

Forgács's Film and Installation *Dunai exodus* (Danube Exodus)

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Zsófia Bán,
"Forgács's Film and Installation *Dunai exodus* (Danube Exodus)"
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Abstract: In her article "Forgács's Film and Installation *Dunai exodus* (Danube Exodus)" Zsófia Bán analyzes film maker and video artist Péter Forgács's film *The Danube Exodus* (1998) and compares it with the installation *Dunai exodus. A folyó beszédes áramlatai* (*Rippling: Currents of the River*) (2002). Combined with additional materials, the two works are based on footage by ship captain Nándor Andrásovits documenting two successive journeys of forced displacement aboard his vessel, the Queen Elizabeth. Bán's analysis includes the 1939 event of the Jewish exodus from Slovakia to the Black Sea with the eventual goal of reaching Palestine followed by repatriating Bessarabian Germans, fleeing to the Third Reich, who were relocated in occupied Poland on land of evicted Polish families. Bán investigates the medium specific differences of the film versus the installation and the different ways in which the two works offer access to the experience of history turning the journeys of dislocation into an exploration and discovery of the two filmmakers, as well as the protagonists' and the viewers' individual and collective memories.

Zsófia BÁN

Forgács's Film and Installation *Dunai exodus* (Danube Exodus)

Internationally acclaimed Hungarian film and video artist Péter Forgács uses found footage — primarily amateur films from the 1930s and 1940s — as the basis of his works referred to as "compilation films." In one of his most significant films, *Dunai exodus* (Danube Exodus) (1998), he documents the Jewish exodus from Slovakia just before the beginning of World War II. The goal of the journey is to reach the Black Sea from where East European Jews can travel to Palestine, although not without hardships, uncertainties, and bureaucratic difficulties. On the way back, a reverse exodus takes place when the same ship carries repatriating Germans who, as a consequence of the Soviet invasion of Bessarabia, are trying to flee to the Third Reich, but who are eventually relocated in occupied Poland on land of evicted Polish families. The film — based on footage taken by the captain of the ship — was later followed by an installation, *Dunai exodus. A folyó beszédes áramlatai* (*Rippling: Currents of the River*) premiered at the Getty Research Center in 2002. I explore how the film and the installation transform, in their own distinct, medium specific ways, these journeys of forced displacement into an exploration and discovery of the two filmmakers, as well as the protagonists' and the viewers' individual and collective memories and how they succeed in immersing the audience into a shared history of humanity and inhumanity.

In 1992 Forgács created a 35-minute film composed of seven short video essays he called "Wittgenstein Tractatus" and it seems obvious that the Wittgenstein's ideas mark his later work no less. Like Wittgenstein, Forgács is obsessed with investigating the problem of discourse which cannot in its totality contain what it refers to. While Wittgenstein investigated the possibilities and impossibilities of language as such, the filmmaker pursues similar problems within the field of visual language. The fundamental split between what can be expressed linguistically and what remains inexpressible has become even more pronounced in the post-Holocaust era and Forgács's film's are an exploration of this split and of what can be revealed through the gaps. In his work, Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy is embedded within or applied to a specific historical time, thus acquiring new meanings and raising new questions relevant to the problem of representation. Wittgenstein's well-known formula of linguistic philosophical faith that "whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (189), when looked at from the viewpoint of cultural history, seems to be one of the chief sources of cultural neurosis. If a culture thinks that "thereof one must be silent," then this implies that we are remaining silent about something of which we know exactly whereof we are not speaking; what it is whereof we are being silent. We may suppress that knowledge consciously or unconsciously, but we cannot prevent it from rising to the surface, every now and again, at the most unexpected moments. It may well be that these neuralgic points vary from culture to culture, but what they nevertheless have in common is that it is useless seeking to suppress these sensitive contents, for they constantly, uncannily keep returning and stubbornly pushing to the surface again and again.

