differential role played by the re-use of found footage materials, moreover raising new questions regarding ethic issues. More specifically, it encourages us to re-think the very idea of manipulating historical truth, in a way that mirrors the modern shift from

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[63] Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 239–40.
[64] Rob Yeo, 'Cutting Through History: Found Footage in Avant-garde Filmmaking', in *Cut: Film as Found Object in Contemporary Video*, ed. by Stefan Basilico (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Museum, 2004), pp. 13–27 (p. 25).
[65] Portuges, 'Memory and Reinvention in Post-Socialist Hungarian Cinema', in *Cinemas in Transition in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989*, ed. by Portuges and Hames, p. 126.
[66] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 45.
[67] See Portuges, 'Jewish Identities and Generational Perspectives', in *A Companion to*

micro-narratives of everyday life to the public history of the national regimes, a shift that is frequently considered to be an effect of the coalescence of time. A return to the memorial residue allows us to re-read those memories as ghosts that bring the past into the present, presenting the ordinary life of two interlocking generations in the light of 'haunting' ramifications of *revenant* home media.

Eastern European Cinemas, ed. by Anikó Imre (Chichester, UK, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 101–24 (p. 121).