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## War in The Eyes

*«Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt» (Virgilio)  
The sadness of 'things', the pain of human events.*

*«To open one's eyes, one must know how to close them.  
The eye always open, always in a state of wakefulness  
- like those of Argos -  
becomes dry.  
A dry eye, permanently,  
perhaps sees everything, but looks badly.  
Paradoxically, to look well  
we need all the tears at our disposal»*

(G. Didi-Houmerman)

### Introduction

This artistic research project was structured with the aim of carrying out an audiovisual investigation into the imagery of families and citizens, where national and international political dynamics intertwine with people's private and intimate lives. The project aimed to explore the connections between the private dimension and history, within family and intimate life, where aggressive and destructive impulses move. The artistic proposal was therefore declined as a visual narration of the unconscious emotional tensions that are the most complex and profound element of human relationships, but which at the same time represent a matrix of conflictuality that when projected into the public context triggers the events of war. Following the lesson of Gino Pagliarini who invites us to pay attention to the individual-institution relationship, this project analyzed the intertwining of intra-psychic conflictuality with the rhetoric of fear propaganda (today expressed by the media mainstream of state television and social networks).

### Objectives

In consulting the audiovisual documents in the archive, we also focused on Hungary in geo-cultural terms. A Central and Eastern European country that, in Mihály Szegedy-Maszák's geopolitically 'boundless' vision, is strongly characterized by the 'national' question. Therefore marked by a specific experience that generates and consolidates identity traits. In this perspective, the present audiovisual research aimed to focus on the historical-political and social chronology of Hungary, for the period from the beginning of the last century to the recent events of the last few years, highlighting the intensity and persistence of the theme of the country's independence, in correlation with the evolution of local social dynamics. This has made it possible to verify the thesis that in Hungary there is an idea of national culture conceived as religion, from which a 'national

character' of the country and a 'common national destiny' that binds citizens and families of the country, even in their domestic imagery, seems to emerge, as revealed by the analysis of home videos, belonging to Peter Forgacs' collection.

Here it was possible to intercept the experiences of anguish that presumably pervaded (in the historical period considered of interest) Hungarian families who led apparently serene lives. But deep down they were crossed by the 'return of the repressed' of such anxieties, almost in the emergence of instances of death in which the most authentic dimension of their existences was revealed. Using the words of the poet Ágnes Nemes Nagy who, in the verses of *Le Journal*, wrote: *"of what I do not know I must speak, of what I do know I must keep silent, and when tomorrow flies by without me, they will ask and my skeleton will answer, what I do not think I must divulge, and what I think I must keep silent, silence the true rumbles the false, the rest I dig from the grave."*

## **Methodology**

Against this backdrop, this research sought to explore the relationship between the ruins of the past (including the ruins of crucial geopolitical events, including wartime events) and the unconscious memories of families, in the direction introduced by Alain Schnapp, in his recent book *"Une histoire universelle des ruines. Des origines aux Lumières (La Librairie du XXIe siècle)*, proposed a stratigraphic analysis of the "thought on ruins", thus working not only on material traces, but also on immaterial ones, intrinsic to the individual and collective unconscious.

With this in mind, a narrative remodelling was proposed, according to Forgacs' found footage technique, which allowed for the use of homevideos with the so-called images of national and international propaganda. The result is a dreamlike and symbolic reading of the inner world of Hungarian families, through the deforming lens of salient episodes in Hungarian history of the last century.

During the research period, it was possible to meet and discuss with Peter Forgacs from whom I received valuable insights and interesting suggestions. It is possible to point to Peter Forgacs as an undisputed master in the use of home videos in the telling of Hungary's recent history (and not only) and my artistic research is also intended as a homage to his work and artistic history.

## **Goals**

In the context of this work, attention has therefore turned towards the construct elaborated by psychoanalyst Franco Fornari, regarding the construct of the 'terrifying interior', proposed in his famous book *'Psychoanalysis of War'*, which has recently come back into the news due to the new phase of atomic escalation, relating to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In the book, Fornari recounts how the history of humans coincides with the history of numerous wars, because every individual is inhabited by an aggressive drive towards everything he or she feels is other than self. Taking up the Freudian construct of *Todestrieb* (In classical Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the death drive [German: *Todestrieb*] is the drive toward death and destruction, often expressed through behaviors such as aggression, repetition compulsion, and self-destructiveness), Fornari explained the Internal Terrifying as the set of persecutory anxieties that reside in every person and that manifest themselves, unconsciously, in the domestic environment, to the point of stating

that *'In our unconscious, war is endemic. Everyone carries silent and hidden killings within themselves'*. This implies that the configuring of the other from oneself as an enemy does not derive so much from aggressive drives, structured as an anti-conservative defense against the other's aggressive drives towards us, but rather springs from a more archaic anguish that derives from the inner world of the person, from his most primordial phantasms that find an elective place of expression in the family environment.

This means that the emergence of the other as an enemy does not depend so much on the aggressive drive as a self-preserving defense against the other's drive towards us, but on a deeper anguish that comes from within the subject, from its most original phantasms.