Forgács aims in his oeuvre to arrive at similar implacability by visual means in order to make these suppressed and silenced subjects a part of Hungarian and European collective memory (following cultural icons like Martin Buber and Claude Lévi-Strauss, Forgács received the Erasmus Prize "awarded to a person or institution which has made an exceptionally important contribution to culture in Europe" in 2007 (<<http://www.erasmusprijs.org>>). In Forgács's oeuvre various motifs and forms of parallelism and repetition — enhanced, for instance, by the art of editing or the minimalist, repetitive musical score — are meant to stage this repeated surfacing in the most diverse narrative times and spaces. Repetition always has an uncanny effect, insofar as it crops up in ever-different forms, and yet, familiar motifs and characters haunt not only the viewers but the world that is presented in his films. That uncanny quality is perhaps nothing more than the spirit of history which is adumbrated in a given culture and does not leave in peace those who figure in it until they have recognized it for what it is: an essential, implacable constituent of their culture. In his 1919 essay "The Uncanny," which arose out of the trauma of World War I, Sigmund Freud wrote that: "Uncanny is what one calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and yet has come into the open" (132). People have endeavored to render the bewildering multiplicity of shades of meaning of

the original German expression, *das Unheimliche* in many different languages — e.g., "uncanny" in English and *inquiétante étrangeté* in French, whereas in Arabic and Hebrew the words are also used for "demonic" and "eerie" — although none has been able to convey the truly unique etymological ambiguity that resides in the original, namely, that it is about an unsettling mixture of the recognizable, the familiar and the cozy yet strange. The equivalent Hungarian word ("*kísérteties*," roughly "ghostly") is at least able to suggest the implication of a revenant, haunting (*kísértő*) quality, something that does not let a person rest, does not let go, however much one might wish. When viewing and reviewing Forgács's films it is perhaps this same uncanny quality that first strikes and instantly hooks viewers and that does not let one rest, that does not let go, that haunts us and makes us want to see more and more of it. In short, one becomes addicted to something that is shown but is rarely spoken of within one's culture, to something that lies beyond the range of words, to something that is shown, if only indirectly, but is not told. We are offered a journey to the heart of darkness, to the uncanny land of silence and forgetting.

Similarly to Péter Nádas's texts — but especially in his opus magnum, *Párhuzamos történetek* (*Parallel Stories*) — Forgács is undeviating in the manner in which it uncovers what is not present in Hungarian cultural memory: what it keeps silent about, what it regularly and consistently with a few rare exceptions turns away from and does so in such a radically fragmented manner that it focuses on the very presence of this absence. Among the missing elements are the Horthy era in Hungary (1920-1944), the country's entry into World War II in December 1941 and its involvement in the Holocaust — as for example in some of the pieces that make up the series *Private Hungary*, such as the films *Free Fall*, *Free Fall Oratorio*, *The Maelstrom* and *Dunai exodus*, as well as certain parts of the Pető family saga — the representation of the body (see, for instance, Forgács's first fiction film based on Nádas's work *Own Death*, a microscopically detailed, cathartic description of a near-death experience caused by a heart attack), the legacy of the Hungarian revolution of 1956, life under the Kádár regime (e.g., *Kádár's Kiss*, *Class Lot*, *The Bishop's Garden*), Hungarian Jewish intellectual history (e.g., *The Portrait of Leopold Szondi* or *Episodes from the Life of Professor F.M.*, two psychoanalysts who left a lasting mark on the development of this field, and others. Forgács's perspective is always that of the individual, the private person, and history is always represented through the privately experienced, individual, and fragmented moments of people's lives. It is these captured, fleeting, individual moments which become metamorphosed before our very eyes into that grand narrative we call history.

