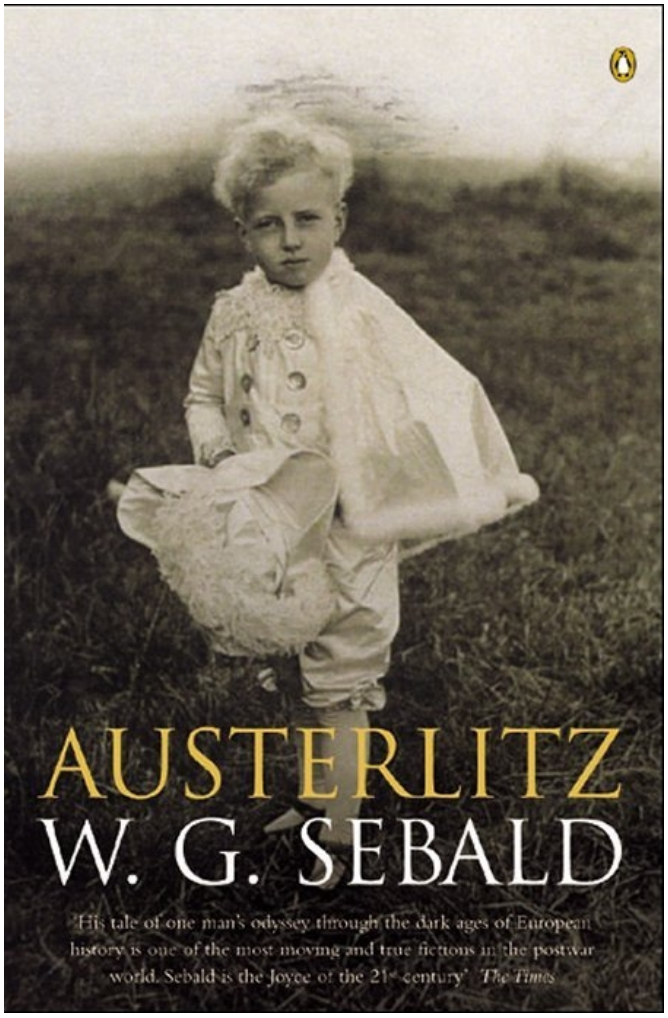

Photo-textuality, Witnessing, and the Convergence of Trauma Memories in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*

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Biography

Angeliki Tseti has obtained a PhD from The National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and The University of Paris Diderot-Paris 7. Her thesis investigates word-image interactions in the context of trauma studies. More specifically she examines the combination of fiction and photography within a single, phototextual narrative and the possibilities such a compound raises thus addressing the problematic of the unrepresentability of historical collective trauma.

Abstract

This paper reads W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* as a photo-text of trauma and examines the ways in which the insertion of photographs in the novel and their interaction with the text disrupt and destabilize the narrative, allowing for a multiplicity of interpretations. The quality and subject matter of the photographs included in the novel, as well as the ambiguity or ambivalence often created by the textual references surrounding them, instigate the viewers/readers to assume the position of a witness and to engage in an elaborate process of meaning-making. In effect, it will be suggested, that the combination of verbal and visual components results in the restoration of witnessing and the construction of a new, multi-perspectival narrative, where traumatic (historical) memory is given space to flow "multidirectionally," (to use Michael Rothberg's term), and converge with other historical traumata.

Résumé

Cet exposé étudie le photo-texte *Austerlitz*, écrit par W. G. Sebald, et examine de quelle manière l'insertion des photographes dans le roman, ainsi que leur interaction avec le texte, interrompent et déstabilisent la narration, en permettant d'interprétations diverses. La qualité et le thème des images inclus dans le roman, ainsi que l'ambiguïté ou l'ambivalence souvent créée par les références textuelles, mènent le lecteur à adopter la position d'un témoin et à participer au processus d'élaboration du sens textuel. Ainsi, la combinaison d'éléments visuels et textuels conduit à la restauration du témoignage et à la création d'une nouvelle narration multi-perspective où la mémoire traumatique se conduit vers des directions multiples et converge avec d'autres expériences traumatiques collectives.

Keywords

Photo-literature, Trauma, Memory, Testimony, Witnessing, W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz,* Viewer/reader, Multidirectionality, Multi-vocality, Intericonicity, Holocaust.

The shadows of reality, so to speak, emerge out of nothing on the exposed paper, as memories do in the middle of the night, darkening again if you try to cling to them, just like a photographic print left in the developing bath too long

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How can a novel, other than a memoir or an autobiography, rise against the ineffability of a traumatic event? How is it possible for a work of fiction to (reliably) explore inexpressible facts or distorted realities rather than perpetuate what Dori Laub calls the "crisis of witnessing"[1] inherent in trauma? I contend that the answers lie in bimediality, and specifically photo-textuality. Photography and the visual have often been connected to narratives of trauma, even promoted as a literary expression of trauma *par excellence*. Ulrich Baer, among others, discusses the photograph's ability to capture instances that were not discernible with the naked eye at the moment it was shot and suggests "a striking parallel between the workings of the camera and the structure of traumatic memory" (8). Similarly, Marianne Hirsch writes about trauma and loss and suggests that photography "is the visual genre that best captures the trauma and loss" ("The Day Time Stopped" 2). Whereas, however, the photographic still, in its frozen ambiguity and provisionality, may eventually reenact the inaccessibility of the experience and the distortion of reality, the collaboration between written and visual narrative results in a "topography"[2] where memory surfaces, rather than being suppressed. The spatial dimension created by the passage between the two media enables different and diverse traumatic experiences to resurge and converge with each other and, thus, the texts become a field where, in Michael Rothberg's words, memories "interact productively" and flow "multidirectionally."

