MEANING THROUGH PICTURES: PÉTER FORGÁCS AND LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (*Tractatus*), with its pithy aphorisms, dark sayings, austere logical architecture and uncompromising seriousness, has iconic status in European and North-American culture and become for better or worse a subject for artistic exploration. Artists have taken advantage of it in various ways with more than a few of its remarks turning up in paintings and other works of art. Moreover it has served as the source for theatre pieces, provided the libretto for a song cycle, even an opera. And it has figured as the subject or pretext for a film or two.

Perhaps the most successful attempt to deal with the substance of Wittgenstein’s text in film, if not any medium, is *Wittgenstein Tractatus*, a film by the Hungarian filmmaker, Péter Forgács. Forgács does not merely cite Wittgenstein’s words or invoke them to give his work credibility. He probes them and tries to bring out what he takes to be important aspects of Wittgenstein’s vision. Wittgenstein wanted his ideas to be pondered, worked through, developed, improved on, and Forgács does just this. He does something creative of his own rather than regurgitate what Wittgenstein says and avoids the trap, which Wittgenstein warned against, of adopting his vocabulary and parroting his thoughts. Viewing his film one sees some of the strengths and weaknesses of the *Tractatus*—even when Forgács gets Wittgenstein wrong. The film sheds light on Wittgenstein’s book while raising questions about it. And in the process it clarifies the relationship between philosophy and film.

Before seeing Forgács’s film one might wonder what a film of the *Tractatus* might look like and even doubt, like Alfred Nordmann (2005 128), that such a film could be made at all. It is not hard to envision a film about the *Tractatus*—Derek Jarman’s imaginative fictional “biographical/historical” attempt comes to mind. But a film *of* the *Tractatus* is another matter. But then again there is reason to think that such a film could be made. The *Tractatus* invites filmic treatment if only because it is about the nature and limits of language, something that lends itself to being shown. Insofar as the *Tractatus* focuses on the relation of language to the world and treats meaningful propositions as pictures of how things are in the world, it would seem open to treatment in film. In particular it is tempting to think that major themes of the *Tractatus*–the idea that “[a] picture is a model of reality” (2.12) and “[i]n a picture the elements of the picture stand for the objects.” (2.131), for instance—should be showable. It may even seem fitting that a book in which meaning construed as pictorial representation is made into a film embodying a philosophy of language.

*WITTGENSTEIN TRACTATUS*, THE FILM

*Wittgenstein Tractatus* is an austere avant-garde film comprising a selection of scenes drawn from Forgács’s archive of home movies, material he has been collecting for many years (it comes mainly from the late 1930s through the early 1960s). Here scenes of everyday life, some more commonplace than others, are coupled with remarks from the *Tractatus*, sometimes as a counterpoint, sometimes as an illustration, sometimes as both. The found material functions as a parallel ‘text’, sometimes directly keyed to Wittgenstein’s text but most often resonating with it.

The film itself comprises seven ‘movements’, each associated with a remark from the seven sections of the *Tractatus*. Forgács quotes the first and last propositions of the work along with important remarks from the other five sections. Thus the first movement pivots on the first proposition of the *Tractatus* – “The world is everything that is the case.” The second on 2.02: “The object is simple.” The third on the second sentence of 3.02: “What is thinkable is also possible.” The fourth on 4.121: “That which mirrors itself in language, language cannot represent.” The fifth on 5.6: “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.” The sixth on the second sentence of 6.5: “The riddle does not exist.” And the last on proposition 7: “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.”

Besides appearing at the bottom of the screen in Hungarian and English, as the film proceeds these seven phrases are intoned in both languages—the English with a Hungarian accent. This serves the double purpose of structuring the film and introducing Wittgenstein’s text. We find ourselves being led, as in the book, from the nature of the world to the nature of language and from facts to values. Moreover along with the seven ‘title’-quotations, Forgács includes other quotations from the *Tractatus*, albeit sparingly, to elaborate on or launch a related theme. Wittgenstein’s name does not appear at the top of the screen in these ‘non-title’ quotations. It appears only when a new movement is announced.

While the main remarks that Forgács quotes from Wittgenstein come from the *Tractatus*, he also includes, perhaps surprisingly (and disconcertingly to the purist), remarks from Wittgenstein’s notebooks and private diaries from the 1930s to the 1940s. The insertion of these quotations, which are woven into the text or spoken (and often both), is not fortuitous. They link the private and the personal with the philosophical as well as add substance to the main quotations. And they contribute to the interest of the film—Forgács includes especially striking remarks of Wittgenstein's—while enhancing its richness as a work of philosophical importance.

Forgács shows that the subject is Ludwig Wittgenstein (and the *Tractatus*) not only in his choice of title and quotations but also by including several pictures of Wittgenstein (these come from late in his life as well as from the period of the *Tractatus*, as we might expect). There is an often-reproduced photograph of him in a plaque at the top left of the screen at the start of the film and from time to time when the titles are being spoken. In the first movement we catch a glimpse of a photograph of him rowing a boat, and a bit later we are face to face with a picture of him, apparently from the 1930s, staring intently off into the distance. In the second movement on the left hand side of the screen there is a picture of Wittgenstein in profile looking on while a boy in one of the home movies is playing in the backyard. In the third movement, there is a similarly placed but somewhat elevated side shot of a middle-aged Wittgenstein, this time looking on as skiers in another home movie make their way down a mountain. In the fourth movement, a scene of a young soldier embracing his mother and saying farewell is juxtaposed with a picture of the young Wittgenstein in uniform from his time in the Austro-Hungarian Army in the First World War. This time, as Wittgenstein is observing the farewell, his picture is placed on the right side of the screen. (Only this picture and the one of Wittgenstein in a rowing boat come from years during which Wittgenstein was working on material that served as the basis of the *Tractatus*. The other photographs are from the “transitional” period of the early 1930s and yet others from the late 1940s. Finally in the fifth movement, after scenes of violence, we are faced with a picture of the older Wittgenstein with a wrinkled forehead and sad eyes (a photograph by his friend Ben Richards). There are no photographs of him in movements 6 and 7.

There are also other elements worked into the film. Along with the home movies, quotations and photographs of Wittgenstein, Forgács includes diagrams, sketch maps, collages, animation (pages are torn to signal the end of one movement and the beginning of the next), a musical score, even Wittgenstein’s signature. All this is complemented by a remarkable score composed by Tibor Szemző, Forgács’s longtime collaborator. Like the film itself Szemző’s score is experimental—it is not program music or “film music” but a significant addition. It too resonates with the moving images and provides yet another layer of meaning. While these elements add to the power of the film, they also bring out an important aspect of Wittgenstein’s philosophy. Both film and philosophy are nothing if not multi-layered, and one is reminded of Wittgenstein’s observation in the Preface of the *Philosophical Investigations* (*Investigations*) about his having “to travel over a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction.” Forgács likewise ranges over a large area back and forth.

*WITTGENSTEIN TRACTATUS*: THE SEVEN MOVEMENTS

The film starts with scenes of a horse drawing a wagon across a bridge, a man tilling a field, another man rowing a boat, a pig being kicked by a shiny boot, a man doing a hand-stand and walking up and down, and a group in the countryside playing ring around the roses. These scenes are accompanied by various remarks. Thus as the pig writhes in agony, we hear and read: “No cry of torment can be greater than the cry of one man. Or again, no torment can be greater than what a single human being may suffer.” (The words ‘one’ and ‘single’ are italicized and in green.) Moreover when a pair of people in the circle is singled out, we hear: “A man is capable of infinite torment therefore, and so too he can stand in need of infinite help” (*Culture and Value*, 45). And when the camera focuses on different facial expressions of the individual members of the group, we hear: “How hard I find it to see what’s right in front of my eyes!” (*CV* 39) Finally, at the end of the chapter, we hear again: “The world is the totality of facts, not of things.”

At the start of the second movement a woman smiles as she running towards us. Then the same woman appears with a large, lively dog. This is followed by scenes of a nude boy in a sandbox and a tub in the backyard of a house, frolicking with the same large dog. Next, we see a man jumping about and flapping his arms. Such happy scenes are suddenly upturned by a man saying in English: “Only a very unhappy man has the right to pity someone else.” (*CV* 46) The same scene will be repeated later accompanied by a woman’s voice echoing in Hungarian the word ‘to pity’ (*szánakozni*). In this part of the film more propositions of the *Tractatus* are woven in, first: “The existence and non-existence of the [atomic] facts is reality” (2.06), “A picture is a model of reality” (2.12), then: “What a picture represents is its sense” (2.221), then as the man with the outstretched hand dances (perhaps to caution us not to jump to conclusions): “It can not be discovered from the picture alone whether it is true or false” (2.224). The movement finishes with a woman joining hands with a man and bounding along while the voice-over repeats: “The object is simple.”