In his introduction to *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*, Ulrich Baer compares the Heraclitean and Democritean conceptions of the world and history. The Heraclitean, dramatic — because fleeting and unrepeatable — model of time-as-river and history-as-narrative is counter posed with the absurd Democritean model as occurring in contingent, unrelated bursts and explosions. "In his *Fragments*," writes Baer, "he [Democritus] describes the world as a vast rainfall, with events occurring when individual drops accidentally touch one another. According to Democritus, every event is random, contingent and remains potentially separate from one another" (4-5). The advent of the medium of photography challenged the Heraclitean model, i.e., "the idea of historical time as continuous was countered with a notion of history that imagines time, in a striking image, as an invisible *event*, a decisive moment that requires a new conceptual framework" (Baer 4; emphasis in the original). The image or idea of history as *longue durée* is thus countered with the idea of a fleeting moment or sudden, flash-like event: "The emergence of this counter-model of the 'sudden event' can be traced to a particular moment in modernity that roughly coincides with the invention of photography" (Baer 4). Baer also refers here to Walter Benjamin whose "The Storyteller" diagnosed this turning point in the conceptualization of history as "the end of the art of story-telling" and the overall decline "of narratable history in response to modern experiences of shock" (Baer 4). Forgács's work is also relevant to recall Baer's reference to Vilém Flusser who has pointed out that these two paradigmatic, semi-mythical conceptions of the world are not mutually exclusive: "The two world views [of Heraclitus and Democritus] do not contradict one another since rain is a thin river, and a river is dense rain" (Baer 5-6).

As opposed to photography that disrupts the supposed continuity of time, "freezes" and dislocates the moment from its natural context, film has been conceptualized traditionally as the medium that is

able to best represent the flow, narrativity, and causal nature of history. This is even more so in the case of documentary cinema that relies on archival footage traditionally viewed as a slice of "reality itself" captured on film⁰, which is a cinematic equivalent of the concept of Heraclitean time. Forgács's works based on archival, amateur films disrupt radically that view, foregrounding and problematizing issues of visibility, framing, knowledge, perspective, as well as private and collective memory. This is especially true for *Dunai exodus* whose core motif is the very image, as well as the factual reality of the river that functions literally and metaphorically as the vehicle of history. The Heraclitean notion of time-as-river and history-as-narrative is supported by the literal contents and images of the found footage, while at the same time it is undermined and questioned by the editing and structure of the film. As a result, it succeeds in creating a unique combination of what Flusser described as the mutually non-exclusive concepts of history and the world. The traditional history-river-film triad or triangle is here transformed into different, multi-angled, multi-perspective forms.

The first part of the 49-minute original footage, filmed by the captain — Nándor Andrásovits — of the ship *Queen Elizabeth*, documents the journey of the Slovak and Hungarian Jews to Palestine. *Dunai exodus* website of the installation <<http://www.danube-exodus.hu/index.php3>> gives the historical background to this journey as follows. In response to anti-Semitism and later "Slovak Nazi terror, the Orthodox community of Bratislava commissioned Aron Grünhut and Ludwig Kastner to organize illegal escape to Palestine" (unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). Although the Slovak authorities did not interfere, their original travel plans — by boat down the Danube to the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, by train to Varna, and finally a sea journey to Palestine — were nearly thwarted by newly introduced British restrictions on Jewish immigration to the Palestine Mandate: "The refugees in Budapest and in Bratislava embarked in July 1939 with luggage of 50 kg onto the Danube steamers, the *Queen Elizabeth* and *Czar Dushan*" (<<http://www.danube-exodus.hu/index.php3>>). Despite British protestation in both Sofia and Bucharest, the refugees eventually boarded the maritime ship *Noemi Julia* in the port of Sulina (Black Sea) and arrived in Haifa after an 83-day journey. The estimated total of Jews who escaped extermination via the Danube during World War II was seventy-six thousand (Jewish Exodus) (<<http://www.danube-exodus.hu/index.php3>>). The reverse journey documents the repatriation of the ninety-three thousand Bessarabian *Volksdeutsch* Germans to the Third Reich in October–November 1940 after a secret protocol to the 1939 Molotov–Ribbentrop pact recognized Soviet interest in Bessarabia. The Soviets paid the Reich for the property left behind in wheat and coal and those resettled were promised compensation for their land and property on arrival. They journeyed in 27 steamships (including the *Queen Elizabeth*) from Galatz, Reni, and Kilja, transferring to train in Zimony from where they reached transit camps in Germany by train, to be eventually settled on land of "evicted Polish families" (German Exodus).

