Holding Time: Archive, Body and Cinema:
What My Father Saw

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This is to certify that the thesis

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Complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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Abstract

Holding Time: Archive, Body and Cinema: *WHAT MY FATHER SAW*

Tamás Wormser

This research-creation project examines how archival still photography is transformed through cinema, focusing on the photographic work of my father, Antal Wormser, a photojournalist who documented life in socialist Hungary alongside our family. Through the production and analysis of four film sketches, I explore how still images can generate duration, movement, and historical consciousness without relying on motion. Combining still photographs with cinéma vérité footage, montage, voice, sound, and intergenerational dialogue, the project treats the photograph not as static evidence but as an unstable temporal site where public history and private memory intersect.

The written thesis accompanies these four sketches, which function as experimental laboratories toward a planned feature film, *What My Father Saw*. Each sketch approaches the archive differently: through present-day encounters with my father, reconstructions of his childhood shaped by historical trauma, reflections on my own early years through his photographs that precede memory, and an exploration of life's thresholds through ritual and birth.

Engaging the archive as both historical record and familial inheritance, the project investigates how identity is formed across generations within broader political and historical frameworks. It reflects on the ethical complexities of filming within one's own family, where the roles of filmmaker and son overlap, and where care, consent, and representation must be continually negotiated. It proposes cinema as a temporal practice that reactivates archival images as events unfolding in the present.

The thesis contributes to discussions on archival cinema and autobiographical documentary, advancing a research-creation approach to filming memory, trauma, and intergenerational experience.

For my parents, Éva and Antal —
for their love, support, humour, and the light they left behind.

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I would also like to thank the collaborators who helped to bring the cinematic work to life: editor **Timur Aslaev** and **Nathan Pupo-Green**, director of photography **Duraid Munajim**, and intern **Galia Thibaut** for their contributions to the project.

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I owe the greatest thanks to my family. To my parents, **Éva and Antal**, whose lives and images form the emotional and historical ground of this work. To my sons, **Léo** and **Victor**, whose presence continues the story forward. To my sister **Andrea**, and to **Nicole** and **David**, and their families, all are part of the extended family that holds these memories together.

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PART I — RESEARCH CONTEXT AND FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This project began as an exploration of my father's photographic archive. For over four decades, Antal Wormser documented life in socialist Hungary while also photographing our family. His images hold public history and private memory within the same frame. My initial question was formal: how might still photographs acquire duration through cinema? How can film reactivate an archive rather than simply illustrate it?

As the research unfolded, the project shifted. Filming conversations around the photographs led to reconstructing my father's traumatic childhood, and to revisiting my own early years through his gaze. When my father collapsed and died— and months later my mother followed — the archive was no longer only historical material. It became the ground of lived mourning.

This thesis accompanies four research-creation sketches developed during my MFA studies. Together, they trace a movement from archive to embodiment, from representation to event, asking what cinema can do at the thresholds of memory and loss.

Antal Wormser, Unknown Photographer, circa 1952

The questions that emerged from this unfolding process shape the conceptual framework of the project, bringing together theories of the archive, trauma, postmemory, embodiment, and autobiographical documentary to examine how cinema can function as both a temporal and an ethical practice.

Research Inquiry and Conceptual Framework

Emerging from my documentary practice background, my father's photographic archive, and the ethical and emotional conditions of working within family space, this project is driven by a set of interrelated research questions. At its core lies an inquiry into what happens when a photographic archive produced in one historical, political, and personal context is reactivated through contemporary autobiographical cinema. How does meaning shift when images move from one generation's authorship to another's, from journalism to memory, from public document to intimate encounter, and from private life to public display?

A second line of inquiry concerns the instability of photographic memory itself. The filmed conversations around the photographs reveal uncertainty, humor, disagreement, and forgetting, suggesting that the archive does not contain a fixed past but becomes a site where memory is continually performed and renegotiated. The project therefore examines the photograph not as evidence, but as a catalyst for relational memory, shaped by time, loss, and the presence of those who look.

A third dimension addresses the position of the filmmaker within the family. By placing myself both behind and, at times, in front of the camera, the work explores how autobiographical documentary complicates authorship, ethics, and authority. The impossibility of being simultaneously observer and son, documentarian and participant, becomes not an obstacle but a methodological condition through which knowledge about representation, care, and exposure is produced. The tension between caring and documenting was prominent, and made questions of betrayal and exploitation unavoidable.

Finally, the project asks what cinema can do at the thresholds of life. As the research unfolded alongside the deaths of both my parents, the intended film shifted from historical reflection to lived encounter with disappearance. This transformation reframes the archive as a space of transmission between generations and positions the camera as a device that accompanies, witnesses, and marks passage rather than simply records events.

Together, these inquiries situate the project within debates on archive, memory, autobiographical documentary, and practice-based research, forming the conceptual basis from which the subsequent sketches emerge as experimental responses. This research operates through the practice of filmmaking rather than the illustration of theory.

Methodology: Reworking the Photographic Archive Through Cinema

This project employs a practice-based methodology in which filmmaking functions as a mode of inquiry. Rather than treating my father's photographs as static historical documents, I work with them as performative materials whose meanings shift through cinematic recontextualization. The process involves filming acts of looking — conversations with my parents around the images, moments of uncertainty, misremembering, humor, and silence — allowing interpretation itself to become part of the form of this video exercise.

Formally, the work explores how still photography behaves when placed inside duration. Through techniques such as prolonged or brief viewing, reframing, montage, voice-over, music, sound effects and temporal layering, the photographs are moved from evidentiary function toward experiential space. Archival newsreel material, contemporary footage, and recordings of my own family intersect with the still images, producing a multi-temporal field in which past and

present coexist rather than follow linear chronology. Time in the film therefore operates associatively and relationally, reflecting the way memory actually functions.

Throughout the process, the methodology became also reflexive. The camera frequently reveals its own presence, including moments where I am seen filming or negotiating what can be shown. This acknowledges the ethical and emotional dimensions of working with intimate material, particularly as the project unfolds alongside my parents' aging and eventual death. Filming becomes not only documentation but an act of witnessing, and the film registers the tension between preservation, interpretation, and personal exposure.

An essential dimension of the methodology lies in the tension between my roles as filmmaker and son. The project unfolds within intimate family space, where the demands of cinematic inquiry — to observe, to continue filming, to follow moments of vulnerability or revelation — can conflict with the physical and emotional responsibilities of care, protection, and presence. This friction is not resolved but carried into the structure of the film. Hesitations, interruptions, off-camera negotiations, and moments where filming itself becomes questionable are retained as part of the material, making visible the instability of the lone filmmaker's position.

Rather than attempting an objective stance, the project acknowledges partiality and emotional implication as conditions of knowledge. The camera does not stand outside the family dynamic but is entangled within it, and this entanglement shapes what can and cannot be recorded. The methodological challenge during the production — how to film without betrayal, how to witness without exploitation, how to live on the film's set and be ready emotionally and physically to record 24/7 — becomes an active component of the research, revealing the ethical limits of representation when the subject is one's own parents, and when filming coincides with aging, frailty, and death.

The film's production was not on a controlled film-set, and little ever was planned – I was trying to deal with it all, as new physical and emotional challenges emerged. Squeezed into a small apartment in Toronto, typically for one or two weeks at a time, leaving my life behind in Montreal was both a sacrifice and a gift – the immense privilege for the chance to accompany my father and mother on their last years. The filming was secondary to the caring, and I often felt I did not film enough.

The camera either becomes my accompanying friend on this journey, or a psychological shield, that creates distance between my parents and I, a tool for avoidance, preventing my full presence. My many years of experience allowed me to deal with this situation. Filming can also be used to present emotions that are beyond words, and that was my quest.

My off-the-set research was also multi-layered, like a media-archeologist, for the first sketch, I listened to both political and pop music from the 1950-60's in Hungary, for the second exercise, music of 1930s and 40's, and the third, 1960 and 70's. It was like time travel, for each one I spent weeks in strange and familial musical universes, abounding in beautiful surprises. Music

directly talks to our heart, and the soundtrack helps create the rhythm and emotional tone of the film. It was fascinating to witness the power of music, how it changes the interpretation and emotional connection to the images.

The Photographic Archive: History, Intimacy, and Image-Making

The photographic archive at the center of this project was created by my father, a photojournalist who worked for more than forty years documenting life in socialist Hungary. Although his photos were daily published in the *Esti Hírlap*, Hungary's most popular newspaper at the time, the large majority of his images have never been seen by the wider world. The museum's archival team is engaged in the ongoing task of preservation — scanning, categorizing and safeguarding the large number of negatives – and my initial intent with my planned non-fiction film was to honour and investigate his life's work.

Pioneers, Photo by Antal Wormser, circa 1960

The subjects he photographed were mostly institutionally assigned — workers, factories, agricultural laborers, official committees, state events, foreign visitors — yet the visual language through which he rendered them remained distinctly his own. Within the constraints of the period, his authorship persisted not through subject choice but through framing, timing, composing, attention to gesture, and the human presence that emerges across his images.