The third movement begins with scenes of a group of friends on a ski-trip. We see them, bathed in sun-light, putting on lotion and sun-bathing (they look very strange in their sun-glasses). This is followed by one skier, hamming it up for the camera, putting a handful of snow in his mouth and eating it as the voice-over reads out another fragment from *Culture and Value*: “It is important for our view of things that someone may feel concerning certain people that their inner life will always be a mystery to him. That he will never understand them.” (74e) A hand-drawn map is next shown superimposed on skiers, then a scene of skiers in the distance forming a human chain. Sharply-contrasting pictures of two train stations follow. At one cheerful skiers board a train with their equipment, at the other sad-looking people stand and wait as uniformed guards mill about. We hear: “I just took some apples out of a paper bag where they had been lying for a long time. I had to cut half off many of them and throw them away. Afterwards when I was copying out a sentence I had written, the second half of which was bad, I at once saw it as a half rotten apple….Is there something feminine about this way of thinking?” (*CV* 31) We sense the movement is about to end when we see a woman in a fur coat in the woods and hear the second sentence of proposition 3.02 of the *Tractatus* again: “What is thinkable is also possible.”

The fourth movement begins with scenes of a military airplane zooming over a field and another railway scene, one in which a soldier leaves his mother and boards a train, which he is apparently in charge of. This scene paves the way to an image of the backside of a woman in a bathing suit while the voice-over informs us that “What can be shown cannot be said” (*Tractatus* 4.1212). This in turn is followed by images of a lake and then a castle. We see formally-dressed men and women conforming to social protocol and rituals. As they are introduced to one another and politely converse, the voice-over comments: “Language disguises the thought; so that from the external form of the clothes one cannot infer the form of the thought they clothe, because the external form of the clothes is constructed with quite another object than to let the form of the body be recognized.” (*Tractatus* 4.002, second part). We next see a couple whom we recognize from the party being driven away in a carriage. The man, a revolver in hand, fires shots at an unseen target to the horror of the woman. “If you offer a sacrifice and are pleased with yourself about it, both you and your sacrifice will be cursed. The edifice of your pride has to be dismantled” (*CV* 26), the female voice chiming in: “your sacrifice will be cursed” in Hungarian. This is perhaps meant as a comment on the next scene, a repetition of the images of the pig on the ground writhing in agony. This time, however, the pig is kicked both by a polished military boot and well-worn shoes. “The horrors of hell”, we are told, “can be experienced within a single day; that’s plenty of time.” (*CV* 26)

Movement five opens with the scene of a wounded hare on its stomach flopping around in a circle with the voice-over intoning: “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (*Tractatus* 5.6), “The world and life are one” (5.621), “We cannot think what we cannot think; and what we cannot think we cannot say either” (last sentence of 5.61). Then, as if amateur anthropologists camera in hand, we visit a village of people living in straw huts. We see a visitor entering a hut and soon afterwards women, young and old, in folk outfits, with babies and children, coming out. At first timid, the women are coaxed by a male elder to dance. The women and the children form a line and, with the elder male dancing solo, the women perform with considerable gusto a folkdance. Now the voice-over says: “I am the world. (The microcosm)” (5.63), and continues in a melancholic tone: “Whatever we see could be other than it is. Whatever we can describe at all could be other than it is.” (5. 634) Then, as the women whirl and twirl, the male elder comes into the foreground, doing a dignified but simple dance, and we hear: “Thinking too has a time for ploughing and a time for gathering the harvest.” (*CV* 28) Now the scene shifts. We see an attractive woman in a white bathing suit wading and jumping with joy in the pool of what seems like a mansion or resort. She plays to the camera as the voice declares: “The spring which flows gently and limpidly in the Gospels seems to have *froth* on it in Paul’s Epistles.” (*CV* 30) This fragment is repeated a little later with the female voice from before echoing in Hungarian the last words ‘froth on it in Paul's Epistles’. The refrain: “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.” (*Tractatus* 5.6) brings the movement to a close and we see firemen dousing a fire.

Movement six begins with the profile of a topless woman at a sewing machine mending a blouse, while a man is doing leg-lifts on the floor. We hear: “The general form of a truth-function is …” (*Tractatus* 6) The same man, now wearing a shirt and a cardigan, then takes a flower from a vase, smells it and throws up his hands as if to say: “Explain that!” This is accompanied by a ringing declaration: “For an answer which cannot be expressed the question too cannot be expressed” (6.5) along with a shot of the same middle–aged man and woman changing the bed-sheets. The man undresses, with his garments being taken one by one by the woman, and he puts on his nightshirt and gets into bed. A newspaper is tossed on the bed and he starts reading it while the voice-over chimes in with: “That the sun will rise tomorrow is an hypothesis” (6. 36311) and “The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen. *In* it there is no value—and if there were, it would be of no value.”(6.41) Here yet again the harmonious female voice-over repeats in Hungarian the final words of the remark (*és akkor nem lenne érték*). A touch of quiet humor about the sex to come follows. The middle-aged nude woman gets on top of the man and, covering her face with her arms from the camera, moves up and down with her breasts heaving, while the voice-over opines: “The world is independent of my will” (6.373), “Death is not an event of life. Death is not lived through.” (6.4311) and “The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem.” (6.521) We then have a glimpse of a ping-pong match on television and, to the amusement of the man in the cardigan, some seconds of his partner/caretaker and her woman friend joyfully doing the twist. “There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical.” (6.522) The episode ends with the refrain: “Not how the world is, is the mystical, but that it is.” (6.44)

The seventh and final movement opens with a boy and a girl taking turns on stage. The boy is in a sailor’s uniform and the girl in a top-hat. The boy drinks a glass of juice and we hear: “As we get old, problems *slip from our fingers* again, as they used to when we were young.” (*CV* 40) This is followed by scenes of Budapest-workers doing road-repairs, a bridge spanning the Danube and an elegant woman getting into a taxi. “You can’t *build* clouds. And that’s why the future you *dream* of never comes true.” (*CV* 41) Next a man is seen rowing a boat as an official map is re-drawn and we hear: “What you are regarding as a gift is a problem for you to solve.” (*CV* 43) Another taxi with a “free” sign appears and the voice-over notes: “A confession has to be a part of your new life.” (*CV* 18) This triggers a striking image of a collapsed horse being helped up and afterwards an image of a masked man in black with a placard inscribed “The invisible man returns”, a walking advertisement for H.G. Wells’s film. Finally, we see a man at a table of an outside café looking appreciatively at everything, yet at nothing in particular. He tips his hat and the voice-over repeats: “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.”

FORGÁCS'S FILM AS PHILOSOPHY: SOME OBJECTIONS

Forgács’s use of quotations will strike some purists as problematic. He dodges around, citing quotations not only from the *Tractatus* but also from *Culture and Value*, which were penned in the 1930s and 1940s. This might lead some people to think the early and late philosophies are more of a piece than they are. It does, however, echo Wittgenstein’s practice, which was to think things through from scratch. By placing the personal alongside the philosophical, Forgács reminds us that however different the letter of the later philosophy may be from the earlier philosophy, it is importantly similar in spirit. For Wittgenstein, it should not be forgotten, “Working in philosophy—like work in architecture in many respects—is really more a working on oneself. On one’s own interpretation. On one’s own way of seeing things. (And what one expects of them.)” (*CV* 16)

Some viewers will also complain about what they see as pointless repetition. For instance, in the second movement the proposition “The object is simple” is repeated several times, as is “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world” and “No cry of torment can be greater than the cry of one man.” And similarly Forgács repeats images, the image of the writhing pig for instance. But while such redundancies may seem out of keeping with the minimalism of the *Tractatus*, they are not superfluous. When the proposition “The object is simple” is repeated, each time the context is different and the proposition itself takes on different shades of meaning: logical (the logical structure of the world), ethical (the goal of the exercise of living), aesthetic/ascetic (the style and mode of living and working).