The archival footage documenting the journey was given to Forgács by János Varga, historian and archivist, while the film about the Bessarabian Germans' exodus was offered to him by the captain's widow, previously kept in a drawer away from the public eye and assumed taboo even decades after the war. This in itself is significant commentary on the often random mechanisms of public and private memory and how they affect the construction of collective memory. The traditional grand narrative is thus undermined by contingency, fragmentariness, and manipulation and as far as access to information is concerned. Moreover, the idea, or rather the reality of manipulation is manifestly present in the way the artist himself deals with the found footage (repetitions, slow-motions, freeze-frames, music, editing based on the rhythm of the musical score, etc.). Forgács's compilations have also been referred to as re-orchestrations, a concept supported by the fact that the musical score, written by Tibor Szemző for all his films since 1976, is relevant not only as an aural complement to the visual material meant to enhance the emotional reception, but more importantly as a rhythmic structure onto which the film is composed via its editing. Often the score is written before the film is made and the editing, most often done by Forgács himself, is based on the rhythms and mood of the musical score. Thus re-orchestration has both a literal and a metaphoric sense: the visual-aural experience runs parallel to the cognitive experience of reinterpreting, re-visioning history. Forgács's films are manifest, visible representations of the multiple — but often invisible — constructions of history. The same river, in this case, the Danube, becomes the literal and metaphorical vehicle for the

Jews' exodus, as well as the Bessarabian Germans' exodus in reverse as if offering the negative and positive imprints of the same photograph (this structural parallelism is, once again, similar to the pattern of the parallel stories narrated in Nádas's novel: where these parallels eventually converge, instead of infinity, is the context of European history). It becomes a visual narrative of a journey outward and inward, both in a literal and metaphoric sense. The contingent representation of these historical journeys is further heightened by the fact that the respective stories are told by an "unreliable narrator," in this case captain Andrásovits, whose fragmented, partial and subjective — but ideologically seemingly neutral — view of these journeys influences our perception of them to a great extent. Hence the film is a visual performance of the various removes at which we perceive reality or what we are inclined to think of as the grand narrative of history. The accessibility of information, the manipulation of accessible information, and the various, subjective and/or cultural modes of constructing reality based on accessible, as well as non-accessible information all influence our perception and understanding of history.

Many of Forgács's films based on archival footage of amateur and home movies show happy moments from the private lives of people who later became victims of the Holocaust. Similarly to these films related, if only retrospectively, to the Holocaust, much of what *Dunai exodus* offers us is the visual expression of another thought by Wittgenstein: "How hard I find it to see what is right in front of my eyes!" (39). The repetitions, the slow-motions, the freeze-frames so often used by Forgács, as well as the inspired, creative editing (the "thinking form," as formulated by Eisenstein [see, e.g., "Montage in 1938"]) all serve to support and enhance this very idea: the blindness or thoughtlessness so often incorporated in seeing. The impossibility of truly seeing, that may be a result of our highly partial, limited, individual and subjective perspective, or of the socially constructed nature of our vision. The voice-overs and the occasional accompanying, explanatory, written texts are often in some kind of disjunction with the image, and they are often repeated in conjunction with different imagery, so that their meaning constantly shifts. For instance, recurring images of natural scenery normally used as a simple backdrop (see, for example, the very first shots in the film) acquire loaded meaning when juxtaposed with specific related events. Nature is sometimes offered as a contrast to culture (history), something that remains neutral and untouched by the workings of man (see, for instance, the stately image of the Babagay rock at the Iron Gate in Romania that stands solidly out of the river as a kind of monument to the eternal sublimity of nature, which in turn is juxtaposed with the contents of the voice over and the hand drawn, man-made maps), or at times it becomes colored by history: you see the same thing but in a different light. Images of water, for instance, constantly recurring throughout the film, acquire a different meaning when we are told the passengers have been denied access to drinking water for long days. Or the flight of seagulls becomes symbolic when their image is offered in conjunction with the information that the passengers were not allowed to continue their travel or leave the ship at Russe. The constant juxtaposition of private and public could also be mentioned, such as the image of Hitler (with the caption: Adolf H.) brought together, via editing, with the image of the captain's pretty wife smiling on board the Queen Elizabeth. Or we could mention images of people on the boat getting dressed, washing, brushing their teeth, sunning on the deck, dancing, flirting, getting married: the microcosm of private, everyday life's *petite histoires* is contrasted with the parallel grand narrative of history.