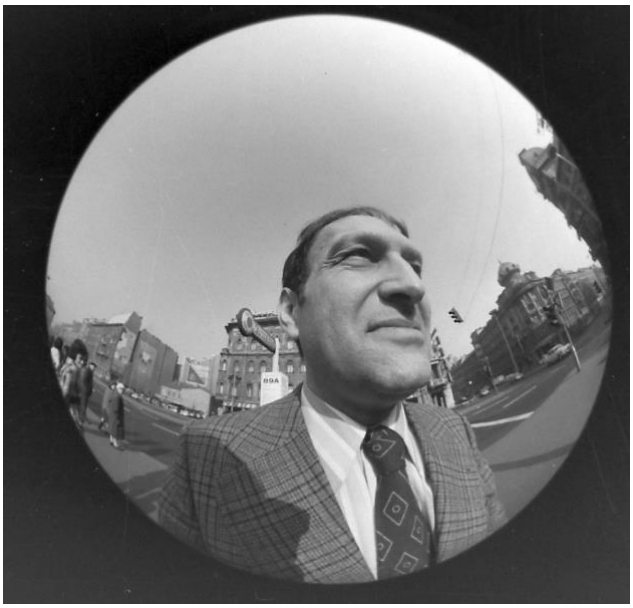
The same camera that functioned as a professional tool of public documentation also entered our domestic sphere, creating an overlap between historical record and family life. Birthdays, holidays, informal moments, and private gestures were photographed with the same eye that observed social rituals and public life. The discoveries are ongoing. This past January, amongst the new scans I received from the Hungarian National Museum, I found never-before seen photos of my mother as a flirty eighteen-years-old young woman. It's deeply fascinating, but also

intimidating: a vast archive in which decades of Hungarian and personal history unfold, and which I now have to confront and process.

The archive resists a simple division between journalistic document and family album. Instead, it forms a visual continuum in which historical time and lived time coexist, and where the structures of the socialist era and the textures of personal memory become inseparable.

Working with this archive therefore does not simply mean preserving or presenting my father's photographs; it means re-authoring them through another medium, another historical moment, and another subject position. I approach the images simultaneously as filmmaker, son, and inheritor, bringing to them questions that did not belong to their original context of production. While the photographs once functioned within journalistic, institutional, and domestic frameworks, in this project they become material for cinematic re-composition —juxtaposed, presented with sound and voice over, and placed into dialogue with moving images, contemporary footage, and the presence of my own body behind the camera.

This process destabilizes the photographs' original meanings and opens a space where authorship becomes layered rather than singular. The project does not attempt to "recover" a fixed past, but stages an encounter between temporalities: the socialist era in which the images were taken, the present moment of my looking, and the intergenerational future represented by the presence of my son, Victor Wormser. Through this encounter, the archive shifts from record to relationship, from document to lived exchange, making visible how memory is constructed not only by what images show, but by who looks at them, when, and why.



Antal Wormser, Photo by Endre Bozsán, circa 1970

The Life Behind the Archive

My father, Antal Wormser, was born in 1931 into a prosperous Jewish family in Budapest. By the age of fourteen he had lost both parents to the Holocaust, and in the postwar years any remaining family property was confiscated during the socialist restructuring that followed. One object, however, remained: a Leica camera he had received as an eight-year-old child. That camera — later passed on to me at roughly the same age — became the instrument through which continuity survived rupture. When family, home, and stability were gone, the capacity to observe, record, and preserve memory endured.

At fifteen, a war orphan, Antal began working as an apprentice in a major Budapest photo studio. By his late teens he was employed by a daily newspaper, entering professional photojournalism at a moment when images were central to public life. Over the next four decades, from 1950 to 1990, he documented Hungary through profound historical transformation: post-war Stalinization, the 1956 uprising and its aftermath, the period of relative liberalization often described as “goulash socialism[1],” and the transition out of the socialist system. His assignments frequently reflected state priorities — workers, agricultural labor, official ceremonies, visiting dignitaries, parades — yet within these frameworks his images reveal a persistent attention to gesture, atmosphere, and the human presence.

Another presence runs throughout this archive: my family. Appearing across decades as companion, witness, model and often subject, we anchor the domestic dimension of the photographs. My father documented my upbringing from birth. The archive therefore reflects not only a professional career but a shared life unfolding alongside history.

In 2007, my father pulled out two garbage bags of negatives from the underbed storage bin, and donated it to the Hungarian National Museum (Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum). Museum archivists have been scanning and cataloguing my father’s negatives ever since, gradually making thousands of images newly visible. Encountering these photographs in annual waves — searchable by month and year across four decades — has shaped my relationship to the archive as an ongoing discovery rather than a fixed collection. Bakers, workers, peasants, soldiers, royalties, political leaders, fashion shows, accidents, rural life, and intimate family scenes coexist within the same visual field. The scale of this material is both exhilarating and intimidating, confronting me with the challenge of how cinema might respond to an archive that holds not only national history, but the layered memory of my own family.

Éva Wormser, Photo by Antal Wormser, 1958

A generational and ideological divide exists in the conditions of image production that quietly underpins the project. My father worked within a system where subjects were daily assigned, production was continuous, and photography was embedded in state-controlled media structures. His practice was constrained in topic yet he was in a privileged

[1] also known as *refrigerator communism*, the economic reforms during János Kádár’s leadership offered an increasingly higher standard of living, cultural freedom and improved human rights, making Hungary *the happiest barrack of the Eastern Block*.

position and made a good living at a difficult time. My own career developed under opposite conditions: as an independent documentary filmmaker in Canada, I have chosen my subjects freely, yet have worked within unstable funding structures, my worktime is mostly spent on applications, with consequently long production timelines, and the general precarity characteristic of contemporary documentary practice. Where his authorship emerged through aesthetic interpretation within institutional frameworks, mine has depended on self-direction under economic uncertainty. The dialogue between our images therefore also reflects two historical models of artistic labour, shaping not only what is represented but how creative work becomes possible.

Documentary Practice Background and Research Trajectory

I was born and raised in Budapest, Hungary, during the socialist period, and later immigrated to Canada, where I shifted from engineering and theatre into filmmaking, graduating from Concordia University's BFA in Film Production program. Since then, I have worked as an independent, more like *interdependent*, documentary filmmaker. Although my films span widely diverse subjects, a set of consistent concerns has shaped my practice and leads directly to the present research project.

Much of my earlier work focused on the human body as a site of lived experience and cultural meaning. Films such as *Faces of the Hand* and *Touched by Water* explored physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of embodiment through gesture and ritual, examining how cultural identity is inscribed in bodily practice. Alongside this, I was drawn to individuals and communities negotiating identity within larger historical and social structures — like modern-day nomadic artists in *Travelling Light*, diasporic musicians in *The Wandering Muse*, and a religious community's struggle for recognition in *Shalom Putti*. These works investigate belonging, displacement, and the relationship between personal expression and collective history.

Despite their thematic proximity to memory and identity, all these films maintained an observational distance. Although I always formed close relationships with my subjects, I remained outside the frame, approaching them as an engaged yet external documentarian. A turning point emerged when I began to question the limits of this position, particularly in relation to authorship and authority: who has the right to tell whose story, and from what position?

This question became urgent while developing a documentary project situated entirely outside my own cultural and familial sphere. The ethical and representational dilemmas that surfaced during this period led me to reconsider the direction of my practice and to turn toward a subject that was both historically significant and personally inescapable: the photographic work of my father, a photojournalist who documented decades of life in communist Hungary while also photographing our family. Éva Wormser, my mother — his partner and favourite model since

1955— is equally present in this visual history, embodying the intersection of personal life and public time that defines this archive.

A recurring pattern in my creative work emerged: I always made films about others, and avoided personal storytelling. I have made films about hands and water rituals, disabled dancers and wandering musicians, but never included myself directly, and never have I exposed myself. This observation prompted reflection and ultimately influenced my decision to return to academia after a long hiatus.

The idea for this film first occurred to me in 2014, when my 83-years-old father held the first exhibition of his life—a small selection drawn from the immense photographic archive he had left behind. I was, for the first time, impressed by the artistry, the quality and historical significance of his images. The exhibition was organised by the Hungarian National Museum, which archives the approximately 70,000 negatives that remained. That was the first time I considered my father an artist. Although the waiter at our regular restaurant often called him Mr. Artist, as he walked us to our table at the imposing Press Palace of Budapest, my father did not consider himself an artist. He was just doing his job as a photojournalist, documenting the world, and doing private work in advertising.

This new project requires a drastic shift for me, from observational documentary toward autobiographical and archival practice, placing my own history and familial relationships at the centre of the work. This transition marks a significant development in my practice: my first sustained engagement with still photographic archives, and also my first film in which I am not only filmmaker but also subject and inheritor of the images. For this new start, the MFA program of the Concordia's Cinematic Arts program offered a nurturing home for this research and creation.

The project *What My Father Saw* emerges not only as a departure from my previous work, but as its convergence. Questions of embodiment, identity, history, and belonging — present throughout my career — return here within the intimate space of family, memory, and intergenerational transmission. During the course of the MFA, and in the midst of the filmmaking process, the unexpected death of my parents further transformed the project, shifting it from a retrospective exploration of the archive to a lived encounter with loss, continuity, and the role of cinema at the thresholds of life.

The questions of body, history, and belonging were now brought 'home,' into the intimate, charged space of family, where the position of the filmmaker becomes ethically and emotionally untenable—a productive instability that became the core of my methodology.

The Weight of an Image

I often reflect on the value of a photographic image, a question that lies at the heart of my film. In the 1930s, when my father was a child, film was precious and cameras were rare—photography was a privilege of the wealthy. Coming from a well-to-do family, he had around a hundred photographs of his childhood that remained. But this flow came to a sudden stop, after my grandfather was sent to a forced labour camp. My mother's family, by contrast, was far poorer before the war, and she has only a handful of childhood photographs. These photos are treasure to me.

When I look at my parents' childhood photographs from before the Second World War, death already seems present within them. As Susan Sontag, American writer and cultural critic, writes in *On Photography*, "Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading towards their own destruction and this link between photography and death haunts all photos of people."

The *ça a été*[2] of a photograph produces a scene of mourning, shared by those who remain to look at the image[3]. More than memory is at stake here. Roland Barthes, French literary theorist, philosopher and critic argues that "the photograph does not facilitate the work of mourning"; it is "never, in essence, a memory… but actually blocks memory, quickly becoming a counter-memory." Marguerite Duras, French novelist and filmmaker, goes even further: "Photographs promote forgetting… It's a confirmation of death."