I. The (Im)possible Representation of the Limit Event

One of the dominant issues raised with the contemporary upsurge of Trauma Studies, and especially the field's preoccupation with historical instances of collective trauma—predominantly the Holocaust—pertains to the (im)possibility of representing experiences that are deemed unrepresentable, or ineffable. As discussed by Cathy Caruth, Robert Jay Lifton and other trauma scholars, the problematic of mnemonic accuracy in relation to the rendition of the limit[3] historic event, as well as the lack of pre-existing schemata that could provide prior knowledge—and thus possibly absorb the traumatic experience and integrate it within the historical continuum—consistently results in an inability to articulate horrific experiences. Hence, what is needed, is a space where traumatic memory, "inflexible and invariable … a solitary activity"—as was described by Bessel A. Van der Kolk and Onno Van der Hart in "The Intrusive Past"—becomes "narrative memory," a social act that can be shared (Caruth, *Trauma* 163).[4]

The necessity for a familiar schema that might contribute to the representation of these limit events, or accurately reflect their disruptive nature, has been met with the promotion of testimony as the more appropriate mode to address the traumatic experience. Dominick LaCapra especially, among trauma scholars, highlights the challenges present in the attempt to reconstruct and represent traumatic events of such magnitude, and suggests that the excess with which they are bestowed, as well as the consequent disruption of temporal linearity and distortion of knowledge that trauma entails, sharply contrast modes of recording and narration that make claims to cognizance and comprehension. For LaCapra, such challenges can be overcome when the historical event is approached through testimony, since, "testimonies are significant in the attempt to understand experience and its aftermath, including the role of memory and its lapses, in coming to terms with—or denying and repressing—the past" (86-7).

Furthermore, the literary text surfaces as a privileged site in the search for a familiar schema that will counteract the difficulties exacerbated by trauma of placing the limit event within "schemes of prior knowledge." While imaginatively reconstructing—rather than merely mirroring or recording—these historic events, literary narratives offer an account of the traumatic experience in "a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding" (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 5), and, therefore, may eventually lead to the articulation of traumatic memory, not only individually, but also culturally. In fact, the act of writing and reading literary texts can be compared to the act of bearing witness, as suggested by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D., who propose "considering … literature and art as a precocious mode of witnessing—of accessing reality—when all other modes of knowledge are precluded" (xx). Felman notes the fragmented nature of testimony which consists of flashes of memory that have not been assimilated or integrated into familiar frames of reference and cannot, therefore, meet the desire for the construction of knowledge. Thus, in order for testimony, a discursive practice in essence, to perform the transmission of the story successfully and thus complete its cognitive function, the absolute prerequisite of a listener, a witness, must also be fulfilled; the presence of a witness is indispensable, not only as an enabler of the testimony, but also as the receptor, what Dori Laub calls: "the guardian of its process and of its momentum" (58).

Within this context, W. G. Sebald's photo-text *Austerlitz* (2001) is an example of trauma literature testifying to moments of rupture, dislocation and suffering, but also, predominantly, as a topos and tropos for memory to unfold in such a multidirectional mode. W. G. Sebald's work has received wide critical attention and has been internationally acclaimed for the high lyricism of his linguistic and pictorial landscapes but most of all, for the originality of his prose, the hybrid quality of his mosaic photo-texts that are neither purely biographies, nor exclusively travelogue memoirs. Sebald himself has characterised *Austerlitz* as a "long prose elegy" or "a prose book of indefinite form," refusing to designate it as a novel. Blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, Sebald's works employ both elements to represent personal narratives developing in the midst or aftermath of historic calamities, specifically the Holocaust, and to establish *loci* of encounter between private stories and public histories, investigations of the individual's place and interaction with(in) the collective. More importantly, his prose narratives' *bricolage* form, specifically the recounting of the protagonists' life stories in

both verbal and visual terms, contributes to the unraveling of the traumatic experience and the restoration of witnessing. The combination of written text and photography, working in reciprocity and complementarity, assigns a pivotal role to the viewer/reader,[5] who assumes the role of the witness, becoming a participant in the fiction-making by making connections and providing interpretations. Significantly, the nature of the photographs employed generates a potentiality for these associations to highlight analogies to other historical instances of collective trauma.

II. Trauma Memory: The Narrator-Witness

In *Austerlitz* (2001), the protagonist has been displaced from his homeland but also from his memories by being sent to England in 1939, as part of the *Kindertransport* programme. Having erased all memory of the event, Jacques Austerlitz spends his childhood years in Wales as the adopted son of a Calvinist preacher, feeling inexplicably isolated and estranged; he is completely unaware of his true identity until, one day, he is told by his school teacher that he should sign his examination papers under his true name, Jacques Austerlitz, which he has not used before. The book follows his trajectory as, later in life, his trauma surfaces and he ventures to retrace his roots and his past. His quest takes him to Prague, where he discovers the terrible fate of his mother, a Jew deported to Theresienstadt, and then to Paris, in a futile search of his father's trail.