What is more, Wittgenstein himself, even in the *Tractatus* is hardly averse to repetition. For example he says: “The world is the totality of facts. . . . The world is determined by the facts” (1.1-1.11) and “Mathematics is a logical method. . . . Mathematics is a method of logic” (6.2 and 6.234). Such repetition, moreover, throws light on an often-forgotten Tractarian proposition: “In philosophy the question ‘Why do we really use that word or that proposition?’ constantly leads to valuable results” (6.211). And it anticipates too Wittgenstein’s later theme of meaning as use. In fact he thinks repetition can be necessary. As he says about music: “‘The repeat is *necessary*’. In what respect is it necessary? Well, sing it, and you will see that it is only the repeat that gives it its tremendous power.” (*CV* 52) Similarly Forgács’s use of repeats makes his blend of images and quotes more memorable, gives them more impact.

Some scholars prefer David Pears and Brian McGuinness’s translation of the *Tractatus* and may object to Forgács’s use of the C. K. Ogden translation for his script and voice-overs. But Forgács’s choice of the Ogden makes good sense. Leaving aside the fact that Wittgenstein vetted it, it is arguably aesthetically superior. The style and rhythm of the language is closer in many respects to the original German, and we imagine Forgács would have chosen to quote *Culture and Value* in the 1980 edition rather than, had it been available to him, the revised 1998 edition. As in the case of the *Tractatus* he would doubtless have preferred Peter Winch’s more poetic translation.

Some other features of the film may for different reasons also cause concern, the voice-overs especially. The voice is a distant, melancholic male voice, speaking in English and Hungarian, and the “philosophical” propositions of the *Tractatus* are read with the same inflection as the “personal” remarks from *Culture and Value*. This is disturbing enough but there is also the fact that he utters some of the propositions in a way that distort their meaning. Thus when reading the first crucial proposition of the *Tractatus*—“The world is everything that is the case”—he reads it as two sentences rather than as a single sentence. We hear: “The world is everything . . . that is the case.” This is a big difference (and may well have been intentional) since it presents Wittgenstein as both expressing a true thought about the world and, more controversially, asserting a necessary proposition, something that according to the *Tractatus* is nonsensical. In any event Forgács goes beyond Wittgenstein’s actual words and may even be heard as anticipating a theme of the later Wittgenstein, namely: “What has to be accepted, the given, is—so one could say—forms of life.” (*Investigations*, p.192)

These objections make a crucial assumption about film and philosophy—that a film like *Wittgenstein Tractatus* should inform people of the facts of Wittgenstein’s life as well as illustrate his early philosophy. Here the thought would be that, like a good biography, a cinematic recreation of Wittgenstein’s thought and times should draw us in and stimulate us to read his works. Indeed the expectation would seem to be that Forgács’s film should instruct as well as illustrate. On such an “instrumental” conception, films about philosophy should function as handmaidens rather than as autonomous works.

If we go along with this assumption about the relationship between Forgács’s film and philosophy, it may be legitimately objected that that the filmmaker has misunderstood the philosophy. Even granting that Wittgenstein is difficult to interpret and there sometimes seems to be as many interpretations of the *Tractatus* as there are interpreters, it might still be insisted that Forgács attributes views to Wittgenstein that he never expressed, even ones he repudiated. One important case in point would be Forgács’s conception of ‘picture’, a conception that is much less subtle than Wittgenstein’s. In the *Tractatus* pictures are understood in a very broad sense to cover things we would not normally regard as pictures. They are not understood, as Forgács seems to understand them, literally.

Related to this is Forgács’s apparent misunderstanding of pictures as taking care of themselves, as self-sufficient and not requiring a background of ‘use’. This is objectionable if only because in the *Tractatus* itself Wittgenstein talks about application. He takes pictures to be pictures only given an associated use (even in *Notebooks 1914-1916* we find him saying: “The way in which language signifies is mirrored in its use” (p. 82, dated 11.9.16)). However Forgács is hardly alone in missing this point. It is regularly overlooked by philosophers and it has to be said that Wittgenstein himself often gives the impression that he thinks that pictures picture on their own (without help from the outside). In fact Forgács may be seen as providing, perhaps unwittingly, support for the more sophisticated account of pictures in the *Tractatus* and what we find in the *Investigations* even as he grapples with the earlier philosophy. Whatever Forgács’s intentions, *Wittgenstein Tractatus* plays the interesting role of showing that a common view about the *Tractatus* is wrong, it being possible to read pictures in various ways, the application and context being all-important.

HOW MOVING PICTURES MEAN

Taking Forgács to be probing Wittgenstein’s early philosophy, questions arise about the status and role of his home movies. If they speak for themselves, what do they tell us? What do they show? And prior to these questions, how do pictures manage to mean at all? The idea of meaning as pictorial representation is usually understood as suggesting the sense of a proposition is understood the moment we grasp, in one fell swoop as it were, the presented picture. Reading the *Tractatus* we often get the impression that the early Wittgenstein thinks a picture presents how things might be without further ado. He writes: “One name stands for one thing, and another for another thing, and they are connected together. And so the whole—like a living picture, presents the fact [a state of affairs].” (4.0311) Once context and background are taken into account, however, this view of how pictures mean gives way to the view that they are open to interpretation. Wittgenstein himself gives a nod to this in the *Tractatus* when he says: “What does not get expressed in the sign is *shown* by its application. What the signs conceal, their application declares.” (3.262) (Also compare the passage already mentioned: “In philosophy the question, ‘Why do we really use that word or that proposition?’ repeatedly leads to valuable results.” (6.211)) Of course, this theme—that use or application is crucial—is much more to the fore in the *Investigations*.

Looking at Forgács’s fragments of home movies, we see the importance of context and historical social/cultural background for meaning. Consider, for instance, the two railway station scenes, one in which police or paramilitary watch over people marked with yellow stars, the other in which a mother waves good-bye to her soldier son as he boards a train. These scenes cannot be understood simply by inspecting the pictures. There is no way to tell from them whether the police in the first scene are guarding people or forcing them to leave or what sort of job in the second scene the son is engaged in—the transportation of cargo, prisoners or something else. What the pictures mean, what we see in them, how they are to be understood, is not, like the picture itself, palpably there in the foreground. They have to be situated. The use and context conventionally provided for them are crucial for how they are understood. It tells us, among other things, whether the home movie is from the Nazi or Communist periods, that the Star of David signifies a Jew, that the military uniforms and the trains come from the 1940/1950s, and so on.

Similarly context and background are indispensable for understanding the scene, earlier in the film, of folk dancing. A Martian might understand the scene as providing a repertoire of bodily movements that Earthlings are capable of, while a person interested in the rituals and ceremonies of exotic tribes might wonder whether they were paid or coaxed to dance, whether they are dancing spontaneously or in celebration of some event. And the dance of the solitary man might be read as an expression of his *joie-de-vivre* or as a performance for the camera. And yet again the man who, at the end of the film, removes his hat may be variously regarded as simply taking it off or as saluting someone off-screen. Evidently these pictures do not line up one-to-one with ‘states of affairs’. What Wittgenstein refers to all-too-briefly in the *Tractatus* as the “projection relation” is of the essence. (Compare 3.11: “The method of projection is the thinking of the sense of the proposition” and 3.13: “To the proposition belongs everything which belongs to the projection; but not what is projected.”) There is no understanding “the bare picture” itself. But to suggest the method of projection includes all possible uses or applications of the proposition, if not false, surely deserves more scrutiny.

Forgács’s images are open to interpretation because—and to the extent that—we see them out of context. If we were members of the group being filmed, the range of possible interpretations would be smaller, even nonexistent. This is something that Forgács himself highlights, whether consciously or not is unclear. He detaches Wittgenstein’s remarks on pictures from their location in the *Tractatus* and recontextualizes them by placing the home movie images in the foreground. The result is that both text and image are underdetermined and are open to multiple interpretations.

It is noteworthy too that the text from the *Tractatus* is projected onto the screen before the found footage selected to accompany it. What is the significance of this way of ordering text and image? Are the words to be regarded as projected onto the images or the images as projected onto the words? It is almost as if the priority of the word is preserved and their incarnation in the moving images treated as secondary. But then again it is possible that—and perhaps more interesting if—this dichotomy is set aside and text and image treated as standing side by side and as working in concert. In either case, by juxtaposing these scenes, Forgács can be viewed as criticizing, in the style of the later Wittgenstein, the doctrine of meaning as straightforward pictorial representation. The crude view of pictures as having or conveying meaning fails to acknowledge the expressive potential of pictures. The viewer has to project an interpretation onto the home movies, or better still, provide a context for them. We do not need to be reminded, as Forgács points out in an interview, that the found footage in his film was shot when middle-Europe was under Fascism or Communism. The scenes of the two railway scenes will, if nothing else, jog the memory.