Photo by Antal Wormser, circa 1958

Walter Benjamin, German philosopher, cultural critic and media theorist, in his 1931 essay *"Optisch-Unbewußte"* (*A Short History of Photography*), is concerned with the invisible that resides within the visible. "Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye — if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man."

Today, one no longer needs to be a skilled photographer to make a "proper" image. Results are instant, the cost is negligible, and photographs can be distributed the moment they are taken. An

[2] Meaning "that-has-been"
[3] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

estimated 5.3 billion[4] photos are captured daily, or 61,000 a second — blurry selfies, half-eaten meals, cats, and sunsets forgotten by sunrise. Most will never be printed, rarely revisited, and eventually sink into the digital graveyards of cloud storage.

What happens to these images? Do they matter? Or are they the visual equivalent of small talk — countless, disposable, a constant chatter that drowns out what is meaningful? Or do they carry a value similar to that of our parents' and grandparents' photographs?

In an age of endless capture, has the power of the photograph been diluted? How can I present my father's body of work temporally against the backdrop of contemporary image overproduction?

This question extends beyond photography. Cinema, too, now circulates within economies of acceleration and disposability. The vast majority of films — particularly independent works — move through a brief cycle of premieres, screenings, and limited distribution before disappearing from public attention, as though they passed an expiration date. Cultural memory accumulates at unprecedented scale, yet struggles to sustain duration. If photographs risk dissolving into a constant cascade of images, films risk becoming fleeting events within an oversaturated marketplace of images.

Against this backdrop, the challenge of *What My Father Saw* is not simply how to animate still photographs, but how to construct a cinematic form that resists disappearance — a film that does not compete for novelty, but instead creates duration. The question is no longer only what an image holds, but how long it can hold us.

Photo by Antal Wormser, circa 1960

[4] According to Photutorial's data

Part II — Research Through Making

Sketch #1: *Return to Memory* – Experiments with Stills, Sound, and a Filmed Encounter

Sketch #1, *Return to Memory,* functioned as both a formal experiment and an entry point into my research on the use of still photography in cinema. At this stage, I began studying how still images operate within documentary and fiction films, examining archive-based works that integrate photographs into narrative structures, particularly in relation to personal histories within broader historical contexts. This theoretical investigation unfolded alongside research-creation: the making of the sketch itself became a way of testing ideas emerging from readings and film viewings.

Using stills in cinema offered a formal challenge I had not previously faced in my career. One of my first steps was to research the history of the use of archival stills in film and exploring its storytelling powers. The ultimate goal for the planned feature is to trace my father's dramatic personal narrative against the momentous post-war history he depicted in his work.

The sketch combines my father's photographs with cinéma vérité footage of my parents viewing these images on my computer. I filmed their reactions, conversations, hesitations, and often humorous interactions, later incorporating voiceover and sound design. The structure alternates between past (the photographs) and present (the filmed encounter), creating a simple temporal oscillation that foregrounds the act of looking as much as the images themselves.

A central discovery at this stage concerned the relationship between stillness and cinematic movement. Through my readings, I revisited the foundational notion that cinema itself is an illusion created from a succession of still frames. Roland Barthes' suggestion[5] that the still image is the "essence" of cinema resonated strongly with this experiment. My intention was to make this dynamic perceptible — to draw attention to the tension between still and moving image — though in retrospect I feel this conceptual layer did not yet fully translate into the finished sketch, indicating an area for further exploration.

Watching Arthur Lipsett's brilliant *Very Nice, Very Nice* had a significant impact on my thinking. Lipsett's rapid and rhythmic montage of still images demonstrated how photographs not only function as static pauses but as dynamic, almost musical elements within film. His approach challenged my initial assumption that viewers require several seconds to "read" a photograph; instead, duration could be fluid, shaped by montage and sound. What matters is not the informational completeness of the image, but the temporal experience it produces. This insight

[5] In his book, La chambre claire, or Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, published in 1980.

shifted my focus from explaining photographs to activating them — allowing juxtaposition and sonic movement to generate associative meaning.

Sound design became a key research focus, and was very much informed by our Sound class, taught by Professor Marianna Milhorat. The moment of first placing sound over the photographs felt transformative: figures from sixty or seventy years ago appeared to regain life, as if the soundtrack animated the dormant image. This experience reinforced the idea that sound creates a perceptual space in which the still photograph acquires duration and emotional immediacy. In the intended final film, I plan to be less descriptive with the soundtrack. Walter Murch, acclaimed film editor, sound designer and film theorist, known for his collaborations with Francis Ford Coppola and author of *In the Blink of an Eye*, shares his wisdom on the metaphoric use of sound. Eventually, in the intended feature-length film, I consider sound not merely as illustration but as a means of opening conceptual and emotional associations beyond the image.

"*Synchronization of sight and sound (…) can be the glory or the curse of cinema. (…) cinema gives us the ability to loosen those chains and to re-associate the film's images with other, carefully-chosen sounds (…) which can offer instead richly descriptive sonic metaphors. This metaphoric use of sound is one of the most flexible and productive means of opening up a conceptual gap into which the fertile imagination of the audience will reflexively rush, eager (even if unconsciously so) to complete circles that are only suggested, to answer questions that are only half-posed. (…) though the audience is being addressed as a whole—each individual feels the film is addressing things known only to him or her."* Murch writes in his 1980 New York Times article, "Stretching Sound to Help the Mind See"

Technically and practically, the sketch was shaped by constraints that also functioned as methodological decisions. To manage the vast scale of available material — approximately 70,000 stills and over a hundred hours of my own footage of the family — I limited the exercise to footage of my parents from a single production period and selected photographs according to the following thematic clusters: May Day parades, rural life, and early images of my parents' relationship. These themes allowed me to move between public history and intimate memory within a compact form.

Wedding of Éva and Antal Wormser, Unknown Photographer, 1955

Collaboration with Concordia student, Nathan Pupo-Greene, as an editor was a key part of the process.

One of my key objectives was to think in a new way about the past. *"In the archeological record, the fragmented history is (…) the evidence of a past that can be reassembled in the present so we can try to reorder the future differently. (…) Archiveology thus offers endless opportunities to rethink the diversity of histories and stories (…)"* (Archiveology: Walter Benjamin and Archival Film Practices, by Catherine Russell, p.32.) As part of my research, I met Catherine Russel, and she has given me more clues about archive-based documentaries. We discussed the uniqueness of my project, how it offers an opportunity to challenge prevailing notions of Cold War imaginaries, while capturing the unique character of Hungary's lively culture during socialism through the prism of contemporary Canada. My aim was to find ways, that allow history to talk to the present through the documentary photos taken from a largely mystifying context in which they have lain dormant.

The sketch demonstrated that humour plays an important role in activating difficult histories. My parents' playful disagreements and speculative interpretations revealed memory as improvisational and relational rather than factual retrieval. At the same time, my father's uncertainties about his own photographs disrupted the assumption that the photographer holds authoritative knowledge about the past.

Findings from Sketch #1

- Still photographs acquire cinematic life through sound and montage.
- The filmed act of viewing transforms the archive into a present-tense event.
- Memory appears as performance, shaped by interaction and humour.
- Sound functions as a primary bridge between temporalities.
- The photographer does not possess stable authority over the archive's meaning.
- The sketch revealed the limits of a binary past-present structure.

Link to Sketch #1. *"Return to Memory"*[6] (6 mins)

How This Led to Sketch #2

While Sketch #1 established the archive as a living encounter, its temporal structure remained relatively simple. The historical dimension of the photographs was only indirectly addressed. This led me to expand the research toward more complex temporal layering, incorporating archival newsreels, generational imagery, and broader historical context — directions that shaped the development of Sketch #2.

[6] See QR code on p. 39

Sketch #2 — *Anti's*[7] *Childhood*: Trauma, Memory, and Multi-Temporal Construction

Sketch #2 marked a decisive shift in both the emotional and methodological direction of the project. While Sketch #1 explored the activation of still photographs through sound and the filmed act of viewing, this second exercise confronted the most difficult terrain of my father's life: his childhood between 1931 and 1945, the Holocaust as the rupture that destroyed his family and childhood.

From the outset, I understood this phase would require a different cinematic language. The goal was no longer only to explore still images in motion picture, but to construct a layered memory space where personal testimony, family archive, historical footage, and present-day material could coexist.

In conversations with Professor Marielle Nitoslawska, I began to clarify how this shift might be approached formally. Our discussions emphasized the need to move beyond illustrating testimony and instead to create a structure in which temporal layers could coexist without hierarchy. This dialogue helped sharpen the methodological direction of the sketch.

Antal Wormser as a child, Unknown Photographer, circa 1938

Influences and Conceptual Orientation

At this stage I immersed myself in autobiographical and memory-based documentary traditions. Alan Berliner's *Nobody's Business* was particularly formative. Berliner's film stages a dialogue between filmmaker and reluctant father, weaving family archives, his filmed research process, and associative imagery into a dynamic structure where personal history resonates with broader cultural narratives. The tension between the father's dismissal of his own importance and the film's insistence on significance deeply informed my approach. Berliner often uses archives for emotional effects, like a house falling into the flooded river, as his voice-over talks about the divorce of his parents.

[7] Anti is the nickname for Antal

Sarah Polley's *Stories We Tell* further demonstrated how family narrative can be constructed through multiple voices, archival materials, and reenactment, foregrounding storytelling itself as subject, and showing how life produces different stories of the same events.

These works reinforced two realizations:

- The filmmaker's presence is necessary.
- Family memory is plural, unstable, and narratively constructed.