A pervasive, still melancholy soaks through the pages of Sebald's final work, as Jacques Austerlitz embodies an eloquent example of a deeply traumatized subject, an individual haunted and scarred by his childhood experience and the—inexplicable at first—sense of non-belonging that burdens him throughout his life. Trapped in a moment of his past that he, initially, cannot specify or comprehend, Austerlitz is a man who is constantly preoccupied with the concept of time and how "it is still possible to be outside [it] … for a certain degree of personal misfortune is enough to cut us off from the past and the future" (143). A feeling of awkwardness casts shadows over all his relationships, as he feels ill at ease among all social or religious environments, and, owing to his inability to relate to or connect with the people he encounters, "no sooner did [he] become acquainted with someone than [he] feared [he] had come too close, no sooner did someone turn toward [him] than [he] began to retreat" (177). He falters between spells of memory loss and phantom chest pains, as well as collapses of both his physical functions and mental faculties, and obsesses over the idea of a "twin brother" always walking beside him or following him on his journeys, a specter-like presence that clearly represents an alienated part of his torn self.

The failings of memory occurring with the passage of time, and the fragmentary images that need to be complemented, are consistently present in Sebald's photo-text, as well as amnesia, either as a manifestation of the repression of a traumatic experience, or as a strategy of silencing. Austerlitz is constantly tormented by unplaceable, incomprehensible mnemonic fragments and the manifestations of his trauma recurrently flash into view as the narrative progresses; these bursts of memory culminate in a thirty-page long description of the traumatic memory resurfacing in the narrator's mid-years. In a detailed, stream-of-consciousness-like passage, Austerlitz narrates how words and sentences started to fail him, mental weariness settled upon him,

physical fatigue to the point where "even the smallest task or duty … can be beyond one's power" (173) took possession of him, as well as a feeling of anxiety, "as if an illness that had been latent in [him] for a long time were now threatening to erupt, as if some soul-destroying and inexorable force had fastened upon [him] and would gradually paralyze [his] entire system" (173-4). The protagonist is swept along in the depths of his angst, smothered by the darkness enveloping him, and even considers suicide once he realizes that any attempt to escape this whirlpool—such as burying his writings or repainting the walls of his house—proves pointless. Soon, he experiences the absolute impossibility of any social interaction, succumbs to the sense of obliteration and feelings of despair, and engages in night-time wanderings in the streets of London, haunted by specters and insomnia. His journeys almost invariably draw him to Liverpool Street Station, a site he feels unable to resist which, nonetheless, causes "a kind of heartache which, as [he] was beginning to sense, was caused by the vortex of past time" (182). It is in Liverpool Street Station that the thread leading to his quest begins to unravel when, in an almost entranced state, Austerlitz impulsively follows a porter and enters the deserted Ladies' Waiting-Room. There, scraps of memory begin to emerge, along with a dazzling feeling that the room "contained all the hours of [his] past life, all the suppressed and extinguished fears and wishes [he] had ever entertained" (193), and eventually, as amnesia turns to hypermnesia, the image of his adoptive parents is conjured, coming to collect a little boy who is waiting for them seated on a bench, the protagonist himself.

Austerlitz's story is relayed through an I-narrator[6] with whom the protagonist forms a peculiar relationship that spans over thirty years, albeit with long breaks, and is always reinitiated by Austerlitz's postcard invitations to a meeting. The Sebaldian narrator plays a cardinal role in the thematization of what it means to bear witness to the stories of the survivors of a collective traumatic experience that lies at the limits of consciousness, and is indispensable in the multidirectional dissemination of this experience and the preservation of memory. His primary role is that of the listener, collector and disseminator of the story, a responsibility that is assumed with meticulousness and zest. Not merely voicing the testimony, this narrator, a wanderer himself, seeks to make connections—by traveling to the places mentioned in the narrative—and to provide details or the missing links by retrieving the material objects that would authenticate the accounts. In fact, the Sebaldian narrator constitutes a true witness, what Laub calls "a co-owner of the traumatic event," someone who "through his very listening … comes to partially experience trauma in himself" (57), while simultaneously maintaining his own perspective and acknowledging his status as a separate entity that will relate to the victim but will not identify with them. This subtle distancing, the narrator's preservation of his own position, is contingent on his reluctance to reconstruct the experience of a victim imaginatively, and dictated by the "[repeated] voicing [of] an awareness of his own inability to present his subjects' backgrounds and stories 'as they actually were'" (Prager 91). These reservations are especially manifest when, during his visit to the historical fortress of Breendonk, he thinks of the prisoners and states how he "could not imagine" (28) the labor of these figures that are "impossible to picture" or even "think of" (29). This distancing, nevertheless, does not preclude the narrator's personal involvement with the lives of the people he encounters; more than a "true witness" the narrator exemplifies LaCapra's

"empathic unsettlement," which resides precisely in an oft-noted dual structure of distance and proximity. In effect, Sebald's I-narrator combines critical understanding and insistence on reporting the stories objectively with personal investment and affective bonds with the protagonists.