This suggests another way Forgács’s film draws attention to the limitations of the view of pictorial representation usually attributed to the author of the *Tractatus*. The scratchy and scarred surface of the home movies introduces a temporal element into the world of the eternal present of the *Tractatus*. Whereas the background required to interpret these pictures makes it evident that the past is the past and what once could have been otherwise is unalterable, there is in the *Tractatus* little place for the fact that what is over is over and cannot be changed. This shapes, indeed is fundamental to, the film. The genocide of Jews, Romani, homosexuals and others is hovering in the background. It is presented, without the slightest hint of sentimentality, with the result that the film has a grief-stricken Requiem-like atmosphere, an atmosphere that the music compliments and the pacing reinforces. Things that cannot be said—we might say in a Tractarian mood—are passed over in silence. They are, as they can only be, shown.

The possibility of this sort of showing, it is important to notice, depends on a historical/social background and our having the similar feelings towards fellow human beings. The sense of joy tinged with loss and grief that we experience as we watch Forgács’s home movies is possible only because we know the history—the death-camps, ghettos and gulags—and can empathize with the people who suffered. Our reactions are deeper the more we project this history onto the film and respond to the idea of a “universal” family. Forgács’s “filmic thinking” invites us to unpack rigid versions of the say/show dichotomy. The importance and point of what we are obliged to pass over in silence depends on the historical background. Just as we can say a lot about Shakespeare’s plays that is shown, not said, so we can say a lot about Forgács’s film that is shown, not said.

In the film in particular we see something of the multiplicity of language games on which Wittgenstein lays such stress. Forgács’s pictures function much like those friendly-to-foreigners paperbacks produced in the late 1950s, *English through Pictures*, which applied the “picture-theory of meaning” to language learning. (Perhaps the author of these books, none other than C. K. Ogden, was applying lessons he took to be Tractarian.) In the *Investigations* Wittgenstein uses the term ‘language game’ to bring into prominence the fact that “the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a life-form”, and Forgács follows suit. His home movies remind us of what Wittgenstein dubs the multiplicity of language-games (at §23 of the *Investigations* he lists: giving orders, obeying them, reporting an event, making up a story, then reading it, play-acting, singing catches, making a joke, constructing an object from a drawing or a diagram, requesting, thanking, greeting and praying).

THE ORDINARY AND THE EVERYDAY IN FORGÁCS AND WITTGENSTEIN

The ordinary, the everyday, the banal, what is taken for granted, what is often considered too trivial or obvious for words, play an important role in Forgács’s film as well as in Wittgenstein’s philosophy. Indeed we see an important affinity between the two. The “ordinary” is discernible in the “language” of Forgács’s found footage both in what it pictures and how it figures in the film. The film/language functions in an everyday way without pretense, technical refinement, professional enhancement or metaphysical baggage. Forgács’s home movies depict people working, family gatherings, friends getting together for picnics, skiing trips, dances, and so on. They show the things themselves and we are reminded of Wittgenstein’s remark that “colloquial [everyday] language is a part of the human organism and is not less complicated than it.” (*Tractatus* 4.002)

Although in the *Tractatus* propositions of ordinary language are said to be “just as they are . . . logically completely in order” (5.5563), Wittgenstein also holds that ordinary language puts clothes on propositional thought with the result that its sense is concealed. Recall: “Language disguises the thought; so that from the external form of the clothes one cannot infer the form of the thought they clothe, because the external form of the clothes is constructed with quite another object than to let the form of the body be recognized.”(4.002) “It was”, he adds, “Russell who performed the service of showing that the apparent logical form of a proposition need not be its real one.” (4.0031) As he sees it at this time, the ambiguities that ordinary language is riddled with are cleared up by filling out the statements, by putting them in a logically more complete form. In the final analysis what counts as a proposition depends on whether or not a sentence conforms to the general form “This is how things are in the world.” (This idea, evidently, takes a big bite out of what is in “perfect logical order in our everyday language.”)

Since grammatical illusions lead to descriptive and communicative failures, we need to be on our guard and look beneath the surface grammar to the depth-grammar, to how the sentence would be expressed in the language of logic. And likewise in the case of Forgács’s home movies. These are similarly deceptive. They do not wear their meanings on their sleeves but require interpretation. Ambiguities in the conventional language or picture have to be cleared up despite the acknowledgement that our everyday language is in perfect logical order. This is done through looking at the application of the proposition/picture. There is no denying a role for application since “[w]hat lies in [the] application, logic cannot anticipate.” (5.557) For Wittgenstein, then, “our problems are not abstract but perhaps the most concrete that there are.” (5.5563)

This conception of the status of “everyday language” will perhaps suffice for the *Tractatus*, but it will not do for the role of “ordinary language” in the *Investigations* or for the role of the everyday in Forgács’s film. A better view is sketched in *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics* where Wittgenstein is reported as saying: “If I had to say what is the main mistake made by philosophers of the present generation…I would say that it is when language is looked at, what is looked at is a form of words and not the use made of the form of words.” (p. 2) If we are not to fall into this trap we must keep in mind that “[l]anguage is a characteristic part of a large group of activities—talking, writing, travelling on a bus, meeting a man, etc.” With a few obvious changes this also applies to Forgács’s film. The key question for Wittgenstein is: In what circumstances is the word, sentence, or picture actually used? And the key question that arises when considering Forgács’s film is: In what circumstances is his found footage being used?

Diagrams, map-sketches, drawings, and other visual aids to understanding are referred to in both Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*. And in Forgács’s film “homely” diagrams and arrows are drawn on “official” maps. Though easily overlooked, such insertions bear significantly on how meaning (and picturing)—as well as on not how the ordinariness of found footage—are to be understood. The idea of propositions or pictures as representations has not been repudiated. It has been deepened. There is a realization that pictures are disambiguated and clarified in light of their application (and our own situations and needs). In this way, as the later Wittgenstein stresses and Forgács hints at in his film, the use we put the picture or map to is all important.

Another feature of such insertions is that they put a personal stamp on a picture or map, thereby bringing out its everyday as opposed to its official or technical use. In one scene in Forgács’s film lines are drawn to help us to find our way and not get lost on a ski trip. In another, a scene of rowing, arrows indicate the direction of the movement of the boat—one imagines the home movie being shown to family and friends who ask about the boat’s direction. At the end of the film, where a work horse collapses, another diagram is drawn with arrows, this time to indicate the best way to help the horse get up and resume work. Thus the found footage shepherds home words as well as pictures. It functions like a family album in which lines are drawn for the guidance of others or even ourselves. As the later Wittgenstein stresses, in special circumstances sign-posts and arrows can be interpreted too, but we have been taught to follow them, all things being equal, in a conventional fashion. “The sign-post is”, he writes, “in order—if, in normal circumstances, it fulfils its purpose.” (*Investigations* §86) And in Forgács’s film too, the images are best regarded as “proto-phenomena”, as associated with particular (i.e. given) language games and explanation or interpretation is necessary only to avert misunderstanding.

Forgács confronts us with paradigmatic scenes, stock examples of language games as it were. Whereas the conventional movie is like an essay or a book, the home movie, at least Forgács’s found footage, is more like a reminder for a particular purpose and hence more akin to one of Wittgenstein’s philosophical comments. The later Wittgenstein says: “The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose” (*Investigations* §127), and Forgács assembles images of experiences of joy and grief to remind us of our shared humanity. He shows us fragments of home movies that are usually shown to relatives who participated in an adventure or excursion or suffered loss (or shown to curious friends). Of course Forgács is very selective in his choice of footage. He does not show any scene, just ones that are striking, that can be regarded as making a point, that resonate with Wittgenstein’s thinking.