Narrative Scope and Materials

The sketch, titled **"*Anti's Childhood*,"** follows a simple biographical line: "born in 1931 into a Jewish family, my father lost his parents in the Holocaust." Yet the telling unfolds through multiple temporal and visual strata:

- My father's interview (February 2024)
- Cinéma vérité footage of my parents' daily life
- Stills from my father's childhood
- Hungarian newsreels (1930s–40s)
- My own private archives of my son Victor as a small child, and my parents at earlier times
- Experimental present-day footage shot by myself

Originally, I considered incorporating my father's photographs of other children as an additional layer, but this proved conceptually excessive and risked diffusing the emotional clarity of the narrative.

Unlike earlier recordings, this final interview with my father was marked by age-related confusion and difficulty finding words. It was painful to witness this and I struggled with whether documenting cognitive decline was betrayal or honesty. I chose to work only with this single conversation, despite having stronger earlier interviews. This self-imposed constraint emphasized fragility, hesitation, and the limits of recall. The testimony becomes less a historical account than a performance of memory's erosion. After the interview, I imagined the sketch will be, consequently, short, probably under 10 minutes. I was underestimating the power of cinema.

Sketch #2 departs from the binary past/present structure of Sketch #1. Here, time fragments into several coexisting layers. Following insights from Sketch #1, my presence became more explicit. A second camera operator allowed me to appear on screen, acknowledging my dual position as filmmaker and son. This shift marks a methodological transition from observational distance to relational cinema. To achieve this, Duraid Munajim, Toronto-based Concordia alumnus and director of photography, joined us for two afternoons. The resulting footage offered a new, missing layer to the film, that felt needed. Today, after my parents' deaths, we know that this kind of filming will not be possible again.

I wanted to experiment with using Hungarian newsreels to contextualize the era. The 2 weeks I spent viewing Hungarian newsreels from 1931–1945 profoundly shaped the work. It was an eye-opening, fascinating and excruciating experience at once, witnessing how quickly and easily a society can slide into hate, war and genocide. Especially poignant to witness this today, and disheartening to see how history relentlessly repeats itself. This footage situates my father's childhood within the visual rhetoric of the era: public spectacles, urban life, rising fascism. For example, the footage of the Budapest Zoo, where one of the photos were taken of my dad, a small boy sitting on a pony, or a scene of demonstrators in Budapest, people yelling "Hitler-Hitler-Hitler." Their inclusion expands the film beyond family narrative into collective history, demonstrating how ideology saturates everyday imagery.

The idea of intergenerational reenactment came to me at this point. Footage of my son, Victor, as a small child initially served as a potential reenactment of my father's prewar childhood. However, this material evolved into something more complex. Placing my son's face beside archival images of my father creates an emotional and visual echo across generations, suggesting how history inscribes itself onto bodies and lineages. In the sketch this is only implicit; in the planned feature the connection will be clarified more explicitly.

This process required revisiting my own family archives— yet another emotionally difficult excavation, intertwined with memories of a past family life that later dissolved. The act of archival searching in my past became part of the research, revealing how documentation functions as both preservation and emotional negotiation. Choosing from about 100 hours of mini-DV and HDV cassettes was not an easy task. I digitized an initial sample of about 25 hours of material, from 2002 to 2010. I also had to face how preoccupied I was to document my world, and this made me question how documenting is a way I negotiate with or escape from this world.

Later, I filmed improvised rituals with my now-adult-son, Victor, dressed in my father's clothes – a perfect fit – winding up my father's old and beaten Schaffhausen watch. From a friend, I borrowed some watch parts he has inherited from his watchmaker father, I had some tulips at home and we did a few moody mysterious shots as breathing spaces, or visual interludes.

Another intuitive filming moment, on my way home from my parents, at the Thousand Islands introduced a more abstract layer. As part of our class with Guylaine Dionne on collaborative filmmaking, I was working on a segment about time. It was a sunny and crisp day, the ice on the lake was melting, creating magical sounds. I was seated in front of this spectacle with my camera hanging off my neck, I closed my eyes and entered a meditative state, concentrating on impermanence –nothing is permanent, change is at life's essence. After opening my eyes, I looked straight into my camera and started filming. Pulling the focus, and later the shutter speed, as if the clock were turning, I filmed the frozen St. Lawrence River – things come in and out of focus, as memory fades, objects fall apart, to its elements – colors and shapes, light and darkness. These shots operate as visual metaphors for memory's instability and time's erosion, framing the historical narrative within a philosophical meditation on change.

Sound continued to function as a primary agent of temporal connection. However, in contrast to the more descriptive soundtrack of Sketch #1, this sketch moves toward more atmospheric and associative sound design, anticipating later exploration of metaphorical sound use.

Editing Sketch #2, the first creative collaboration with Timur Aslaev, *Anti's Childhood* proved emotionally taxing. Confronting Holocaust-era materials, family loss, and my father's diminishing capacities revealed that this project is also an inquiry into inherited trauma. A classroom screening of the finished sketch intensified this realization, making visible how personal and historical grief can intersect in cinematic space. Presenting the work publicly for the first time, I found myself unexpectedly overcome with tears. While I have always cried easily, public vulnerability is unfamiliar to me. The screening revealed that the film's emotional charge did not remain on the screen, it moved through my body.

Link to Sketch #2 *"Anti's Childhood"* [8] (26 mins)

Findings from Sketch #2

- Multi-layered temporal structures allow personal memory to intersect with collective history.
- Reenactment through family archive produces emotional resonance without literal reconstruction.
- The filmmaker's visible presence clarifies the relational nature of the project.
- Testimony's fragility can be more expressive than coherent narration.
- Abstraction provides a necessary counterpoint to historical representation.
- The sketch revealed the ethical risk of using historical images as illustration.

The sketch opened a second research axis—trauma representation—discussed in the following sections.

Trauma, History, and Representation: Ethical and Political Stakes

Personal Threshold: Why I Avoided the Holocaust in My Work

I always felt that the Holocaust was already overrepresented in cinema and I felt morally uneasy centering Jewish suffering yet again. But it was not only out of theoretical reasons, I

[8] See QR code on p. 39

feared exposing my own vulnerability, exploiting my own family trauma, and forced to aestheticize and anesthetize the horror my parents and grandparents went through.

The Holocaust permeated my childhood—its shadows lingered in our home, its echoes shaped our family. It was not only an historical fact but a lived atmosphere. Survivors—my parents and many others around them, often women who gathered in our home—shared graphic, unfiltered accounts of terror and loss. As a child, I heard details I could not possibly process, images that had no conceptual frame, horrors that exceeded comprehension. What remained was not narrative clarity but emotional residue: fear, grief, vigilance.

And yet, as a filmmaker, I consciously avoided the subject. This avoidance did not stem from indifference, nor from denial, but from ethical unease. I was troubled by the disproportion between the immense cultural and institutional focus placed on Holocaust memory and the ongoing, global realities of violence, displacement, and genocide. With approximately seventeen million Jews worldwide — the population of a single large metropolis — the scale of representation devoted to Jewish suffering often appeared to eclipse other catastrophes, both historical and contemporary. Genocide, I came to feel, is not a closed chapter of the past but a recurring structure of the present. While museums enshrine one atrocity, elsewhere unmarked graves continue to be dug.

I became increasingly aware that historical trauma is not singular, nor confined to one people or one event. Across cultures and geographies, violence, displacement, and oppression continue to reverberate through generations, shaping bodies, memories, and identities long after the original events have passed. Acknowledging this broader field of inherited trauma helped clarify my reluctance to isolate one history from others, and clarified my commitment to a cinematic approach attentive to transmission, loss, and survival as shared human conditions, not singular or isolated histories. Yet this perspective did not let me distance myself from the Holocaust; it reframed how and why it would surface in my work.

However, in turning my camera toward my parents and the photographic archive of my father, the Holocaust became unavoidable. It is the foundational rupture of their lives, the invisible structuring force of our family history, and the silent horizon behind countless images my father produced. Making *What My Father Saw* requires confronting not only their trauma but also my own inherited relationship to it. Literary scholar Marianne Hirsch, whose work on Holocaust memory and visual culture introduced the concept of postmemory, the condition of the second generation, whose identities are shaped by the traumatic experiences that preceded their birth and were transmitted through stories, images, and affect rather than direct experience. Postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance, and from history by deep personal connection. It is mediated through imagination, projection, and creative investment.

Thus, the developing feature project emerges from a threshold where personal biography, intergenerational transmission, and historical catastrophe converge. What had long been avoided as an artistic subject became an ethical necessity.

The Ethical and Political Burden of Remembering

Some artists carry an ethical and a political burden to remember, acknowledge and confront the aftermath of traumatic events. To engage trauma cinematically is to enter a field defined by paradox. There exists an urgent moral demand to remember, to acknowledge, and to bear witness to historical violence. At the same time, traumatic events resist coherent representation. They are never fixed in a single, objective truth but are continuously reshaped through interpretation: in how they were experienced, narrated, written, filmed, and reimagined. Each act of representation alters meaning.

This tension produces a central dilemma: the simultaneous urgency and impossibility of fully documenting traumatic history. The challenge is not only how to represent suffering, but how to do so without reducing it to spectacle, myth, or ideological instrument. Historian Timothy Snyder, in his book *Bloodlands*, cautions against the dangerous notion of historical "uniqueness" when it is mobilized in ways that obscure contemporary atrocities or foreclose comparative understanding. The task, then, is to honour the specificity of victims' experiences while remaining attentive to the broader, recurring patterns of human cruelty.

For me, this dilemma is inseparable from my dual position as both son and filmmaker. How do I balance the gravity of my father's lived trauma with the interpretive agency inherent in cinematic construction? How can a film illuminate history while remaining accountable to present ethical concerns? These questions shape not only the thematic core of *What My Father Saw* but also its formal strategies. The developing feature film does not seek to present definitive historical truth; rather, it explores how memory is mediated, fragile, and constructed, and how cinema can make this process visible.