These affective bonds, and the relationship he establishes with Austerlitz, facilitate the narrator's desire to report the protagonist's life story objectively. Eventually, he progresses from being a listener of the protagonist's testimony to becoming his trustee, departing from their meetings with the photographic documents that constitute fragments of Austerlitz's life, tokens of his broken memories, and the key to their unraveling. Austerlitz hands the narrator the key to his apartment and invites him to "stay there whenever [he] liked … and study the black and white photographs which, one day, would be all that was left of his life" (408). The narrator's affective relation with the protagonist's life story is nurtured and developed through the acquisition and possession of these documents; more importantly, the reproduction of these photographs alongside the verbal narration of Austerlitz's experience disseminates the testimonial act and instigates an extra-textual expansion of witnessing. In other words, as the verbal narrative is complemented with the visual one, the role of the witness is transferred and bestowed to the respondent viewer/reader who is invited to engage in the formation of diverse associations and parallels, dependent on each beholder's personal reservoir of experiences. This is achieved with the activation of what Liliane Louvel terms the "Sebaldian Device," specifically the insertion of the image.

III. Photo-textual Trauma Memory: The Viewer/Reader-Witness

In *Austerlitz*, the visual element consists in eighty-seven photographic reproductions of snapshots, but also paintings, blueprints, book pages and postcards. Their cohesiveness, as they are embedded in the text, lies in common authorship,[7] as they constitute products of the main character's amateur photographic activities, tokens of his life experiences and objects of observation, a means of providing an interpretation of the past. The narrative device of the protagonist photographer is a strategy which justifies the presence of the stills as professional practice, intended to document Austerlitz's research as an art historian interested in architecture, part of his on-going and never-finished dissertation.[8] More importantly, the employment of this device creates fertile ground for the exploration of photography as a trace and remnant of the past, and as a theme fundamentally related to those of time[9] and memory.

Jacques Austerlitz's connection to photography is so intricate that it actually defines his vision of the world and his whole disposition. On the one hand, he describes "leaden grey roofs" (39), "silvery willows" (68), "stony-grey or whitewashed" (111) houses, "grey or plaster-coloured" (146) cities, as well as a "white-turbaned porter" (188), "a woman in a light gabardine coat" standing beside a man "wearing a dark suit" (193), everything showered in "dusty grey light", indicating that he views the world as a photographic plate in shades of black and white. On the other hand, as Carolin Duttlinger observes, "the discourse on photography in *Austerlitz* … figures as a symptom of the protagonist's traumatized psychological disposition" (156). Consonant to the flash-like, frozen quality of the protagonist's memories, these

photographs appear stuffed inside a folder that Austerlitz keeps in his jacket pocket (125) or spread in disarray on his coffee table, where they are constantly reshuffled and rearranged, mirroring the fragmentary nature of the protagonist's life and playing a leading part in his quest for answers. Austerlitz places the photographs on his table and searches for clues, in an incessant yet futile ritual that strongly resonates a traumatic "repetition compulsion."[10]

> Austerlitz told me that he sometimes sat here for hours, laying out these photographs or others from his collection the wrong way up, as if playing a game of patience, and that then, one by one, he turned them over, always with a new sense of surprise at what he saw, pushing the pictures back and forth and over each other, arranging them in an order depending on their family resemblances, or withdrawing them from the game until either there was nothing left but the grey table top, or he felt exhausted by the constant effort of thinking and remembering. (167-8)

Prima facie, these photographic reproductions embedded in this photo-text anchor the text to reality and act as testimonial evidence in its simplest, crudest and most literal form. In fact, the vast majority of the stills appear to be in concert with the verbal narrative; for instance, the photographs of Austerlitz's study (43) and rucksack (55), or those of chemical plants (262-3), rivers (317), cemeteries (320-1, 361, 409) and train stations (309), illustrating Austerlitz's wanderings in search of his past, are explicitly referenced in the verbal narrative immediately preceding or following the image. These illustrative photographs, consonant to the written description, endow the storytelling with a type of authenticity and are bestowed with a *modus operandi* that is essentially referential; as Stephanie Harris notes, "Sebald employs photographs in his works not for their pictorial value but only their referential character—in other words, the photographs verify something in the world" (379).

Nevertheless, as Liliane Louvel observes,[11] the presence of these images in the text is so pregnant with meaning that they necessitate an arrest—so that their function, their power, but also the stakes they imply be fully comprehended; eventually, this renders their indexicality performative, rather than factual. Captionless and ambiguous, often grainy and unclear, occasionally of indeterminate origin, although predominantly conceived as illustrative and documentary, the photographs embedded in W. G. Sebald's photo-texts eventually prove to be destabilizing and disturbing, an effect stemming from the silences surrounding them and generated by them, their subject matter and, most importantly, their interaction with the verbal components of the narrative. As Samuel Pane suggests,

> [T]hey paradoxically reinforce and undermine the credibility of accounts offered and recorded by Sebaldian characters … they manifest the disparity between the catastrophic events of history and the ability of human memory and archival technology to accurately recall them. (37)

Subsequently, viewers/readers realize that, while most images correspond to the written text, there are some that flash in isolation, whose referentiality to the verbal narrative surrounding them remains indeterminate. Examples would include some of the pictures representing Austerlitz's first attempts at photography (108), and the image of a man walking (171), which seems to echo the hero's state of mind, rather than the actual flow of events. Sometimes these very photographs also acquire a symbolic function, since, as Silke Horstkotte notes, "a single, isolated photograph can hint at a larger context with which it stands in a conventional relation" ("Pictorial and Verbal Discourse" 134).Photographs of railway tracks and train stations, for instance, bear direct and explicit connotations in the context of the *Kindertransport*; they function as a manifestation of trauma, echoing the main character's repressed memories, which is also reflected in his obsession with railway station architecture and waiting rooms. Occasionally, the photographs function synecdochically, such as the stills juxtaposed to Austerlitz's recollections of the days he spent at Romfort, where he talks about the "carefree and very cheerful" people he met (326) and the hours he spent on "the careful pricking out and potting up of seedlings, transplanting them when they had grown larger" (327). Evidently, despite the numerous examples of informative accordance between the verbal and the visual narratives, the pictures embedded in the novel also acquire a meta-diegetic function, often eluding their verbal frames to spin their own, individual tales.