A home movie with its sketch-maps and arrows and diagrams is reminiscent too of something else Wittgenstein writes: “It is as though I had lost my way and asked someone the way home. He says he will show me and walks with me along a nice smooth path. This suddenly stops. And now my friend tells me: ‘All you have to do now is find your way home from here.’” (*CV* 46-47) We are putting our own stamp on the official map, a stamp that shows us “the things themselves” and is an effective antidote to wild theorizing and romantic/philosophical nonsense. The traditional attitude to the ordinary as rough and lacking precision, as better replaced by something more refined and exact, is rejected as a prejudice. In the *Investigations* we are urged to attend to what’s right in front of our eyes—to the multifarious ways the expression is used—and Forgács can be seen as doing just the same.

So while these episodes in Forgács’s film square with the early Wittgenstein’s view of meaning as pictorial representation, they undermine it (there is, arguably, a similar tension in the *Tractatus* itself). The pictures do not tell us how they are being applied or used, a fact that it is tempting to express in terms of the distinction between surface and depth grammar. But if the idea here is that the pictures conceal meaning because they have only surface and no depth, it is open to an important objection, namely that the pictures are edited together in such a way as to give them shape as well as depth. On the one hand by appropriating home movies and seemingly telling a story, the film engenders illusion. On the other hand by showing the methods of selecting, mixing and editing, it alerts to the illusion. Here one is put in mind of the standard reading of the *Tractatus*, which takes the book to comprise a set of propositions that arm us with a “philosophy”, a philosophy that we are told at the end is out-and-out nonsensical. But whatever the merits of this interpretation for the *Tractatus*, it will not work for Forgács’s film, which does not collapse into nonsense but brings us back to the ordinary. When we “throw away the ladder” we are not left with nothing. (A parallel way of reading the *Tractatus* is possible, namely that what we are meant to throw away is the remarks of the book regarded as propositions, not the remarks regarded as true thoughts.)

About the important issue of time there is yet another way in which Forgács’s film comes close to and moves away from Wittgenstein’s philosophy. The film’s otherworldly voice-over is occasionally reinforced by a “look-over” as photographs of Wittgenstein are shown watching the home movies as if from a great distance. The impression we get of the image of the philosopher is that of a spectator viewing the passing scene from the vantage point of eternity. Indeed, in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein writes: “If by eternity is understood not endless temporal duration but timelessness, then he lives eternally who lives in the present. Our life is endless in the way that our visual field is without limit.” (6.4311) And the *Tractatus* itself may be regarded as having been written *sub specie aeterni*. This does not, however, accord with the radical contingency of the scenes in Forgács’s film. His home movies show changes in ways of living (changes that go hand in hand with changes in language games). The sequence of the horse and carriage, for instance, is followed by the appearance of streetcars. Indeed Forgács’s interest in home movies is, he tells us, motivated to a considerable extent by his interest in history and the past and differs from the work of avant-garde documentary filmmakers who take found footage to illustrate something, a sentence, a personal biography or an ideology, or for no particular reason at all. And his work differs as well, he adds, from the work of filmmakers who take the found footage out of its social, cultural and psychological context and “use it for their own self-expression.”

Forgács’s filmic practice differs from both approaches. He finds images by themselves “empty”, leaving him feeling alone as if in a museum. For him it is important to get behind the appearances. He writes: “For me there is something before and after in an image. There is one thing that differentiates my work from theirs: the forbidden and prohibited past. Which means that the suppressed ego, the suppressed feelings of a person are expressed in spontaneous diaries, in a country where the past was suppressed….The meanings are hidden and the quest for meaning means that you open up the trauma….The immense banal happiness that flows from these images [of found footage], this boredom linked to pastimes, this discovery of lost moments—all this tells me more than just to exhibit them as pictures on a wall. Such pictures are funny and nice—and empty. And, for me, that emptiness should be recreated in a film, because it is the scene of a crime.”

How do these remarks square with the idea of “two Wittgensteins”? The point about meanings being hidden suggests, as the received reading of the *Tractatus* would have it, that you have to dig deep beneath everyday language to find the logical form of the proposition. The idea that images have a before and after goes better with the *Investigations* with its emphasis on context and background. Moreover Forgács’s final remark about telling a story reminds us that the film has a beginning, a middle and an end (even though the scenes are not temporally ordered). And his remark about the quest for meaning opening up “the trauma” lurks in the background of Wittgenstein’s later work, which in contrast to the *Tractatus* is characterized by an appreciation of contingency. Once again we see Forgács coming close to the *Investigations* while ostensibly dealing with and trying to come to terms with the *Tractatus*. While it is absurd to suppose that we learn the language game of remembering from what it feels like to remember, Wittgenstein mentions that “one might, perhaps, speak of a feeling ‘Long, long ago’, for there is a tone, a gesture, which go with certain narratives of past times.” (*Investigations*, p. 196)

In a conversation with O.K. Bowsma about Descartes’s “Cogito, ergo sum” Wittgenstein uses a cinematic analogy to show how important the past, the background, is to meaning. Taking up the question of whether it is possible to make sense of an isolated present mental image without what went on before or after, he says: “I always think of it as like the cinema. You see before you the picture on the screen, but behind you is the operator, and he has a roll here on this side from which he is winding and another on that side into which he is winding. The present is the picture which is before the light, but the future is still on this roll to pass, and the past is on that roll. It’s gone through already. There is no future roll, and no past roll. And now further imagine what language [meaning] there could be in such a situation. One could just gape. This!...or ‘Awareness’….So there would be no past things, no past earth, no past fire, no friends, etc.….and no future. Now there is nothing….But if Descartes now said anything of this sort, his words would have no meaning.” (Bowsma 1986 13) One lesson to draw from this, one that bears on Forgács’s project is that a picture, like a word or a sentence, begs for a context, for a scenario, and as the film maker recontextualizes it, the active viewer contributes multiple meanings and associations.

*WITTGENSTEIN TRACTATUS* AS ART AND PHILOSOPHY

How is it that Forgács’s archival footage has artistic significance, that it is not a humdrum record of historical or social goings-on? This question is an instance of a more general question about found objects and depictions of ordinary situations, which have figured prominently in the history of art. It seems right to ask in such cases how the material transcends the forgettable, the ordinary, the trivial. The answer is that the ordinary language of home movies is like the ordinary language of everyday life. Forgács’s found footage acquires philosophical significance in much the same way as ordinary language acquires philosophical importance in Wittgenstein’s philosophy.

In an interview Forgács addresses this problem and sheds light on his film and methods of work. “For me”, he says, “it all begins with the question ‘What is an *objet trouvé*?’ What is finding an object, and placing it in a different space or time; or exposing it to the viewer in its non-original, non-conventional, non-accepted, not useful, not-practical, not functional, not familiar environment? … [U]sing photographs in my work inevitably meant drawing this space into another. … In fact, collecting photographs and making collages from them is a normal practice since the early avant-garde, the Dadaists. [For them] recycling was a normal use of images. So to me, banal home movies are another form of *objet trouvé*.” This strategy – that of transforming the common place, the home movies, into works of art by de-familiarizing and re-contextualizing the images is an important key to the work. Moreover the effect is heightened by the accompanying text and the musical score. The images, words and music conjure up memories, experiences and associations that enable us to think and feel our way through the film and get what Forgács is driving at.

Forgács goes on to differentiate his own practice from other avant-garde filmmakers. He writes: “[T]hey believe that, in itself, in its clear Puritanism, the image tells you enough. So you are there with your contemplation, in the Zen nothingness.” By contrast, for Forgács “it’s really important to tell a story—let's say a fictional story” and to have shown the home movies in a distinctive manner. But what exactly is this manner? It is, he tells us, “not anthropological or linked to some family historiography, nor was I driven, at first, by the idea of making an archive.” Rather it is the “exciting look and the feel” of the movies, that “there is something behind them…simply the idea that there was something there, that holds our interest.” Having come “to this material via Conceptual Art”, he adds, his perspective “differs from an anthropologist’s or a sociologist’s or a documentary film maker’s view.”

The artistic/aesthetic value of Forgács’s film is not reducible to the private/personal or, for that matter, to a public historical/sociological document. The anthropological attitude is observational and aesthetically empty. It invites the offhand response: “So that’s the way they do things over there.” And besides if we look at archival materials as mere historical or sociological documents, we are likely to end up entirely indifferent and aesthetically unresponsive. On the other hand, insofar as the purely personal or biographical approach is overly self-absorbed (or family-absorbed), it runs the risk of leaving the viewer feeling left out and “alone.” Apart from a glow of recognition—“It's my uncle who is dancing for joy” or “It’s me who is playing with the dog”—there is nothing of aesthetic interest that redeems the kitsch. What is more, the personal and biographical perspective does not touch Forgács’s interest in “what’s behind” the home movies in his archive. Just the opposite, they obscure “the forbidden past, the scene of the crime” and fail to engage the way a regime can repress even memories of bourgeois family life. What turns Forgács’s recycled home movies into art is his selection and handling of them. In the final analysis it is this that reveals “what’s behind.”