Sketch #2 marked the point at which these questions ceased to be theoretical. In confronting my father's childhood and the Holocaust directly, the project shifted from formal experimentation with still images toward an encounter with the political and ethical stakes of representing trauma. The research that follows emerges from that confrontation.

Holocaust Cinema and the Problem with Testimony

In preparing Sketch #2, I turned toward a body of films that has profoundly shaped the visual language through which the Holocaust has been remembered. Studying these works was not only an academic exercise but an emotional and ethical trial. Each film confronted me with the limits of representation and the responsibilities embedded in the act of bearing witness.

Professional historians, and mainstream media like *History Television*, tell the past in conventional ways, what Michael Frisch describes as an "anti-history" approach[9], where oral testimony is granted sacred authority and treated as historical evidence that is *"beyond interpretation."* Here, eyewitnesses become unimpeachable authorities—stand-ins for History itself. Yet this method disregards both the fragility of memory and the fact film and TV does not simply record history – it constructs it.

Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog* (1955) stands as one of the earliest cinematic reflections on the Holocaust. Its alternation between contemporary colour footage of abandoned concentration camps and stark black-and-white archival images constructs a temporal dissonance: the peaceful landscapes of the present coexist with the visual traces of industrialized extermination. The film's poetic narration, written by survivor Jean Cayrol, refuses explanatory closure and never mentions Jews or Nazis. Instead, it situates the camps within the ongoing structures of modernity, warning that the conditions enabling such atrocities persist. Resnais' strategy suggests that history is not sealed in the past; it remains latent in the present.

Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) takes an opposite formal path. Refusing archival footage altogether, Lanzmann insists that the Holocaust cannot be represented through historical images. The past, he argues, no longer exists; only the present act of testimony remains. Survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders are filmed in the landscapes where horrifying events once unfolded. Meaning emerges not through visual evidence but through the duration of speech, silence, hesitation, and emotional breakdown. The film foregrounds the act of remembering itself — memory as labour, as struggle, as impossibility.

By contrast, more conventional documentary approaches, such as the Steven Spielberg produced Academy Award winning *The Last Days,* directed by James Moll (1998), employ archival images to illustrate testimony and construct a more linear, emotionally guided narrative of survival and resilience. With this, the film suggests that the past can be either idealized *or* transcended. These films offer accessibility and narrative clarity, yet they risk suggesting that trauma can be adequately contained within familiar storytelling structures.

Together, these works reveal a core tension in Holocaust documentary cinema:
- Is memory evidence, or is it a fragmentary, affective trace?
- Can images explain history, or do they inevitably aestheticize horror?

Witnesses in these films are often granted a form of sacred authority, positioned as living conduits of historical truth. Yet memory is fragile, shaped by time, trauma, and narrative reconstruction. When cinema treats testimony as transparent evidence, it risks obscuring the mediated nature of both memory and film itself. The camera does not capture truth; it constructs a space in which truth is negotiated.

[9] A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History. By Michael Frisch. Albany: State University of New York, 1990

This realization became central to my own process. In Sketch #2, my father's recollections of childhood — already shaped by age, confusion, and fading memory — could not function as stable historical anchors. His hesitations, contradictions, and silences became as meaningful as the stories themselves. Rather than correcting or clarifying these gaps through authoritative narration, I chose to work with them formally, allowing fragmentation to structure the film's temporal movement.

Holocaust cinema also raises the question of the archival image's ethical status. Resnais shows atrocity directly; Lanzmann refuses to do so. Both approaches attempt to avoid the transformation of suffering into spectacle. Yet the very act of filmmaking risks aestheticization. The viewer's emotional response — shock, grief, fascination — can slip into a form of consumption. This dilemma resonates with Theodor W. Adorno's critique of the culture industry, in which he warns that suffering risks becoming aestheticized and commodified within systems of mass representation (Adorno 1991).

For my project, the Holocaust is not the main topic of the film, though central in its dramaturgy. It is the historical ground beneath my parents' lives — the invisible rupture shaping everything that follows. The film therefore approaches it indirectly, through absence, archival stills, fragmented recollection, and the intergenerational echo of trauma. In this way, the work aligns more closely with what Hirsch describes as postmemorial practice: representing not the event itself, but its afterlife in subsequent generations.

The study of these films clarified for me that representing trauma is not a matter of showing more, but of acknowledging limits. Cinema cannot restore the past, but it can expose the instability of memory, the gaps in knowledge, and the emotional residues that persist across time. Sketch #2 became my first attempt to translate this understanding into form.

The Logic of Memory: Personal and Public History

Public history is indebted to personal memory, just as personal memory is always embedded within a social context; the two exist in a relation of interdependence. Documentary films often operate as acts of private remembrance that contribute to and shape public history, performing a form of "memory work" on behalf of society. This cinematic space becomes what Marianne Hirsch describes as a "hinge" between individual consciousness and collective memory. Such films do not merely document history; they stage the process through which private memories enter public discourse and personal trauma takes on the form of cultural artifact.

These examined films revealed to me that memory is not a fixed record but an ongoing negotiation between what we choose to remember and what we are compelled to forget. Public history rests on the unstable ground of personal recollection, just as private memory only acquires meaning within social frameworks. The most resonant films are those that sustain this tension without forcing a false resolution.

Postmemory, the Second Generation, and the Body

If Holocaust cinema confronts the limits of representation, the position of the second generation confronts the limits of experience. I did not live through the Holocaust, yet it structured the emotional architecture of my childhood. The catastrophe was not only an historical topic in our home; it was an atmosphere. Silence, grief, absence, and unspoken fear formed a background hum beneath ordinary life. What Marianne Hirsch terms **postmemory** describes precisely this condition: the relationship of the second generation to the traumatic experiences that preceded their birth but nonetheless shape their psychic and imaginative worlds.

Postmemory is not memory in the conventional sense. It is mediated, indirect, constructed through stories, images, gestures, and emotional transmission. It operates through imagination and identification rather than recollection. For me, my father's childhood photographs function as postmemorial objects: I look at them not as historical documents but as portals into a world that determines who I am, yet which I could never fully access. Murdered before my birth in brutal circumstances, the relatives in those images lived on in our everyday life like ghosts. The photographs simultaneously offer proximity and enforce distance.

This dynamic became painfully tangible while working on Sketch #2. Watching Holocaust films and editing sequences about my father's childhood did not feel like arranging historical material; it felt like touching an exposed nerve. At moments, I experienced profound physical and emotional reactions - a racing heart, violent itching and an overwhelming sense of grief, what Saul Friedländer describes as "that which resists discourse." Yet paradoxically, these visceral responses are often followed by a strange emotional blankness. This oscillation between overwhelming affect and sudden detachment echoes what trauma theorists describe as dissociation, a protective mechanism of the psyche. In retrospect, this pattern mirrors the coping mechanisms I developed as a child when confronted with stories too overwhelming to process.

My personal experience mirrors what we see in second-generation survivors - the way trauma becomes both omnipresent and elusive, simultaneously unforgettable and impossible to fully grasp.

Psychiatrist and trauma researcher Bessel van der Kolk, whose clinical work has shaped contemporary understandings of trauma, argues in *The Body Keeps the Score* that traumatic memory is not stored primarily as narrative, but as sensation, image, and physiological imprint. In this sense, the body itself functions as an archive — not of documents or coherent stories, but of marks, reflexes, tensions, and embodied traces of experience.

Holocaust survivor and writer Charlotte Delbo, reflecting on her own deportation to Auschwitz, distinguishes between *mémoire ordinaire* — chronological, rational memory — and *mémoire profonde*, the fragmented, embodied persistence of traumatic experience. Although I am not a survivor, my responses while working on the film-sketch suggest that postmemory also operates

somatically. Trauma can be inherited not only through stories but through emotional patterns, silences, and embodied responses passed across generations.

Cinema, as an audiovisual medium, occupies a unique position in relation to this. It is capable of working simultaneously on cognitive and sensory levels. In Sketch #2, fragmentation, temporal jumps, blurred focus, and sonic textures allowed me to approach something closer to *mémoire profonde* rather than constructing a seamless historical account. The film exercise does not "explain" my father's childhood; it moves through it the way memory itself moves — associatively, unevenly, with gaps and returns.

Survivors often could not fully process what they endured; their children therefore inherit not complete stories but fragments, absences, and emotional residues. This condition shaped my own childhood sense of guilt — the dissonance between my comfortable and safe upbringing and the annihilated world of my parents' childhood.

Israeli psychologist Dina Wardi, in *Memorial Candles: Children of the Holocaust* (1992), argues that the children of survivors often come to embody both the miracle of their parents' survival and the symbolic replacement of those who were murdered. They are not only descendants but also bearers of memory. As reminders of lost relatives and unfulfilled lives, they may carry heightened parental expectations and an implicit responsibility to restore continuity. Wardi describes such children as "memory candles" — living commemorations of the dead, entrusted, consciously or not, with the task of sustaining intergenerational survival.

Working on this project forces me to confront this inheritance directly. Filming my father at the end of his life, and later facing his death, collapses temporal distance. Postmemory shifts toward memory; absence becomes immediate. The project thus moves from historical inquiry toward lived mourning.

How can cinema give form to postmemory, where the trauma of one generation becomes the psychological landscape of the next? My work seeks to visualize not only a survivor's testimony but the afterlife of that trauma: the way it echoes across generations and inhabits the very texture of domestic and social life.

Many contemporary filmmakers adopt a postmodern approach to history that radically reconfigures how we engage with the traces of the past. Through reenactment, experimental sequences, and the deliberate exposure of memory's fallibility, I also seek to develop a cinematic language that does not simply document history, but underscores emotional resonances, hidden connections, and internal contradictions, allowing new meanings to emerge.