The uncertainties which the subject matter and quality of the stills generate, as well as the realization that these particular photographs are neither purely documentary, nor exclusively related to the verbal narrative concerning them, enhances the impression of their independent narrative potential. Specifically, the subject matter of these photographs, depicting mostly, landscapes, buildings and constructions, the general vagueness and lack of clarity, as well as the grainy quality of the reproductions, destabilizes their illustrative role.[12] Unfamiliar with the places or faces in the photographs, viewer/readers succumb to the impulse to process these images in order to find the details that would link them to the verbal narration in order to verify their connection, or, more importantly, provide the information needed for their appropriation and interpretation. The full, double-page photograph of a group of people, presumably taken from Gerald Fitzpatrick's family archive (220-21), for instance, forces the viewer/reader to pause and retrace the family genealogy in the pages preceding the picture to recognize those portrayed in it. Is the man carrying a parrot on his shoulder "Gerald's parrot-collecting ancestor" (119)? Can the moment the photograph was taken be detected by the solemnity and agitation on the subjects' faces? The placement and format of the photograph, namely its size and lack of a verbal frame, renders the need for answers more intense and dictates the ensuing stasis more forcibly. Soon, as the flow of the verbal diegesis is interrupted by these stills and the ensuing search for their verbal correlates, instability and disorientation emerge as to whether the photographs are an affidavit of the verbal narrative's authenticity, or the fictional accounts have been appropriated so as to support the visual texts.

This effect is further enhanced via the photo-text's elaborate, highly fractured temporality which is constructed not only through the dual temporal nature of the photograph itself—the moment of its taking and the

Jetzttime of its viewing—but also by the morphologically ruptured diegetic time, when one component of the photo-textual blend is not adjacent to its counterpart, but instead appears many pages before or after.[13] On these instances, upon the appearance of the informative part, be it the verbal or the visual, a *caesura* is created, a "pregnant" stillness urging the viewer/reader to trace the connection and sweeping attention backward, so as to revisit the component that complements the bimedial narrative. When the narrator enters Austerlitz's front room, for instance, he finds:

> nothing in it but a large table, … with several dozen photographs lying on it, most of them dating quite a long way back and rather worn at the edges. Some of the pictures were already familiar to me, so to speak: pictures of empty Belgian landscapes, stations and métro viaducts in Paris, various moths and other night-flying insects, ornate dovecotes, Gerald Fitzpatrick on the airfield near Quy, and a number of heavy doors and gateways. (167)

Of this array of verbally described photographs, some antecede their visual referent, for instance "Gerald Fitzpatrick on the airfield near Quy" (164), some appear much later, such as the photographs of the gates in Teresin (268-9, 270-1), while others, for example the images of Belgian landscapes, lack a visual counterpart altogether. Sebald provides the viewer/reader with a key to deciphering the provenance of certain images in the narrative, while the latter is drawn into a back and forth movement, similar to the intricate workings of memory. As a consequence of the viewer/readers' engagement in a thorough examination of the photographs—and the detection for clues that may link the images to the written parts of the narration—the spaces of stillness created expand and invite more profound pondering. The links created by the references themselves loosen and occasionally unfasten.

The disruption and fissures created by the insertion of the photographs and photographic reproductions of documents in the text—when these are arranged in a bimedial layout[14]—but also, more importantly, their relation of "interreference"[15] with the text, the aporias raised by the interplay of the two media, and their spatiotemporal relations incite the viewer/reader to pause in contemplation and thus, in Liliane Louvel's words, "a seesaw movement between photograph and text" (45) is generated, that opens up a third space where the "pictorial third" is formed. Louvel has defined the "pictorial third" as:

> [T]he in-between image conjured by a "pictorial reading," that is, one in which word and image combine and intermediality fully plays its role. This in-between image floats in the reader's mind … a phenomenological event, a visual movement produced in the viewer-reader's mind by the passage between the two media. It is a virtual image engineered by the text and reinvented by the reader. (45)

Evidently, this image will differ from the images created in the mind's eyes of the narrator, as well as from those of other viewer/readers; in fact, the "pictorial third" image is reliant on each recipient's personal reservoir of

experiences and so two of these can never fully coincide. Louvel proceeds to suggest that the "pictorial third" is used in the Sebaldian universe and system as a device that will, among other things, reduce "the free play of the imagination" (46) and lead either to the recognition and identification of the photograph or to the creation of doubt concerning its origins and authenticity. Nevertheless, I would argue, this process may also lead to the creation of mental connections and to an affective association of the traumatic experience narrated with other instances of catastrophe lying in the viewer/readers' background. The hermeneutic unveiling of traces lying behind the written text—that results from the back and forth movement of observation, association and interpretation incited by the visual component of Sebald's works—and the unsettlement of initial assumptions, prompt the viewer/readers to peer through the illustrative surface layer, question and investigate, in an attempt to construct an interpretation by perceiving what lies underneath. As these efforts to assign meaning are complemented and supported by the "pictorial third" image, "engineered by the text" yet "reinvented" by the viewer/reader, the acts of recognition performed expand further and include more historical instances of trauma. In other words, not only is memory resurrected from the text but it is also allowed to flow multidirectionally and, in turn, trigger more memories, of another event. This potentiality is cultivated by the photo-text's polyvocal quality and is contingent specifically on the subject matter of the photographs, which allows for an affective response on the part of the beholder.