In a notebook, Wittgenstein recorded a conversation with Paul Engelmann that suggests a parallel line of thinking. The entry, written in 1930, comes from the time when Wittgenstein was still close to the *Tractatus*. He writes: “Engelmann told me that when he rummages round at home in a drawer full of his own manuscripts and letters from his dead relations, they strike him as so splendid that he thinks it would be worth making them available to other people. But when he imagines publishing a selection of them, the whole business loses its charm and value, and becomes impossible.” (*CV* 4) Why is this? Why would the material look and feel different when transferred from the private to the public sphere? In response, Wittgenstein compares Engelmann’s reaction with another case. He says: “Nothing could be more remarkable than seeing a man who thinks he is unobserved performing some quite simple everyday activity. Let us imagine a theatre; the curtain goes up and we see a man alone in a room, walking up and down, lighting a cigarette, sitting down, etc. so that suddenly we are observing a human being from outside in a way that ordinarily we can never observe ourselves; it would be like watching a chapter of biography with our own eyes,—surely that would be uncanny and wonderful at the same time. We should be observing something more wonderful than anything a playwright could arrange to be acted or spoken on the stage: life itself. But then we do see this every day without its making the slightest impression on us!” (*CV* 4)

Wittgenstein’s solution to the problem of how something can shift from the remarkable to the impossible involves the idea of an aesthetic attitude. He declares that “[o]nly an artist can so represent an individual thing as to make it appear to us like a work of art” and adds that “it is *right* that those manuscripts should lose their value when looked at singly and especially when looked at *disinterestedly*, i.e. by someone who doesn’t feel enthusiastic about them in advance.” The crucial point is that “[a] work of art forces us—as one might say—to see it in the right perspective but, in the absence of art, the object is just a fragment of nature like any other; we may exalt it through our enthusiasm but that does not give anyone else the right to confront us with it.” (*CV* 4) (We might add in passing that in the *Tractatus* at 6.421 Wittgenstein says: “It is clear that ethics cannot be expressed. Ethics is transcendental. Ethics and aesthetics are one”, and at 6.45 he alludes to the disinterested gaze” when he says: “To contemplate the world *sub specie aeterni* is its contemplation as a limited whole.”)

These thoughts seem to apply to Forgács’s film, as does Wittgenstein’s following parenthetical remark in *Culture and Value* (“I keep thinking of one of those insipid snapshots of a piece of scenery which is of interest for the man who took it because he was there himself and experienced something; but someone else will quite justifiably look at it coldly, in so far as it is ever justifiable to look at something coldly” (5).) Forgács’s home movies of ordinary scenes do not collapse into sentimental snapshots because Forgács forces us to see them “in the right perspective.” His representations of these scenes mean that even though we were not present and have no personal interest before viewing them, we sense the special mood, the aura of felt expression that they create in the context of the film. If on seeing the film someone says: “It is like watching the paint dry on the wall”, the correct response would not be: “You had to be there” (that treats the film as “a fragment of nature like any other”). It would be: “You are robbing the film of aesthetic value. You are missing how Forgács works the material, how he treats it, in particular how the pictures, text and music are woven together.” Moreover given Wittgenstein’s remarks, it is tempting to invoke the apparatus of the theory of the aesthetic attitude and regard Forgács as putting his home movies in the right perspective by “disinterestedly” looking at them. This is not to suggest that he is uninterested in the found material itself but rather that he filters out “feeling enthusiastic in advance”, i.e. eliminates personal bias, economic investment, ulterior motives and political posturing. It is to say that the first person point of view drops out since the material is presented and contemplated *sub specie aeterni*.

Though not without merit, this line of interpretation fails to do justice either to Wittgenstein or to Forgács. When Wittgenstein speaks of “the right perspective” he is not proposing a theory of aesthetic distance or attitude, reminiscent of Arthur Schopenhauer’s or Edward Bullough’s theory, indeed he is not proposing a theory at all. He dissolves the problem and suggests that, instead of giving philosophical weight to the “right perspective”, this notion be construed in a down-to-earth way. He is noting that the *objet trouvé* when looked at as “a piece of nature like any other” and without artistic treatment loses its value. His thought is that we need the artist if we are not to look at or hear things in a cold, “distanced” way. Also it should be remembered that in his later writings Wittgenstein cautioned against looking beyond (transcendence) as well as against theory construction in the arts no less than in philosophy. Theorizing and looking beyond, he would have us appreciate, distract us from what’s right in front of our eyes and intrude on the job of carefully attending to the details. (Thus he writes in the *Investigations* §109: “And we may not advance any kind of theory. We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place.”) So, the God’s eye point of view is de-mythologized, and the idea that the aesthetic attitude is essentially disinterested is gone. What remains is a sympathetic, sometimes passionate, attention to and contemplation of the object and its features for their own sake. (This is not to deny that a hint of “theory” and the “transcendental” still lingers in the Engelmann passage.)

Since Forgács’s home movies—and Engelmann’s private manuscripts—remain the same when transferred to the public sphere, what change accounts for the loss of charm and value? Wittgenstein notes that Engelmann is “enthusiastic in advance” about his letters and manuscripts because of “vested interests”—his personal connections to relatives and so on—and when he imagines the letters and manuscripts in the public sphere, he imagines viewers who do not share his enthusiasm, viewers for whom they are nothing special. And the same can be said of Forgács’s home movies as viewed by the people who made them. For viewers to appreciate them, as for Engelmann’s manuscripts, they have to be transformed. The *objets trouvés* have to be shown in such a way that they can be seen for and in themselves without the crutch of personal experience and knowledge of their original surroundings and context. In Forgács’s film we see what Wittgenstein’s dismantling of the traditional, sharp, dichotomy between “a fragment of nature” and “a work of art” comes to in practice. The perspective that Forgács supplies turns “[a] fragment of nature” into a work of art. This is somewhat like solving a philosophical problem, the solution of which, Wittgenstein thinks, “can be compared with a gift in a fairy tale: in the magic castle it appears enchanted and if you look at it outside in daylight it is nothing but an ordinary bit of iron (or something of the sort).” (*CV* 11)

To fill this out a little, Forgács’s footage acquires significance partly because of his choice of material, partly because of the way in which he sews it together into a kind of opera expressing something more than appears on the surface. The focal point of his use of archival footage is the human face and the human body, i.e. the human being expressing joy, suffering, pleasure, grief. One is reminded of Wittgenstein’s observations that “[t]he human being is the best picture of the human soul” (*CV* 49) and “[t]he face is the soul of the body” (*CV* 23). The human beings in *Wittgenstein Tractatus* that appear in the foreground—what we mainly see—are isolated and cry out for a background, demand interpretation and our supplying human value. The home-made footage of everyday life is “framed” by being removed from its normal surroundings as family entertainment or reportage. Once provoked, our filmic imagination directs us back to the “rough ground” of our everyday practices (*Investigations* §107). Here once again, whatever he intended, Forgács is more in tune with the *Investigations* than the *Tractatus*.

Besides turning the home movies into art, Forgács does something similar with the *Tractatus* itself. Employing a strategy of “disinterestedness” comparable to the strategy employed by the later Wittgenstein, he forces us to see the book “in the right perspective.” In the film the significance of the selected fragments of the philosophical text, originally penned to make things explicit, is suspended and the viewer has to supply an interpretation, even as the image, text and musical score work with and against one another. Forgács, it might be said, turns Wittgenstein’s book into art by bringing out and exploiting the “magic of the ordinary.” If this is right, then it further confirms the point that, despite its title and texts, Forgács’s film and its methods are closer to the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* than to the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*. There is in fact a striking resemblance in the way Forgács and Wittgenstein draw our attention to things, arrange and place them side by side to get us to see them with new eyes. All aesthetics does, Wittgenstein once remarked, is “draw your attention to a thing, to place things side by side,” make another person “see what you see.” (G. E. Moore, “Wittgenstein’s Lectures 1930-1933” in Klagge and Nordmann 1993 106)

Wittgenstein’s reminders about ordinary language—his sketches of what we say when and where—acquire philosophical importance because of the background of “the problems which trouble us.” And Forgács’s film likewise. Even if Wittgenstein stresses “what’s in the work” and Forgács stresses “what’s behind the work,” their strategies are similar. Forgács’s home movies play an important role—one could almost say an important philosophical role—because of the problems (broadly understood) that trouble us. Indeed the difference between the two is less than it may seem since Wittgenstein also regards “what’s behind” as important. In the *Investigations* he says of philosophical description that it “gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems.” (§109) What is behind Wittgenstein’s observations and Forgács’s images is a suppressed desire to misunderstand—in the one case to misunderstand the workings of language, in the other case to misunderstand the past. As Wittgenstein somewhat paradoxically puts it in two closely-positioned remarks in the *Investigations*: “[W]hat is hidden . . . is of no interest to us” (§126) and “The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity” (§129).