This approach embraces ambiguity, fragmentation, and subjectivity — qualities far better suited to the complexities of traumatic memory than the false certainties often associated with traditional modes of Holocaust representation. Where conventional documentaries may strive for coherence and closure, these works inhabit uncertainty and contradiction. They do not only

recount history; they perform the very process of remembering, with all its gaps, distortions, and revisions.

My task as a filmmaker is therefore not to reconstruct an authoritative account of the past, but to create a cinematic space where this intergenerational transmission becomes visible — where fragmentation, uncertainty, and embodied response are not failures of representation but its very subject. In this sense, the intended final film does not aim to close historical wounds but to acknowledge their persistence within the present.

Autobiography, Image Inheritance, and the Shift Toward the Self

This project marks the first time in my career that I fully enter my own film — not only physically, but historically and emotionally exposing myself. My earlier documentaries engaged deeply with others' lives, yet I maintained a structural distance. I was present as a subjective author, but not as subject. Working with my father's photographs destabilized that position. These images are not neutral documents; they are part of my origin story. To look at them is to look at the visual ground from which my own life emerged.

The shift toward autobiographical filmmaking therefore did not begin as an aesthetic decision but as an inevitable consequence of the material. My father's archive contains not only public history but my childhood, my mother, our domestic world. The more I worked with the photographs, the more the boundary between historical research and personal memory dissolved. I could no longer position myself as an external interpreter of images; I became their inheritor.

This inheritance is double. I inherit the photographs themselves, but also a way of seeing. My father spent four decades observing the world through a camera under the conditions of socialist Hungary. I grew up inside that visual environment, surrounded by negatives, contact sheets, prints and smells arriving home from the lab. Even when I later chose a different political and professional path as an independent filmmaker, the act of documenting had already shaped my perception. The camera, in both our lives, is not simply a tool but a way of relating to reality.

As I continued working, I realized the exercise was gradually shifting focus. Sketch #2 still positions my father's childhood as its centre, but my presence behind the camera became a necessity. I am not only recording his memory; I am responding to it, organizing it, and confronting my own place within that history. The archive begins to function less as evidence of the past and more as a mirror reflecting my own formation.

This realization leads directly to the next stage of the project. If my father's images shaped the visual and emotional environment of my childhood, what happens when those same photographs are used to tell my story instead of his? At what point does inheritance become authorship? When does the son stop looking at the father's past and begin to see himself within it?

These questions open the path toward Sketch #3, where the archive undergoes another transformation: from historical record and filial memory to the material of self-narration.

If Sketch #1 explored how stills come alive, Sketch #2 explores how memory fractures across generations and historical trauma. This expansion of temporal, emotional, and formal complexity lays the groundwork for the next phase of research, where personal, historical, and philosophical time increasingly interpenetrate.

Since my last sketch did not include them, I was also eager to return to my father's photos and his gaze, the visual essence of my planned film, and also, in order to explore its formal and narrative potentials.

Sketch #3 — Constructing the Self Through the Father's Archive

With Sketch #3, *Becoming the Image,* the project undergoes a decisive shift. After exploring my father's childhood and inherited trauma in the previous sketch, I turned toward my own early life. I set myself a formal restriction: to work exclusively with my father's photographs and avoid all moving images. This constraint forced me to confront a central question of the entire project — how can still images, taken by another person, become the material of my own autobiographical narration?

The time frame narrowed to the first seven years of my life: from birth to becoming a "kisdobos"[10] and entering the social structures of socialist Hungary. Unlike Sketch #2, which dealt with a past I did not witness, this period belongs to my lived but not-remembered memory. Yet I do not possess visual authorship over it. My childhood exists, visually, through my father's gaze.

Tamás Wormser, Photo by Antal Wormser, circa 1968

Collaborating with editor, filmmaker Timur Aslaev, we approached the archive almost archaeologically. The negatives, already scanned and catalogued by date at the Hungarian National Museum, were revisited and reorganized according to thematic and chronological logic. Categories began to

[10] Kisdobos (Hungarian, literally "little drummer") was the youngest level of the socialist youth movement in Hungary during the state-socialist period.

emerge: children, public celebrations, urban spaces, workers, leisure, state rituals, sports, cultural life. The result was not a family album but a visual ecosystem — the world into which I was born.

Images of public events, such as the visit of cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, the first human in space, to Budapest around the period of my birth, at the beginning of the video, became markers of historical atmosphere rather than biographical milestones. The social and political environment entered the sketch not through explanation but through texture: faces, gestures, clothing, architecture, crowds. In this way, the archive allowed me to position my childhood not as a private bubble but as embedded within a collective visual order. Gagarin represents future, progress, socialism's promise at a cosmic scale. Pairing that with my birth, to show that personal life begins under a political sky. No childhood is purely private — it begins inside historical forces.

As we lacked access to authentic Hungarian radio archives, period broadcasts, and ambient recordings, Timur and I relied largely on university sound libraries and public sound libraries. While functional, this solution flattened the cultural specificity of the environment. I realized how crucial sound will be in the final feature-length film—not as illustration, but as an associative and psychological layer. Walter Murch writes that cinema's power lies in freeing image and sound from literal synchronization, allowing new emotional and conceptual connections to emerge. This insight resonates strongly with my approach. In future development, I intend to collect historical Hungarian audio materials and field recordings, so that the sonic world can carry memory, ideology, and atmosphere as powerfully as the images.

The second, deeper issue was conceptual. Writing the narration, I became aware that I was uncertain what exactly I wanted to articulate about socialism. The images are rich, complex, and often contradictory: scenes of community, celebration, work, and order coexist with the knowledge of restriction, oppression and state control. Because this system shaped my earliest years, my relationship to it is neither purely critical nor nostalgic. The sketch exposed this unresolved position rather than resolving it. I now understand this not as a failure, but as an essential research finding. To proceed with the feature-film, I need to engage more rigorously with history and theoretical perspectives on everyday life under socialism, so that my personal narration can interact meaningfully with the broader social context.

Despite these difficulties, Sketch #3 marks a crucial development in the project. Here, for the first time, my father's photographs cease to function primarily as historical testimony or filial memory. They become the visual fabric of my own autobiography. The archive is no longer something I study; it becomes the ground from which my identity emerges. This shift—from inheritance to self-construction—prepares the way for the next stage of the project, where authorship, memory, and generational transmission intersect even more directly.

Link to Sketch #3 *"Becoming the Image"*[11] (8:40 mins)

Sketch #4 — *Antal's Death*

This sketch was never planned. The project was meant to consist of three video exercises. But history intervened — not national history this time, but family history unfolding in real time, in front of my camera.

My father died on **16 October 2024**, during the bris[12] of his great-grandson.

I had arrived to my parents on the previous evening, on October 15. This trip was scheduled long in advance, as two close filmmaker friends had premieres that week at a festival in Toronto. It happened, that my niece just gave birth a few days before that. After my arrival, I asked my father off-camera, *"How are you, Dad?"*, he did not answer with his lately habitual *"I still am."* Instead, he shook his head and said quietly, *"You know, my friend Pali, he is lucky."* Pali, his friend, had died a few weeks earlier.

I tried to pull him toward the future: *"Tomorrow is your great-grandson's bris!"*
He responded with unexpected force: "I hate circumcision. They caught me twice because of it, you know that. I don't want anybody to go through that."

He was referring to two wartime moments 80 years prior, when his forged Christian papers were not enough to save him, he had to present his penis. The body betrayed him. Both times he was arrested immediately. During the first transfers, large groups were often guarded by just a few gendarmes, the 13-years-old boy managed to run through a doorway and disappear. Circumcision marked him for persecution; his survival depended on escaping after that exposure — the same mark now being ritually repeated in his family.

This exchange reframed the ceremony before it even began. What for others was covenant and continuity, for him was bodily evidence of persecution. The ritual linked sacred tradition and genocidal history through the same wound.

The Ceremony

The next day, we dressed up nicely for the celebration, and my dad made sure that I brought his cigarettes, which I did despite my mother's disapproval. I, as usual, with a camera in hand,

[11] See QR code on p. 39
[12] Jewish ritual circumcision

documented the events. Early morning, a lot of well-dressed people gathered for this mutilation ceremony.

The rabbi, before performing the circumcision, offered a prayer for *“our Israeli brothers and sisters sacrificing themselves for our civilization.”* In the shadow of the current genocide, his words sounded to me like militant agitation rather than anything remotely spiritual. I was disturbed — but filming prevented response. The camera both enabled witnessing and enforced silence, a situation that happened many times during my career.

While covering the event, I focused mostly on my parents, as the subjects of my documentary. During the procedure, they were visibly distressed as the baby screamed. The ritual’s theology spoke of joy and continuity; their bodies registered pain and memory.

Collapse

After the ceremony, my father ate, started choking, and suddenly collapsed into my arms.

When I lowered him to the floor, I noticed that his hand held tight the lens barrel of my camera, hanging from my neck. The last thing he held firmly was the camera, the very tool of his profession of documenting. Two relatives there who were doctors asked whether to begin CPR. My sister said yes. There was no time to debate.

I removed the camera from my neck, pressed record, and placed it on a chair before beginning mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. The image is overexposed, badly framed, partial, almost resistant to being seen. The technical “failure” mirrors the event’s emotional impossibility.

The ambulance arrived, and I was pushed aside. I filmed fragments: paramedics, my mother, my sister, the sudden disintegration of ceremony into emergency. My father died later in hospital. I filmed him there as well — but once he was gone, I could not continue. I still do not fully understand that limit.

While I was able to film the attempt to save him, I could not continue once he was gone. The limit emerged not from a rule I had formulated in advance, but from an instinctive shift. As long as there was breath, there was relation. Once death arrived, the camera risked turning my father from participant into object. The act of filming no longer felt like accompaniment but exposure. I do not fully understand this boundary, but I recognize it as the point where documentation ceased to be presence and became intrusion.