IV. Multivocality, Intericonicity, Convergence

While attempting to approach and address the haunting theme of the Holocaust, W. G. Sebald constructs an elaborate universe of multi-vocality, which not only pervades the rendition of testimony but is also fostered by numerous examples of intertextuality and intericonicity,[16] the cross-references between and across media. In effect, *Austerlitz* constitutes a site of encounter where diverse experiences of dislocation and trauma converge productively, and—enabled by the spaces created through photo-textual interweaving and interaction—memory surfaces "multidirectionally," to use Michael Rotheberg's term. Rothberg defines "multidirectional memory" as a model that "posits collective memory as partially disengaged from exclusive versions of cultural identity and acknowledges how remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites" (11).

The architecture of *Austerlitz* advocates multidirectionality through the choir of voices—joined by their experience of persecution, uprooting and estrangement—that, far from simply reproducing the structural traits of modern fiction, emerges as a salient component of the Sebaldian universe, and the point of departure for the development of multiple—yet analogous—perspectives. Specifically, the narrator's account and thoughts interchange with the protagonist's monologues and these are progressively complemented and enriched with the narrative of Austerlitz's nanny Vera, of his parents' story, as well as anecdotes of similar experiences taken from books. The narration shifts smoothly and seamlessly as the writer changes from third to first person without using quotation marks and each character steps forward to unfold their own story in monologues that eventually efface the narrator. Vera's testimony is rendered as a twenty-four-page stream of recollections

articulated in a hypotactical manner, while the viewer/reader is constantly reminded of the source: "Vera remembered, said Austerlitz" (244), "Vera continued, said Austerlitz" (246), "Vera told me, said Austerlitz" (248).

What is more, the page-long sentences in which the testimony of the protagonist is delivered also include subtle and unobtrusive references to other literary excerpts that are permeated by the same issues or consist of similar testimonial accounts; these are blended into the narrative by being reported in an indistinguishable manner, interwoven with Austerlitz's tale and integrated in the narrative as part of a whole. Thus, while never explicitly mentioned, the history of the deportation and extermination of European Jews that haunts the background of Austerlitz's story—and family history—is supplemented by Jean Améry's[17] descriptions of the tortures he suffered in Breendonk and Claude Simon's storytelling, in *Le Jardins des Plantes*,[18] of Italian painter Gastone Novelli—who was tortured in the same way as Améry but in Dachau. Wittgenstein's texts, Kafka's diaries and H. G. Adler's[19] treatise on the organization of the Theresienstadt ghetto, are also added to this array of extra-textual references which enhance the photo-text's multi-vocality and enable it to extend and expand beyond the story-bound universe of the book. The importance of these extensions is emphasized by the author's choice to conclude the novel with one such testimony; *Austerlitz* ends with the narrator sitting where he started, at the ruins of fort Breendonk. The end of the prose narrative coincides with his reaching the end of a book the protagonist had given him, presumably written by one of his colleagues, Dan Jacobson, that is, in fact, yet another narrative of exile, describing Jacobson's search for his roots and his grandfather, Melamed Heshel, and highlighting the scale of the persecution by adding the Jews of Lithuania to the incommensurable toll of the Holocaust.[20] As a result of this interchange and overlapping of accounts, and the circling patterns involved, testimony is reiterated to the point where the experience is no longer pertinent solely to the protagonist's life story but also to the many victims and/or survivors of the history of catastrophe; as Josephine Carter puts it, "the book … highlights that the narrator's role as a witness to the past, even if indirect, does not end with Austerlitz but is ongoing" (15).

These cross-references and allusions are also maintained by the visual component of Sebald's narratives, which is often selected and placed so that it can perform elaborate gestures of self-reflexivity but also inter-iconicity. In effect, the employment of the photographic element in W. G. Sebald's photo-text—as an instrument of allusion and association, engaged in different kinds of reflecting or doubling—performs a multi-perspectival visual effect which is equivalent to the multi-vocal quality of the verbal narrative. Apart from the different gestures of reflecting or doubling performed within the context of the novel,[21] however, the photographic component in Sebald's *œuvre,* consisting specifically in the use of the everyday, found photographs, plays a cardinal role in establishing a type of memory that is connective, owing to its reliance on themedium's potential to convey diverse messages beyond the subject depicted on the surface.

Documentary, rather than artistic, whether they depict landscapes or people or everyday objects, these pictures are ordinary and banal and invite Marianne Hirsch's "affiliative looking," the type of looking we employ when looking at family photographs: "we all have pictures like these in our own albums, and thus we invest them with a form of looking that is broadly shared

across our culture," Hirsch notes ("I Took Pictures" 75). The ordinariness and familiarity inherent in these photographs counteract the potential distancing that can result from viewing disturbing images and instigates the viewer/reader's involvement. These found photographs' connectibility to a number of other, similar photographs that surround us as part of our familial, social, or cultural past establishes the desired relation of affect,[22] while their interplay and dense entanglement with the verbal narratives of calamity and loss preserves their status as non-traumatic photographs that, nevertheless, address a traumatic historical event. This affective encounter may trigger the thought processes that will evoke similarities and forge the links between diverse traumatic experiences. Thus, what is constructed as the main pre-occupation of the photo-text is the "history of destruction" itself, the encompassing circumstances but also the plight of the survivors, the importance of memory and the catastrophic consequences of silencing and forgetting, regardless of the name of the event that lies at the root.