## Conclusions

Through the conceptual register that Fornari calls "*paranoid processing of mourning*", this audiovisual research project aimed to investigate the internal anxieties of Hungarian families, animated by an expulsive mechanism of the most extreme otherness, represented by death, sublimated in the war events that have marked the country's history. Because, if the individual - as Fornari explains - ends up delegating the resolution of these archaic anxieties to the government institution, this institution finds itself forced to manage the sum of all the aggressive instances of individual citizens. In this way, a switch occurs from the terrifying internal to the terrifying external, as demonstrated by the images of the propaganda in the OAS archive.

Here the familiar becomes the site of an uncanny, perturbing, unfamiliar - in Freud's words - causing the angel of the story to re-emerge, as described by Walter Benjamin "*...an angel who seems in the act of distancing himself from something on which he fixes his gaze. His eyes are wide open, his mouth open, his wings outstretched. The angel of history must look like this. He has his face turned towards the past. Where a chain of events appears to us, he sees a single catastrophe, which relentlessly piles ruin upon ruin and throws it at his feet. He would like well to restrain himself, to raise the dead and recompose the shattered. But a storm blows in from heaven, which has caught hold of his wings, and is so strong that he cannot close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which he turns his back, as the heap of ruins rises before him to heaven. What we call progress is this storm.*"

So, in the scenes of Hungarian family life, combined, emriched with images of war politics and propaganda about national identity, one glimpses what Olivier Mannoni calls *l'inquiétant familier*. That is a disorienting disturbance for the observer, because it generates a profound unease in the viewer. The discomfort of hearing that otherness resonates, which is not external to us, but resides in our own intimacy. An *unheimlich* (the uncanny is the psychological experience of an event or thing that is unsettling in a way that feels oddly familiar, rather than simply mysterious) thanks to which we can try to decode the new community neuroaesthetics not only of Hungary, which, as a central eastern country, allows us to understand differently the monolith we call the West, marked by the destiny of a name, *Occasum*, which is therefore marked by perennial fall.

## **Documents consulted in OSA**

The Diary of Mr. N. (Private Hungary 4), 1990; HU OSA 320-1-4:3/2; Péter Forgács Art Documentaries; Hungarian Home Movie Collection; Photographs and Home Movie Collection of Privát Fotó és Film Alapítvány; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

Tale of the Dead Princess and the Seven Knights, 1960; HU OSA 206-2-1:46/6; Audio-Visual Research Materials from Multiple Sources; Exhibitions; Records of the Open Society Archives at Central European University; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

Demonstration of Protective Equipment and Weapons, 1989; HU OSA 344-0-1:17/1; Documentary and Propaganda Films of the Workers' Militia; Hungarian Workers' Militia Films; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

Civilian Defense Drills, 1978; HU OSA 394-0-1:27/5; Propaganda and Educational Films from the Film Studio of the Hungarian Ministry of Interior; Records of the Film Studio of the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

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Paranoia Archive  
HU OSA LibSpColl-Paranoia-005

Paranoia Archive  
HU OSA LibSpColl-Paranoia-015

Paranoia Archive  
Vegyí fegyverek [Chemical weapons] / Polgári Védelem Országos Parancsnokság  
HU OSA LibSpColl-Paranoia-054

Gyula Hidegkuti Home Movies, 1968; HU OSA 320-1-2:127/1; Hungarian Home Movies; Hungarian Home Movie Collection; Photographs and Home Movie Collection of Privát Fotó és Film Alapítvány; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

Langmár Home Movies, 1968; HU OSA 320-1-2:321/1; Hungarian Home Movies; Hungarian Home Movie Collection; Photographs and Home Movie Collection of Privát Fotó és Film Alapítvány; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

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Alfréd Ruby Home Movies, 1944; HU OSA 320-1-2:90/1; Hungarian Home Movies; Hungarian Home Movie Collection; Photographs and Home Movie Collection of Privát Fotó és Film Alapítvány; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

[Unidentified Home Movie], 1944; HU OSA 320-1-2:416/1; Hungarian Home Movies; Hungarian Home Movie Collection; Photographs and Home Movie Collection of Privát Fotó és Film Alapítvány; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

Jóka Gémesi Home Movies, 1948; HU OSA 320-1-2:402/1; Hungarian Home Movies; Hungarian Home Movie Collection; Photographs and Home Movie Collection of Privát Fotó és Film Alapítvány; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

Túrmezey Home Movies, 1955; HU OSA 320-1-2:119/1; Hungarian Home Movies; Hungarian Home Movie Collection; Photographs and Home Movie Collection of Privát Fotó és Film Alapítvány; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest (statua stalin)

[MAFIRT Newsreels], 1945; HU OSA 320-1-2:341/1; Hungarian Home Movies; Hungarian Home Movie Collection; Photographs and Home Movie Collection of Privát Fotó és Film Alapítvány; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

Mrs. Istvan Kékesi Home Movies, 1936; HU OSA 320-1-2:272/1; Hungarian Home Movies; Hungarian Home Movie Collection; Photographs and Home Movie Collection of Privát Fotó és Film Alapítvány; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

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Alapítvány; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

[Hungarian Newsreels], 1940; HU OSA 320-1-2:424/1; Hungarian Home Movies; Hungarian Home Movie Collection; Photographs and Home Movie Collection of Privát Fotó és Film Alapítvány; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

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Pálma Mihály Home Movies, 1968; HU OSA 320-1-2:120/2; Hungarian Home Movies; Hungarian Home Movie Collection; Photographs and Home Movie Collection of Privát Fotó és Film Alapítvány; Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest

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