The Ethical Rupture

This moment forced a confrontation I had postponed throughout the project:

What is allowed to be documented — only beauty, fun and happiness? Is there a point at which filming becomes violence? Or is refusing to film another form of erasure?

I was making a film about my father. I was present. The camera was already there. Not filming would also have been a decision — a rewriting of the event into absence. I filmed instinctively, without time for moral deliberation, without distance from the unfolding reality. The gesture preceded thought. The body continued filming even as intention collapsed.

This sketch therefore became an experiment in limits.

The rupture was not only my father's collapse; it was the collapse of the distance that had structured the entire research process — the fragile boundary between cinema and life. Until this moment, I had been working with archives, with memory, with images that could be paused, re-edited, revisited. Even when engaging with trauma, I operated within representational space. Here, representation gave way to event. I was no longer interpreting history; I was inside it.

Was filming a reflex, a defense, a professional habit, or a refusal to accept what was happening? I still cannot fully answer. The camera did not create distance; it functioned as a way of remaining present, of not turning away. Yet something shifted when his breathing stopped. While he was alive, there was reciprocity — however fragile. My father could still be addressed, touched, called back. Once dead, the body no longer responded. The image risked becoming object.

At that moment, my mother leaned close and whispered into his ear: *Nemsokára jövök* — "I'm coming soon." The intimacy of that farewell exceeded what the camera could hold. I stopped filming. I still do not entirely understand that limit, but I sensed it. Filming the dying father was witnessing; filming the dead father felt different — closer to possession than accompaniment.

The rupture introduced irreversibility into a project previously structured by re-editability. The archive is revisitable. The event is not. Photographs can be rearranged; testimony can be revisited; sound can be layered and adjusted. Death cannot be undone. Cinema here was no longer about activating the past through montage, but about registering something that could never occur again.

Sketch #4 forced the project to move from thinking about history to being inside it. It relocated ethics from theory to action, from premeditated framework to embodied response. The camera ceased to function primarily as a tool of representation and became instead an instrument situated within the event itself — displaced, imperfect, trembling. What had begun as research into how still images can generate duration became an encounter with duration as it ends.

In this rupture, cinema revealed another capacity: not mastery, not explanation, but accompaniment. To remain present at the threshold, without aesthetic control, without narrative certainty, and without knowing in advance what is permissible.

The limit was not defined by any doctrine. It was felt.

And that felt boundary now shapes the moral texture of the film to come.

Ritual, History, and the Body

The bris — symbol of continuity — becomes in this context a site where histories collide:

- religious covenant
- genocidal identification
- contemporary political violence
- intergenerational trauma
- birth and death within the same frame

My father was captured twice because of the mark. He died while witnessing it return to the family line. The body carries history more stubbornly than ideology.

For editing Sketch #4, again a collaboration with Timur Aslaev, I imposed one rule:
All the shots must originate on the day of his death — 16 October 2024. (I made one exemption.)

This constraint transforms the sketch into a temporal capsule. Unlike the archival expanses of earlier sketches, here there is no historical distance, no curatorial control, no decades of sedimented meaning. Only immediacy. Shock. Breath. Failure.

Cinema at the Edge

In this sketch, cinema ceases to be observation and becomes reflex.

The camera is no longer a tool of representation but an object inside the event — grabbed, displaced, running unattended. The footage resists aestheticization. It documents not mastery, but the breakdown of control that research-through-making often conceals.

Sketch #4 is therefore not about death alone. It is about the moment when:

- personal history overtakes artistic structure
- documentation becomes compulsion
- ethics cannot be theorized in advance

- the filmmaker is no longer behind the camera but inside the frame

Across the four sketches, distance progressively collapses — from archival experimentation, to historical confrontation, to autobiographical reconstruction, to lived catastrophe. The research thus unfolds as a movement from image toward body, from representation toward event.

Link to Sketch #4 *"Antal's Death"*[13] (5:10 mins)

Sketch #4 as Research-Through-Making

Earlier sketches worked with distance — archival time, historical analysis, aesthetic construction. Sketch #4 collapses that distance. The film event and the life event become indistinguishable. This moves the project into what documentary theorist, Bill Nichols, known for his book, Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary, calls performative and embodied documentary: knowledge is produced not through explanation, but through lived experience registered by the camera.

I am no longer interpreting history.
I am inside it.

The footage is not illustration — it is indexical evidence of presence. The shaking frame, over-exposure, bad composition: these are not technical flaws but signs of what film-theorist Laura Marks who developed the concept "haptic visuality" — images that operate through bodily sensation rather than optical mastery. The spectator doesn't "see clearly"; they feel proximity, breath, urgency.

I do not represent trauma after the fact, but encounter it as it happens. That is rare in documentary and shifts the intended final film from historical reconstruction into what we might call cinema of the event.

Ethics: The Camera at the Threshold

My central ethical question becomes methodological: When does filming become an act of care, and when does it become extraction?

Here the camera does not dominate the situation — it is displaced, almost abandoned, recording imperfectly. This recalls Vivian Sobchack's idea that cinema is an ethical encounter between bodies. The footage does not objectify my father; it records our shared vulnerability.

[13] See QR code on p. 39

My father's wartime survival depended on escaping bodily inspection; his death occurs at a ceremony that reinscribes that mark. The body becomes an archive — what Michel Foucault describes as a surface upon which history leaves its marks. History here is not narrated; it is inscribed in flesh.

In that event, my roles collide. The camera records the moment my filial duty naturally overrides my professional one — yet I still press "record." This is not contradiction; it is the condition of autobiographical documentary. As Michael Renov writes in his 1993 book, Theorizing Documentary, that documentary desire always oscillates between preservation and loss. I try to save my father's life and preserve his image — two forms of resistance to disappearance.

If the earlier sketches explored history through distance, Sketch #4 collapses distance entirely, confronting the moment where cinema, ritual, trauma, and death coincide — and where the filmmaker's body becomes part of the archive.

Throughout the project, archives were external: photographs, newsreels, tapes, documents. In Sketch #4, the archive becomes embodied. The film thus performs what postmemory theory describes but rarely visualizes: history transmitted through physical proximity. Memory is no longer symbolic or narrative; it is somatic.

The Ethical Transformation of the Filmmaker

Before this moment, my ethical questions were speculative:

- How to represent trauma?
- How to avoid spectacle?
- How to balance history and memory?

Sketch #4 relocates ethics from discourse to action. Ethics becomes **situational**, embodied, undecidable in advance.

The camera runs. I neither exploit nor abstain. I remain in the contradiction. That contradiction becomes the planned film's moral texture. Ethics here is not purity; it is tension without resolution. I think of the countless images he made of me growing up, documenting my childhood with the same instinct I now carry. My father documented my beginning, I recorded his end.

Documentary is not only a representational practice.
It is a mode of being in the world, one that can place the filmmaker in ethically and emotionally extreme positions where cinema continues even when intention collapses.

Cinema can function as a site where memory, history, body, and ethics converge in real time — not as reconstruction, but as lived event.

What emerged through the fourth sketch forced my research, again, into territory I had not anticipated. The footage of my father's collapse and my attempt to resuscitate him did not begin as filmmaking. In that moment, I was not a director or researcher; I was a son responding to an emergency. The camera was present almost incidentally, part of my habitual way of being in the world. Yet later, in the editing room, this recording became something else. It became material — and with that transformation, responsibility returned.

Unlike earlier sketches, where I consciously constructed relationships between image, sound, memory, and history, here the image preceded intention. It belongs to what might be called an *event-footage*: a recording produced by contingent reality rather than design. Such images resist aesthetic control. They carry the rawness of an unrepeatable moment and refuse to behave like illustrative footage. Their force lies in the fact that they were not staged, not sought, not composed. They simply happened — and now they exist.

Although the moment of recording occurred outside artistic intention, the act of using the footage is entirely deliberate. I know this material will be part of the film. The question for me is not whether to include my father's death, but how. How can the image be held without sensationalism? How can it remain an encounter rather than becoming spectacle? The responsibility shifts from permission to form. Authorship here is not about creating meaning, but about protecting the dignity of what the camera witnessed.

The most striking revelation came during the in-class screening of Sketch #4. I feared that viewers would reject the presence of real-life-death of my father, and it would be perceived as a violation. Instead, no one objected to the death. What unsettled several viewers was something else entirely: the momentary visibility of a baby's penis. The image of a newborn's body provoked more ethical discomfort than the image of an elderly man dying.

This reaction exposes a profound paradox in our socially conditioned spectatorship. Our visual culture is saturated with fictionalized death; we are trained to see bodies at the edge of life. But the exposed body of a child — especially in a ritual context that is cultural, religious, and political — triggered a stronger sense of impropriety. The boundary anxiety did not arise around mortality, but around vulnerability and the body marked by tradition. The classroom discussion revealed that ethical discomfort is not fixed; it is socially conditioned, historically shaped, and unevenly distributed across types of images.

This experience reframes the sketch's ethical field. The film-exercise does not simply document a death; it stages a confrontation between different kinds of thresholds: life and death, ritual and violence, private grief and communal celebration, the acceptable and the unacceptable image. My father's collapse occurs immediately after a ceremony meant to affirm continuity and covenant across generations. The bris, an ancient ritual marking entry into a lineage, is followed

by the literal exit of the family patriarch. Birth, covenant, suffering, and death collapse into a single temporal space. The camera, by remaining present, holds these contradictions together without resolving them.