V. Conclusion

In an interview with Eleanor Wachtel, W. G. Sebald talked about the ethical questions raised by the intrusiveness entailed in witnessing and documenting the life-story of an individual:

> It's a received wisdom that it's good to talk about traumas, but it's not always true. Especially if you are the instigator of making people remember, talk about their pasts and so on, you are not certain whether your intrusion into someone's life may not cause a degree of collateral damage which that person might otherwise have been spared. (Schwartz 60)

Yet, the commonly acknowledged necessity to find a schema that might address and perhaps even assess and heal the traumatic impact of such historic ruptures prompts the quest for a new *locus* of expression. Arguably, photo-texts can provide such a context. The intricate relationships and associations constructed with(in) the verbal and visual components of the prose narrative, which do not fully unfold unless the two media are read in complementarity and the work is examined from the perspective of its bi-mediality, invite the viewer/reader to actively participate in the narrative process and, hence, assume the role of the witness. More importantly, the photo-text's pictorial and verbal synergy guides the viewer/reader towards tracing confluences, but also potential incongruities between the two constituent elements and, thus, initiates a process of mental correlation. In effect, the interplay between the verbal and the visual narrative, the anachronistic quality photography bestows on reading by arresting the text and, accordingly, the illustration the text endows to the photograph by framing it, the photo-textual essence, in other words of Sebald's work, not only constitutes fertile ground for the resurrection of memory but also facilitates a productive way of doing so, not in diversity but in convergence.

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Notes

[1] The term refers to the survivor's struggle to overcome the distortions or vicissitudes of memory and provide testimony of an experience whose magnitude precludes any reality-anchored account and testifies to a failure of the imagination; in Laub's words, "what precisely made a Holocaust out of the event is the unique way in which, during its historical occurrence, *the event produced no witnesses* … the inherently incomprehensible and deceptive psychological structure of the event precluded its own witnessing, even by its very victims" (80). At the same time, the term refers to the precarious position of the witness/listener seeking to break the silences and partake in the sharing of the experience while acknowledging the impossibility of telling.

[2]The term has been coined by Silke Hortskotte who has suggested that Sebald becomes the architect of idiosyncratic "photo-text topographies," where images introduce a spatial dimension and become linking devices that "connect distant or incommensurate spaces."("Photo-Text Topographies" 49)

[3]I am referring to Saul Friedlander's formulation of a non-numerical concept of "uniqueness," according to which something is unique when it passes a certain limit, when it becomes "an event which tests out traditional conceptual and representational categories" (3). This formulation of an "event at the limits" carries a special significance, I would argue, in that, by shifting the focus to the event's ontology, rather than its singularity, it suggests that an analogous experience can be, paradoxically, repeated in history.

[4] Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart look into Jean-Martin Charcot's and Pierre Janet's studies at the Salpêtrière on the disruptive effects of traumatic memory on consciousness, and formulate their arguments on the importance of prior schemes and past experiences for the registration and integration of traumatic memory, on Janet's conception of these terms.

[5]The term has been introduced by Liliane Louvel in "Photography as Critical Idiom and Intermedial Criticism," to discuss the reader response aspect of intermediality. For Louvel, there is a distinction between the "viewer/reader" of photography-in-text fiction and its counterpart, the "reader/viewer," in cases when the photographs are ekphrastic, in other words rendered verbally. Silke Horstkotte uses the term "reader/spectator" to discuss the interpretative processes of intermediality.

[6]Sebald scholarship has elaborated on the I-narrator extensively, predominantly with reference to the specificities of his persona and function in the narrative technique and content,his relation and autobiographical connection with the writer being a rather foregone conclusion. Katja Garloff, for instance, explores Sebald's work as literature of testimony and notes how the narrator's dual nature as a narrative device and a literary character constructs an inherent dynamic whereby, on the one hand, the presence of the narrator highlights mediation of the experience, while, on the other hand, his role consists primarily in facilitating the reconstruction of events and establishing a chain of transmission. Anneleen Masschelein(Patt 360-387) and Marc M. Anderson also discuss the narrator's significance in the development of a "periscopic" type of writing and the manner in which this effect directly relates to issues of omniscience and knowledge. For an overview of the role of the narrator in *The Emigrants* see also my "Historiography in Photo-Textuality: The Representation of Trauma in W. G. Sebald's *The Emigrants*."

[7]It is important to note that in the original German edition of *Austerlitz* the photographs are also connected through the layout, since, when leafing through the book, their careful placement on the page performs the effect of a flip book and creates the semblance of a photographic album. This effect is completely lost in the American and English editions, as is their being framed in a grey box that actually frames them outside the verbal text. For a detailed analysis concerning the importance of typographic changes between different publications see Lise Patt's introduction to *Searching for Sebald*; for an analysis of the problematic nature of translated photo=texts see Silke Hortskotte's "Photo-Text Topographies: Photography and the Representation of Space in W. G. Sebald and Monika Maron."