Instead of enhancing understanding, images of different texts used in the film also often serve to destabilize or complicate it. We see the text of the menu of a cruise ship to Vienna before the *Anschluss* (fish soup, etc.) as a kind of textual/visual stand-in for the image of the golden years of pre-war peace, which in turn is accompanied by the melancholy, foreboding score. We see brief captions which by their briefness suggest incompleteness and the fragmentary nature of our access to information and to history. We hear excerpts from diaries and letters but we do not see the people who wrote them, we do not know their individual life stories. These texts become free-floating signifiers enhancing the affect of history. We see parts of Torah texts but we do not understand their meaning: they serve only as icons of Jewishness, of the Jewish tradition, similarly to the sound of fragments of prayer.

However, the sound effects and the music of the film (score by Tibor Szemző) contribute perhaps most powerfully to this feeling of uneasy foreboding, melancholy, and disjunction. The non-diegetic

music of the film (the score) is constantly being brought together, juxtaposed with "diegetic" sounds, that is, sounds meant to function as such — note that the original footage is without sound — as for example the sound of prayers, the sound of water, or the chugging of the boat as a kind of constant aural backdrop (similar to the recurring natural landscape backdrop). At times the music of the score stands in for music that is only shown, but unheard, as for example when we see a saxophone player, but instead of the instrument we hear the film's minimalist, melancholy music. We see the people dancing on the ship but we do not hear the music they are dancing to. We see people talking to the camera but we do not hear their voices, we get captions, diary excerpts or voice overs instead. It is as if we were constantly being confronted with the indirect, constructed and imperfect access we have to history and to "reality." Ironically, the documentary footage used in Forgács's film only enhances this effect. Instead of simply offering visual proof, it is used to destabilize meaning and understanding.

The above mentioned manipulations and additions of images, texts, and sounds all contribute to this feeling of disjunction, to the feeling that there is something more to it that cannot be seen, that cannot be captured and cannot be accessed. Consequently, the images create the impression of a visual code, an abstract language that invites to be decoded, to be read, to be understood. They offer themselves as parts of a puzzle, a beautiful but bewilderingly fragmented access to the world, to history, and to life, as such. As opposed to several other films by Forgács where he makes a pronounced effort to reconstruct the lives of the protagonists of the amateur films from which his works are created (e.g., *The Bartos Family*, *Maelstrom*, *I am von Höfler*, or *The Bishop's Garden*), in *Dunai exodus* we are offered only a moment of their lives, which moment indexically and elliptically represents their past and their future. This sense of incompleteness is created despite or perhaps because of the archival, that is, the documentary nature of these images. We see landscapes passing by, we see the passengers' faces, we see them laughing, dancing, sleeping, celebrating marriage, praying, eating and drinking on the boat, we hear excerpts from their letters and diaries, but the individual lives, the very lives that are eventually being saved by this journey, are absent. What is nevertheless present is a sense of historical time: a sense of the past, the present and the future as if compressed into a magic bubble. Forgács develops a new aesthetics of temporality, as well as a new kind of historiography: "When home movies are combined with the historiographic mode, as in the work of Péter Forgács, another kind of relationship with the viewer or reader is stimulated. The clash between — not harmonious blending of — the personal time of home movies and the historical time of historicism brings the situations in the home movies closer to us. Instead of sensing an uncomfortable alienation, as occurs usually when we watch other people's home movies, we begin to identify with the people in the home movies. The personal time of the home movies becomes an anchor within the historicist framework with which it clashes" (Van Alphen 69).