Here, the long-standing tension in my work between being a filmmaker and being a son reaches its most concentrated form. I did not choose this event, yet I choose its place in my film. The son in me experiences the moment as an immense loss; the filmmaker in me recognizes that this is where the film's exploration of inheritance, history, and the body culminates. My father spent his life documenting others, me included. He preserved my upbringing from birth. In this final reversal, I become the one who documents him, the end of his life. The transmission between generations becomes not only emotional or historical, but optical. I inherit not just his stories, but the responsibility of his last image.

Through this sketch, the project moves beyond questions of archive and memory toward the limits of documentary itself. The research and creation project began as an inquiry into how still photographs can be animated through sound and montage. It now confronts a different question: what happens when the camera does not animate the past, but records the irreversible present? This is no longer research about representation alone; it is research conducted through the ethical pressure of an image that cannot be undone.

Sketch #? – *Éva's Death,* The Unmade Film

My father's death did not only mark an ending, but the beginning of another passage. After my father's death, my mother's condition deteriorated rapidly. The force that had sustained her — their shared life of close to seventy years — seemed to dissolve. Less than a year later, due to an incurable illness, she chose Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID). Once again, I found myself beside a parent at the threshold between life and death, and once again the camera was present. But this passage unfolded differently. My father's death was sudden, chaotic, rupturing the space of a ritual. My mother's departure was slow, lucid, and intentional — a time of a conscious farewell ritual.

During her final two weeks, I came to a crucial realization: the final film could no longer be about my father. My mother, whom I always felt closer to, had to become an equal presence within it. What had begun as an inquiry into my father's images and memories expanded into a shared narrative.

The intended final film thus shifts toward a love story shaped by historical circumstances: two survivors who, despite profound loss, created a family, raised two children, and fashioned a meaningful and fulfilling life within a world marked by hostility and displacement. Their partnership becomes not simply a biographical detail, but the emotional and ethical core of the

work, reframing the project from a portrait of one life into a relational history of endurance, attachment, and mutual care.

I accompanied her through this final period as both son and filmmaker. There were no dramatic gestures, only fragments of intimacy: conversations with friends, the revisiting of shared memories, looking through photographs, crying and laughing within the same moment. It was intuitively clear what could be filmed and what could not, often the context did not feel right, or the required consent was absent, communicated sometimes by a look. The camera was around, witnessing hesitantly, registering textures of presence rather than events. Unlike the footage of my father's death, which demanded immediate confrontation, this material remains unreviewed. I have not yet had the emotional distance — nor the financial support — to fully enter this footage. It exists in suspension, waiting for the moment when I can engage with it not only as a grieving son, but as an editor capable of shaping it. This unedited footage is itself an archive-in-waiting.

The Afterlife of Images: Moving Forward

The deaths of my parents do not conclude the film; they redefine its conditions. What has ended is the possibility of continuing the living dialogue I had with them on and off camera. This vacuum made me face the realization: the film's central human story has reached its natural end in life. I have to move from filming lived presence to working with what remains — images, memories, and material traces. The making of *What My Father Saw* now moves decisively into a phase of integration. I will continue to explore the vast body of my father's still photographs, which offer a temporal depth far beyond what the sketches could hold. These images exist on multiple registers: his childhood before the war; his decades as a photojournalist documenting socialist Hungary; and the private family life unfolding within and alongside that history. To this photographic archive I bring my own materials — cinema vérité footage of my parents in their final years, my own family archive and a growing body of experimental imagery.

New filming with my son becomes part of this evolving language. These moments, sometimes structured as ritualized reenactments and sometimes purely aesthetic explorations of light, gesture, and duration, do not attempt to reconstruct the past. Instead, they create an emotional and sensory counterpoint — spaces of breath within the film's structure, where the viewer can process density through sensation rather than information. These staged or semi-staged moments do not replace lived experience; they metabolize it. My son's presence introduces a forward movement into a work otherwise shaped by loss, making visible the ongoing transmission of memory, body, and history.

This next phase also presents a daunting task: crafting a proposal compelling enough for an arts council, cultural institution, or commissioning editor to secure funding for its completion. It requires translating an intensely personal, experimental practice into a form that can be assessed, funded, and supported — all without compromising the film's delicate balance of memory, imagery, and lived experience.

The core artistic challenge now lies in weaving together these heterogeneous archives: the childhood photographs of my parents; my father's documentary images of public history; our family photographs embedded within them; my observational footage; my own family archives and experimental sequences that operate on a more abstract, affective level.

Newsreels helped me research historical atmosphere; the planned feature will achieve historical texture primarily through still images and sound. I plan to experiment with animating the photos and explore various ways of transitioning, not just straight cuts, as we've done so far.

The final film will become the site where these image-worlds encounter one another. Rather than illustrating a linear story, cinema here functions as a relational space in which personal memory, historical documentation, and sensory experience coexist and resonate. The camera shifts from being primarily a recording device to a mediating instrument — translating between stillness and movement, past and present, document and imagination — converting grief, memory, and inherited history into gesture, image, rhythm, and light.

What My Father Saw therefore evolves from a project about filming my father into a film built from the afterlife of images: how photographs outlive their makers, how memory persists in material traces, and how cinema can bring disparate temporalities into a shared perceptual present.

Photo by Antal Wormser, circa 1970

III. Conclusion — Cinema as Accompaniment

This research-creation journey began as an artistic investigation into stills, archives, memory, and the moving image. I set out to explore how I might work with my father's photographic legacy and my own filmed material to construct a cinematic language capable of holding personal and historical memory together. At the outset, I believed I was making a film about my father, about history, and about images. What the process ultimately revealed is that I was also making a film about presence, disappearance, and the role of cinema in accompanying life as it reaches its limits.

The project transformed alongside lived events, a dynamic that is especially evident in works developed over an extended period. What began as an exploration of archival stills, documentary interviews, and intergenerational memory evolved into a practice of filming at the threshold between life and death. The research did not remain in the realm of representation; it entered the realm of experience. The death of my father, followed months later by my mother's chosen death, altered not only the emotional stakes of the work but also my understanding of what filmmaking can be. The camera was not merely a recording device or a research tool; it became a way of staying present.

Through the making of the four sketches, I discovered that each formal strategy carried a specific emotional and temporal function. Still photographs, like my father's archive, do not simply illustrate the past; they suspend time. They create a space where the viewer contemplates duration, not merely narrative progression.

My father's still photographs continue to look back at me, as if time had folded but not disappeared. My mother's last days remain in footage I am not yet ready to face. The work is no longer about searching for them in the present. It is now about learning how to live with their absence.

The movement between time-fields — childhood before the war, wartime rupture, socialist Hungary, my own and my son's childhood, the present moment of aging and death — gradually replaced chronological storytelling with emotional logic. Memory in the film does not proceed in a straight line; it surfaces, recedes, echoes, and returns. The structure of the final film must mirror the structure of remembrance itself.

Sound emerged as an equally important site of knowledge. Inspired by Walter Murch's writing on the expressive potential of image–sound disjunction, I came to understand that synchronization can limit meaning as much as it can clarify it. By allowing sound to drift from literal illustration, the intended feature-length film opens inner spaces for the spectator. Sound becomes subjective memory rather than external reality. This layering of meaning reflects my long-standing interest in creating films that operate on multiple interpretive levels simultaneously.

The reenactments with my son, Victor, marked another significant shift in my understanding of cinematic language. These gestures are not symbolic substitutions; they are bodily transmissions of history. Seeing my son inhabit gestures, clothing, or spaces connected to my father's past reveals how history inscribes itself across generations. The reenactments are not about recreating events; they are about rituals rendering emotional continuities visible.

The inclusion of experimental imagery — abstract landscapes, focus shifts, sensory interludes — also found its place through the process. What at first seemed aesthetic became necessary. These passages function as emotional regulators, or counterweights. They confront heavy historical and personal material with breathing spaces. These moments do not escape the subject; they allow the spectator to remain with it.

Perhaps the most profound transformation occurred in the ethical dimension of the work. When my father collapsed and died, and later when I accompanied my mother through her final days, the question was no longer whether death can be filmed in principle. The question became: what is my responsibility in this specific moment, with this person, in this relationship? The camera was a way of not turning away.

This experience reshaped my understanding of documentary ethics. Ethics did not arrive as a pre-existing rule system; it emerged situationally, relationally, and intuitively. Some moments could be filmed, others could not. The boundaries were sensed rather than theorized. The footage of death is not spectacle; it is trace — a record of being there. The camera functioned as a companion.

The challenge ahead is to deepen the integration of heterogeneous archives: my parents' childhood photographs, my father's documentary photography of socialist Hungary, my own cinéma verité footage, private family images, and experimental material. The task is to find a cinematic form capable of holding these temporal, aesthetic, and emotional registers together while celebrating their differences. The film, like grief, does not resolve. It settles. It finds a form that can be carried.

Now my parents are gone, but I was not left in a vacuum. Their images and voices exist as recordings. Their touch survive as light on a screen. This research-creation process has brought me to a place where filming as lived encounter shifts toward shaping meaning from traces — photographs, video recordings, fragments, memory. And yet, I continue. I film my son. I stage gestures. I search for images that breathe between heaviness and light. Not to add to the story, but to make space around it.

If the beginning of this project was driven by the desire to understand my father through his images, its conclusion rests on a different recognition. Film does not give answers about the past; it creates a space where the past continues to resonate. In that space, the dead remain with us, persist as thoughts, gestures, feelings, sounds, and light — as forces within the present.

Perhaps this is what cinema becomes here: not explanation, not preservation, not closure — but accompaniment. A way of walking beside time as it takes everything and still leaving light behind.

This research and creation project demonstrates that cinema can function not only as representation but as relational accompaniment — a practice through which archives, bodies, and lived experience converge in real time.

Éva and Antal Wormser, Unknown Photographer, circa 1957

SKETCH #1

SKETCH #2

SKETCH #3

SKETCH #4

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