At the end of the conversation with Engelmann, Wittgenstein returns to philosophy, almost as an after-thought. He writes: “But it seems to me that there is a way of capturing the world *sub specie aeterni* other than through the work of the artist. Thought has such a way—so I believe—it is as though it flies above the world and leaves it as it is—observing it from above, in flight.” (*CV* 5) Here we can see aspects of the relationship of Forgács’s film to philosophy itself, and especially so when we notice an echo in Wittgenstein’s remarks of Kant’s disparaging comparison of the philosopher who aims to get beyond the mundane world with a dove that “cleaving the air in her free flight, and feeling its resistance, [imagines] that its flight would be still easier in empty space” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A5/B9). In the spirit of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, Forgács sets things in front of us—without any mediating theoretical veil. The dove analogy reminds us of the foolishness of looking beyond, of hoping for something great other than the real life in front of us—as seen from “the right perspective.” The heart of Forgács’s achievement.

MUSICAL RESONANCES: TIBOR SZEMZŐ’S SCORE

A major component of Forgács’s film, so far only mentioned in passing, is the contribution of Tibor Szemző’s music, a contribution that enhances the distancing Forgács creates by his choice and organization of visual material. It is no exaggeration to say the musical score is essential to the film. Indeed Forgács tells us that he “always edit[s] on music” since it is the music that “compels the big question: what is the rhythm, what comes here and there?” As Forgács sees it, the mixture of text, image, and music “constitutes a language”, one that elicits associations, imagination, memories, and prompts us to get behind the image to the “forbidden and prohibited past.” In particular he regards Szemző’s music as giving voice “to the unconscious level of the film. Sometimes to the main actor, sometimes to the event behind; and sometimes it just alienates us from the event and creates a kind of contemplative distance. Sometimes it pulls you in, sometimes it shows what’s to come. So the sensuality, the deep undercurrent, is figured in the orchestration in a specific way. That’s why we don’t need dialogues for example, because you read the picture and the music. You read it and understand it in a very complex way. Without his music, the whole thing wouldn’t be what it is.” However, he adds, for the music, the image and the text of *Wittgenstein* *Tractatus* to constitute “a language”, the viewer has to supply an imagined context, to provide scenarios from the “forbidden, prohibited past”, “the scene of the crime.” What the crime itself is is not spelled out, in fact something Forgács has no interest in spelling out.

The general issue of the relation between film and music is approached by Wittgenstein when he says: “In the days of silent films all kinds of classical works were played as accompaniments, but not Brahms or Wagner. Not Brahms, because he is too abstract. I can imagine an exciting scene in a film accompanied by Beethoven’s or Schubert’s music and might gain some sort of understanding of the music from the film. But this would not help me to understand Brahms’s music. Bruckner on the other hand would go with a film.” (*CV* 25) The idea here is that showing (moving) pictures may shed light on the music but only if the music has sufficient content, and thus is not abstract. There must be an appropriate match between music and image. (One wonders what Wittgenstein would have made of the striking, perhaps ironic, use of Wagner’s *Ride of the Valkyries* to accompany a helicopter attack on the Viet Cong in Francis Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*.) As Forgács’s comments on Szemző’s music make clear, however, what goes on in his film is different from matching, something that Wittgenstein would regard as deeper, namely it helps us to get an intuitive grip on the visual material. In *Wittgenstein Tractatus* the music does not merely accompany the imagery. It resonates with it.

How does Szemző’s music, an original, experimental and minimalist score, resonate with the images and help forge the “language” Forgács alludes to? Like the (edited) home movies in the film, the main theme of Szemző’s musical score is also a “found object”, a Hungarian children’s ditty that adults use to humor kids and test their wit. In the beginning segment of the film where “furniture of the world” is shown, we hear sounds of a cart’s wheel turning, then muffled humming of the ditty—this serves, one might say, to get the film moving. (Sounds associated with other incidents are also introduced in the film, e.g., when a bomber flies over people on the ground.) And when scenes shift and different people appear, the ditty’s words are chanted untranslated (in Hungarian). The only exception is in movement 6, which treats the ethical/mystical. Here the humming recurs—as if ethics, aesthetics and religion are propositionally mute, i.e. cannot be expressed, only shown. At moments of celebration and joy, moreover, the contemplative chant reinforced by percussion is intensified, suggesting an intensified experience. At yet another point, a lyrical piano unexpectedly kicks in for a few moments as if concluding a movement.

Elsewhere in the film, we sense Szemző is contrasting the empirical with the transcendental, the lumber-house of the world with the domain of value. A calm, plaintive monotone, reminiscent of Gregorian chant or Buddhist mantra, which describes the lumber, is more than once interrupted by a high pitch sound, a note in a different key, which suggests a different level, the level of the transcendental, the higher plane of the ethical/mystical, to what cannot be linguistically expressed. “Value is not in this world; if it were, it would not be value”, says Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*.

There is something in the music as well as in the found footage that encourages this sense of going beyond, one that brings us back to the *Lecture on Ethics*, where Wittgenstein writes: “All I wanted to do with [ethical language] was just *to go beyond* the world …beyond significant language…to run up against the boundaries of language.” (44) Both the music and the found footage are in this sense transcendental for Szemző/Forgács, who initially seem to accord considerable weight to the transcendental, only to surprise us later by including a folksong for children and showing scenes of ordinary life. Our tendency of going beyond, says Wittgenstein, is a “document of the human mind.” But there is, he also insists, no going beyond—the very thought is nonsensical. And likewise for Szemző/Forgács. They intend that we hear the music and see the footage as expressions of a mood, of aspects of human forms of life. As in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy, this has no metaphysical significance. Rather it signals that we are in a different region of the linguistic landscape, that we are playing a different language game. Here too Szemző/Forgács are closer to the later Wittgenstein. What is deemed inexpressible (and transcendental in the *Tractatus*) is transformed into something devoid of other-worldly metaphysics: “Perhaps what is inexpressible (what I find mysterious and am not able to express) is the background against which whatever I could express has meaning.” (*CV* 16)

In fact the theme of the deceptiveness of ordinary language is inscribed in the musical score by Szemző. When Wittgenstein’s remark about language clothing itself and concealing thought is spoken, a children’s puzzle is chanted, one familiar to Hungarians. The puzzle starts with what sounds like a greeting “Hello, junior”, then poses a problem in arithmetic: “How many people do five Turks and five Greeks add up to?” (*Szervusz, öccse, öt Török, öt Görög, hány ember*?) The obvious answer, “Ten”, is wrong since what sounds like a greeting is part of the arithmetical challenge. We get the addition wrong because the Hungarian expressions *Szervusz* (“Hello”) and *Szerb Husz* (“Twenty Serbs”) and *Öccse* (“junior”) and *Öt Cseh* (“five Czechs”) are homophones. Whence the right answer is: “Thirty-five” (that being what twenty Serbs, five Czechs, five Turks and five Greeks add up to). That this deception is noticeable only to Magyar-speakers, indeed noticeable only to those who are paying close attention, only reinforces how easy it is to be taken in by grammar.