Instead of alienation, I believe this has more to do with boredom — as Ernst Van Alphen points out: "This boredom stems not from the fact that the filmic quality of home movies tends to be rather bad and sentimental but because what we see does not concern us, but them" (69). The striking similarity of the situations recorded in home movies — just like the similarity of the happy moments photographed and later included in family albums — makes it questionable to refer to alienation, as the similarities trigger easy identification with the represented scenes and the people in them. What could, nevertheless have an alienating effect on some, may be fascinating for others, precisely because of their familiarity: this is why many of us are fascinated by other people's family albums: because we recognize our own memories and families in them. This familiarity allows easy identification, and it is further enhanced when such filmic scenes are embedded in specific historical time (instead of private time). The film thus immerses us in the spirit of history, but it does so using only one fixed viewpoint — that of the captain and the fixed setting of the boat. As a result, the viewing of the film places the viewer in the position of an (eye)witness who, however, has only limited access to information (the film begins with a shot of the captain using his binoculars — this is the partial frame also offered to the viewers of the film). It is this relatively static quality that is undermined by the installation created later on. In fact, it is the installation that makes it seem static by comparison, because otherwise there is a kind of fundamental deconstructive drive in Forgács's films, as far as traditional temporality and traditional historiography are concerned. As Alphen puts it: "This is a call for an aesthetics that subverts traditional temporality. Forgács's systematic clash

between personal time and historical time is an example of such a productive practice. His staged clashes do not end up in a deadlock but result in an aesthetics that inserts personal time into historical time, or the other way around, without either false harmony or insurmountable incompatibility. Instead his aesthetics of temporality give personal time a broader historical significance. The genres and media he works with and in, no longer comply with the principles of historicism" (74). As opposed to the relatively static, passive position of the eyewitness, the immersive, surround effect of the main space of the installation, and the "info-booths" allows viewers to become subjects and agents respectively. Here the viewer-subjects become, as it were, parts of the experience as well as agents of investigation leading them to a different, non-sensual, data-based knowledge.

The installation *Dunai exodus: a folyó beszédes áramlatai* (Danube Exodus: The Talking Currents of the River) premiered at the Getty Research Center in Los Angeles in 2002. Not surprisingly, Forgács often quotes Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* when asked to talk about his work: "Everything we see could also be otherwise. Everything we can describe at all could be also otherwise" (Wittgenstein qtd. in Nordmann 129). Forgács's re-orchestrations of the original materials are visual stagings of this very idea. What we see, i.e., "what is there" is shown differently and as a result we see it and understand it differently: it acquires new meanings. This is particularly relevant when we discuss the installation based partly on footage used in the film and partly on additional materials such as individual interviews made with surviving passengers of both journeys, photographs, texts (including diary excerpts, essays, and studies) and soundbites. This additional material can be viewed at <<http://www.danube-exodus.hu/index.php3>> where the different sections consist of materials related to the Jewish exodus, the German exodus, and captain Andrásovits, as well as a video introduction to the installation and related content. When entering either of the three main sections of the site, we are offered a general description of the historical event shown in the film. The website also offers materials related to different media types such as images (photographs, maps), texts (diary excerpts, letters, essays, studies, interviews, memoirs), as well as a rare type of image-text: descriptions of lost or damaged reels as noted down by captain Andrásovits, as in the excerpt from "No.3, i.e., the material of the No.3. Bessarabian reel, from memory, approximately": "A flag with a swastika. People wave from the Elizabeth; the ship is departing, with its stern visible, then the other police NCO salutes. Beautiful scenes of the Melk. Myself in a fur coat with the Reiseleitung, Szalma with the nannies, Bánkuti with the Schwester's. There are beautiful waves at the paddle-drum, on two occasions: once there is a sunlit waving face of water, with the Babakaj approx. at the end" (<<http://www.danube-exodus.hu/index.php3>>). There are also video interviews with surviving passengers, as well as a video documentation made by Forgács on the Heimatmuseum der Deutschen aus Bessarabien, film (excerpts from the original footage) and sound (e.g., Bessarabian German folksongs).