[8]John Zilcosky presents a different reader reception in "Disorientation, Loss and the Holocaust Melodrama," where he claims that the fictional device of a protagonist-photographer in *Austerlitz* dissolves the potentially alienating effect that might be created by a sense of an apparent authorial intrusion and contributes to a photo-textual composition that is far more free-flowing and natural.

[9]For an interesting discussion on the photographs' role in constructing a "vertical temporality" in the novel see also Mary Griffin Wilson's "Sheets of Past: Reading the Image in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*."

[10]In *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth reads Freud's 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' and discusses the ways in which 'not having truly known the threat of death in the past, the survivor is forced, continually, to confront it over and over again. For consciousness, then, the act of survival, as the experience of trauma, is the repeated confrontation with the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to one's own life' (62). The act of survival, therefore, involves 'the endless inherent necessity of repetition' that shapes the individuals' lives after surviving a traumatic event.

[11] "La présence de l'image, des images, est si prégnante et constante au travers de toute cette œuvre qu'il convient de s'y arrêter afin d'en saisir les modes de fonctionnements, les lignes de force et les enjeux" ("Un événement de lecture" 1).
[12] Cropping is also a dominant factor to this effect, which can sometimes be detected through comparison with the original German editions.
[13]Carolin Duttlinger uses the terms "retrospective" and "anticipatory" to describe the ways the photographs refer to the verbal narrative and suggests that this technique highlights the fragmentation and discontinuity of experience, which lies at the heart of Austerlitz's traumatised existence. "This technique … reflects a sense of discontinuity between experience and photography which underpins the protagonist's engagement with his pictures" (*Companion* 158).
[14]When the photographs are embedded and in interplay with verbal narrative rather than functioning as paratextual elements of the plot, cut off from the text.
[15]I am referring here to Kibedi Varga's "Criteria for Describing Word-and-Image Relations." According to Varga, "interreference occurs when both the verbal and the visual aspects are primary and neither is subordinate to the other, when they "refer to each other".
[16]Formulated on the model of intertextuality, the concept of intericonicity is discussed by Clement Chéroux, among others, to describe systems of allusion or association between diverse—usually well-known—images.
[17]Jean Améry (1912-1978) was an Austrian philosopher and essayist, whose participation in the resistance against Nazi occupation led to his capture by the Belgian Gestapo, his imprisonment and torture in Fort Breendonk and, subsequently, his deportation to concentration camps. Having survived internment in Auschwitz and Buchenwald, he was liberated in 1945 at Bergen Belsen and spent the rest of his life writing on his experience, the sadistic nature of the Third Reich and the Nazi regime and the effort to preserve the memory of horror as a Holocaust survivor. Améry ended his life in 1978. Sebald's consistent interest in the philosopher's life and work materialized in the form of the essay "Against the Irreversible: On Jean Améry," which is included in *The Natural History of Destruction* 147-171.
[18]In this book, Simon tells the story of Italian painter Gastone Novelli, who was tortured in a similar way to Amery (albeit in Dachau). It is interesting to note the similarities of patterns between Sebald's and Simon's, novels, as both include direct references to novelists and artists and integrate them in the narrative; also, both are written in a similar way, seeing that, the disruption of the text which occurs in Sebald with the insertion of the photographs is also achieved in Simon's text via typography which separates the text into columns or snippets often containing different stories. More importantly, Claude Simon is also interested in depicting the world as a composite of mnemonic fragments and similar experiences, to the effect that his novels are often the composition of a single image that forms like a puzzle from different pieces of separate, yet similar, historic instances – specifically times of war.
[19]Hans Günther Adler (1910-1988) was a German-language poet and novelist, who was also a Holocaust survivor, deported to Theresienstadt with his family in 1942, where he spent two and a half years before being sent to Auschwitz. Adler devoted himself chiefly to collecting and maintaining archives about the times of persecution and the Theresienstadt camp and was also involved in accumulating the documents from the camp. His first major work was the study of the ghetto Theresienstadt, *Theresienstadt 1941-1945. Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft* (*Theresienstadt 1941-1945: The Face of an Enforced Community*), first published in 1955 and in an enlarged edition in 1960. The book was the first scholarly monograph devoted to a single camp and became one of the foundational works of Holocaust Studies. It is still the most detailed account of any single concentration camp.
[20]An interesting example of Sebald's blurring between fact and fiction, the fictitious character Austerlitz claims Dan Jacobson to be his colleague and so provides the narrator with an opportunity to reference *Heshel's Kingdom,* a book whose writing strongly resembles Sebald's, in that it constitutes a blend of biography, memoir and travel writing. Jacobson, an acclaimed novelist and critic, is the only authorial voice brought to the narrative by Austerlitz himself, rather than the narrator.
[21]Examples of these acts would include the twin portraits of the girl (73) and the boy Austerlitz (258), or the photograph of Austerlitz's study (43) and its counter image of the room where the files from Theresienstadt are kept (396-7); also, the quasi-cinematic close-up performed in the series of photographs depicting a panoramic view of the shop window of the Antikos Bazar, in Terezin (272-3), which is followed by two smaller photos, each closing up to a different detail of the window, a set of china (274) and a porcelain statuette of a hero on horseback (276) respectively, as well as the photographs of the glass and steel dome of Austerlitz train station (404-405, 407).

[22] For a discussion of the affective quality of art as a tool for understanding traumatic experiences see: Jill Bennett's*Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* and Margaret Olin's *Touching Photographs*.