Nor is this just a Tractarian point. Even though the later Wittgenstein remarks that “Ordinary language is all right,” he also stresses that when we philosophize we are engaged in a struggle with language, that “[p]hilosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of our language” (*Investigations* §109). (Wittgenstein leaves it open whether we are bewitched by language or the battle is conducted by language—both readings work.) The difference is that whereas in the *Tractatus* we are to eliminate ambiguities in ordinary language by rephrasing the offending propositions in a logically perspicuous form, in the *Investigations* we are to resist the pull of grammatical pictures that mislead us about the uses and functions of language—about the variety of the language games played. So while the picture may be all right—may even demand respect if it is at the root of our thinking (*CV* 83)—we must attend to how the picture is applied. That’s what provides understanding of the meaning of pictures in particular contexts. And once again we are brought back to Szemző’s music. It too would have us attend to the context, the background of common knowledge.

The salient challenge of the puzzle in the children’s folksong is a problem of addition and, being in the forefront of our minds, this keeps us captive. The friendly greeting—greeting is one of Wittgenstein’s language games—is taken at face value and unless they are carefully revisited we do not see that they conceal another layer of meaning (in fact that another language game is being simultaneously played). This children’s puzzle neatly parallels Wittgenstein’s diagnosis of the sources of philosophical error and clarifies what Wittgenstein has in mind when he compares the depth of a philosophical problem to the depth of a joke. The music, images and text run in parallel channels—in counterpoint. They do not explain one another, and in this way the later Wittgenstein is again unwittingly exemplified.

THE MYSTICAL IN FORGÁCS AND WITTGENSTEIN

Forgács comes closest to the *Tractatus*—it could have been what attracted him to the work in the first place—regarding the “sacred” and the “unseen.” While Forgács differs in some respects about this from Wittgenstein, he takes him at his word and ends up illuminating his thinking more than many commentators (and emphasizing the importance of the 6.4s and 6.5s of the *Tractatus*, remarks often ignored or discounted). Forgács assumes there is “the sacred” or “unseen” and this is something that can be set alongside what Wittgenstein says in this part of the book, propositions like: “The sense of the world must lie outside the world” (6.41); “And so it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics. Propositions can express nothing higher” (6.42); “It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental” (6. 421); “There is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself; it is the mystical.” (6.522) Forgács’s notions of the “sacred” and “unseen” are also allied with the notion of the “the mystical” in the *Lecture on Ethics*, where Wittgenstein speaks of the sense of wonder at the existence of the world, the sense that I am absolutely safe whatever happens, and ethics as being a matter of intrinsic/absolute value. (41-42)

We encounter an immediate difficulty when we attempt to articulate these sorts of experience, and it is interesting to see how Forgács negotiates his difficulty. The problem, as Wittgenstein recognized, is that while there can be no denying that we have such experiences—and they are in some measure and in some sense true—the moment we speak about them we realize that what we say is nonsensical. We feel that we should be able to describe these experiences but once we try the whole thing seems silly or jejune. It loses its charm, as Wittgenstein might say. Thus in the *Lecture on Ethics* he notes that “we cannot express what we want to express” and says: “If a man could write a book on Ethics which really was a book on Ethics, this book would, with an explosion, destroy all the other books in the world.”(40) More strikingly still he is reported to have said in conversations in December 1929 with Moritz Schlick and Friedrich Waismann: “To be sure, I can imagine what Heidegger means by being and anxiety. Man feels the urge to run up against the limits of language”—Wittgenstein calls this “ethics” (*Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle* 68). But thinking this “inclination, the running up against something, indicates something”, Wittgenstein also thinks that “it is definitely important to put an end to all the claptrap about ethics.” In other words, while Heidegger’s remarks about generalized objectless anxiety and being-in-the-world are out-and-out nonsense, they are not to be sneezed at, dismissed out of hand as comparable to the ravings of the mad.

How does Forgács deal with this problem? For him, it would seem, experiences of the sort Wittgenstein mentions in the *Lecture on Ethics* constitute “the sacred” or “the unseen.” Thus when the family ski trip is shown and Wittgenstein’s portrait is inserted into the scene looking on, one senses the world is being seen as “a limited whole.” In the scene in which a man smells the scent of a flower and throws up his hands, the suggestion is that language cannot to do justice to the scent of the flower, that you have to smell it for yourself. And likewise in the scene of a man dancing, jumping with joy, reaching upwards, in the scene of suffering and sadness in the facial expressions of the people at the railway station, and in the final scene of a man silently tipping his hat, expressing his respect and reverence. Here absolute value is propositionally mute, the words we use in an attempt to “express it” being inevitably nonsensical. This is not, Wittgenstein emphasizes, because we have not found adequate words for what we want to express. The reason is that “their nonsensicality [is] their very essence”, the aim being “to go beyond the world”, which is to say “beyond significant language.” We run up against the walls of our linguistic cage insofar as our words gesture toward intrinsic value—and lapse into nonsense, a lapse that Wittgenstein “personally cannot help respecting deeply and . . . would not for [his] life ridicule.”(*Lecture on Ethics* 44)

This line of thought, however, leaves something to be desired not least because it suggests that the sacred is either other-worldly or confined to a privileged cluster of special experiences set apart from everyday life, which is hardly Forgács’s intention. While the *Tractatus*, with its reference to the “mystical”, is friendly to “the sacred” (and Wittgenstein is plausibly regarded as treating them as two sides of the same coin), Forgács has a much more secular conception of the “holy.” He sees himself as “using the ordinary language of photography and film to find in banality, the sacred.” He says: “Essentially, making these films [based on private movies] and the research they require constitute my terrain.” “I try to see the unseen, to de-and reconstruct the human past through ephemeral private movies.” (Forgács 2008, 47) These remarks about how he sees his method and purpose, arguably, square more with the *Investigations* than with the *Tractatus*—the work under the shadow of which Forgács’s film ostensibly stands. The stress on the ordinary and the “banal” in Forgács’s remarks and the idea of the sacred (or value) manifest in the ordinary go much better with the later Wittgenstein’s concern with what is “before one’s eyes” and his conception of “the best picture of the human soul [being] the human body.”

Forgács’s way of portraying the “secular holy” in his images of joyful “holiday moments” hinting at oncoming suffering, for instance, is surely better described, at least in the final analysis, in the later Wittgenstein’s “deflated” terms (one would like to say “disinflated” terms). In the *Investigations* the supposedly inexpressible experiences are in and of themselves nothing special, indeed are the most normal in the world. In this work Wittgenstein no longer speaks of language as limited and asks why if we don’t have a word, we don’t invent one. He writes in a passage we fancy Forgács would find congenial: “Describe the aroma of coffee.—Why can’t it be done? Do we lack the words? And for what are words lacking?—But how do we get the idea that such a description must after all be possible? Have you ever felt the lack of such a description? Have you tried to describe the aroma and not succeeded? (I should like to say: ‘These notes say something glorious, but I do not know what.’ These notes are a powerful gesture, but I cannot put anything side by side with it that will serve as an explanation. A grave nod. James: ‘Our vocabulary is inadequate.’ Then why don’t we introduce a new one? What would have to be the case for us to be able to?)” (*Investigations* §610)

Still it would be wrong to forget what Wittgenstein says in the *Tractatus* about what can only be shown and think *Wittgenstein Tractatus* would have been better titled *Wittgenstein Investigations*. When viewing Forgács’s film it is wise to keep in mind what Wittgenstein wrote in letters to two readers he especially wanted to understand the *Tractatus*. In the first, to Russell, he wrote: “Now I’m afraid you haven’t really got hold of my main contention, to which the whole business of logical propositions is only a corollary. The main point is the theory of what can be said by propositions—i.e. by language—(and, which comes to the same thing, what can be thought) and what cannot be said by propositions, but only shown; which, I believe, is the cardinal problem of philosophy.” (*Letters to Russell, Keynes and Moore.* 71, August 1919) And in the second letter, to Ludwig von Ficker, editor of the literary journal *Brenner*, he makes the same point, relating it to ethics: “…the sense of the book is an ethical one. At one time I wanted to put a sentence into the preface, which in fact is not in it, but which I will write for you now, hoping it will serve for you as a kind of key. I wanted, in fact, to write that my work consists of two parts: That presented here, and all that I have not written. And it is the second part that is really important. The ethical is, as it were, delineated by my book from the inside. And I am convinced that is the only way it can be strictly delineated.” (*Letter to Ludwig von Ficker*). Perhaps what Forgács does with the *Tractatus* is not Wittgenstein but it is not not Wittgenstein either. The way Forgács works with the say/show distinction in the film generates a similar tension. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein says: “What can be shown cannot be said,” and what Forgács shows in *Wittgenstein Tractatus* cannot sensibly be said, said without destroying the magic of the film.

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