The installation itself plays out on five screens, using eighteen points of view or "orchestrations" which can be chosen individually by the viewers with the help of a touch screen interface. The individual fragments of memory (or memory-bites) are 4-6 minutes long. These given memory-bites are meant to interact freely with the viewers' own fragments of memory based on either primary or secondary experiences (received knowledge). The five screens function as different windows of opportunity to understand what happened before and during World War II in Eastern and Southern Europe. The free associations triggered in the viewers' minds are complemented by parallel, and often playful, positive-negative motifs incorporated by the artist himself and the programmers of the installation. Hence the installation offers a partly free, spontaneous and partly controlled, pre-programmed artistic and learning experience. The reception of information and impressions is thus very similar to the reception of hypertext narratives where each variation, each reading path leads to different conclusions subverting the reading process that took place until then — the only difference is that in the case of the installation the viewers' own, previously acquired knowledge and memories contribute to the experience in a fundamental way. The installation stages the process of viewing and reviewing information in both senses of the word: re-viewing as looking again, and reviewing as reassessing, revaluing the received information. The installation is thus a visual-haptic-aural performance of immersion into time, into private and collective history and memory – it becomes a complex, sensual *lieu de mémoire* in which the created ambient is equivalent to the ambient of history

itself. The rippling currents of the river become the talking currents of memory, forgetting, questioning and understanding (see a video segment at [vimeo.com](http://vimeo.com/1644101) <<http://vimeo.com/1644101>>; the title of the installation in English is *The Danube Exodus: The Rippling Currents of the River*: the translation of the Hungarian subtitle — *a folyó beszédes áramlatai* — would be more literal as "talking" than "rippling" because *beszédes* means "speaking," "talking," or "talkative" thus referencing the events which took place).

The installation of *Dunai exodus* was created by the group called Labyrinth Project in collaboration with Forgács: "In 1997, I founded The Labyrinth Project at the Annenberg Center for Communication at the University of Southern California. As Executive Director, I assembled a core team of media artists – Rosemary Comella, Kristy H.A. Kang, and Scott Mahoy – and together we produced a series of multimedia projects [installations, websites and DVD-ROMs] in collaboration with artists, scholars, scientists, archivists, museums and talented USC students from a wide range of departments. Since 2006, we have been housed in USC's School of Cinematic Arts" (Kinder, 254-55). The installation has been travelling ever since (so far to Barcelona, Helsinki, Ulm, Budapest, Berlin, Berkeley, and New York) and thus has to be accommodated to each given space which basically makes it a site-specific installation. My own experience of it was at the Ludwig Museum in Budapest that has a large, wall-to-wall window overlooking the Danube, and it was with this view in mind that one stepped into the darkened, central space of the installation. The immersive nature of this work is enhanced by multiple, darkened rooms, large, multiple screens (instead of the original single screen), and immersive 5.2 sound system (instead of the original stereo). The scale of the montage is enlarged to enhance the emotional and sensual impact and another dramatic expansion is the use of 40-hours of footage (including parts of newly created materials like, e.g., the interviews or archival footage found elsewhere) instead of the original 60-minute version. Although the installation is meant to offer an interactive experience, it is nevertheless controlled by the programmers in order to retain the original rhythm and mood of the film:

If we were correct in assuming that the emotional power of Forgács's works was largely dependent on their stunning rhythms of editing and music, then we could not let museum users freely control the pacing of the images in this interactive version, for we would then risk having the tone become playful as in an electronic game or merely informative as in a hypertext. Although an educational goal might help contextualize the Captain's primary footage, mere pedagogy would fail to achieve the unique mesmerizing quality of Forgács's 60-minute film, with its shadowy figures, its historical ironies, and its melancholy rhythms provided by Tibor Szemző's original minimalist score. That is why we turned to the musical term orchestration (a concept suggested by Labyrinth's interface designer Rosemary Comella) and to the poetics of rippling currents to control the pacing. (Kinder 236-37)

The spatial conceptualization of the installation resulted in three separate spaces. One side-space is dedicated to the Jewish journey, the other to that of the Germans, showing interviews with survivors, as well as offering access to two 17-inch touch-screen monitors which allow visitors to watch these documentaries in any order and for any length of time (this is where the relatively passive, eyewitness viewer of the film becomes an active investigative agent). In the central, much larger space, visitors may orchestrate their own viewing experience by choosing different segments at the central control panel, thus placing them in the position of the captain commanding the ship (viewers become directly experiencing subjects). The segments of the two stories, as well as materials about the captain constantly overlap with each other (as a result of being shown at the same time, in parallel on the 5 screens), thus making it difficult to separate them. Instead of suggesting equality between these passengers' experiences, the installation (and the film) focuses on the differences and similarities, as well as the uncanny, historical reality of the same captain having helped them reach safety in their new, respective homes, on the very same ship. Since viewers — at least the active ones wishing to operate the console — make selections constantly between the various segments, they never become totally immersed in one story only, but are offered different perspectives from which to compare them. More passive viewers remain content with watching the selections made by other visitors. Some visitors choose to spend most of their time in this central, hauntingly immersive space, while others remain glued to the monitors in the side-spaces listening to as much documentary material they can related to the survivors and their experiences. Both kinds of spaces offer an open-ended experience, never suggesting an illusion of wholeness or completeness. For some this may be disturbing —

although, ideally, urging them to find out more on their own — while for others it may a liberating sensation, ridding them of the constraints of set, prefabricated grand narratives of history, and offering them alternative view-points and unexpected perspectives. The fragmentary and contingent nature of how individuals experience history is here demonstrated or rather, staged in a startling, corporeal and sensuous manner that makes viewers want to return again and again in search of yet unbound experiences.

While in the film Forgács turns to the form and method of narrative parallelism (two parallel stories counterpointing and complementing each other) and to the Heraclitean concept of the river as time and history, in the installation he foregrounds the above mentioned Democritean concept of the fragment (via textual and visual fragments) which, instead of a dual, complementary form offered by the parallel trajectories, creates multiple, complex and to a certain extent contingent trajectories that in turn allow visitors to experience multiple, complex versions of history. Not least, to experience stories of forced displacement as a way of relocating us not only within history as such, but also within our own history, and that of others. The use of the two different media thus has significantly different results. While the film offers a controlled experience, the installation provides access to various background content and information (e.g., historical articles, surveys, interviews, photos, etc.) through its web pages. This adds to the interactivity of the experience which may have advantages, as well as disadvantages since the less free and more controlled experience may well be more intense and deep. For this reason those turning to interactive, hypermedia forms may find it more challenging to ensure that the experience of the work retains its aesthetic, emotional, and sensual significance. These differences are relevant beyond the specific works discussed here, and point to larger questions concerning the installation and hypermedialization of documentary films.

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