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The Image Novel

Reconceptualizing Reality through Images in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* and Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*

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Introduction

> One has the impression, she said, of something stirring in them, as if one caught small sighs of despair, *gémissements de désespoir* (...) as if pictures had a memory of their own and remembered us.
>
> —W.G. Sebald,

> Only that which is difficult or impossible to remember is worth remembering. Only that which is hard or impossible to say is worth saying.
>
> —Aleksandar Hemon

In *The Way of the World*, Franco Moretti famously claimed that "[t]he *Bildungsroman* [i]s the 'symbolic form' of modernity" (5) and that "youth is 'chosen' as the new epoch's 'specific material sign', and it is chosen over the multitude of other possible sings, because of its ability to *accentuate* modernity's dynamism and instability" (5). Thus, if in the 19th century the *Bildungsroman* "helped retrospectively legitimize a heroic passage onward and outward" (Summers-Bremner 308), Eric Santner wonders, "what would an alternative model for reconstituting a cultural identity look like? (...) How does one face a past such as this one at a time such as this one?" (qtd. in Summers-Bremner 308). But what time is exactly "this one"? What Santner is referring to here is the problem of representation after the Holocaust as in its aftermath literature had to face the challenge of trying to "expres[s] what remains unrepresentable" (Keniston & Quinn 2). As "a reality that went beyond powers of both imagination and conceptualization," LaCapra explains, "it [the Shoah] posed problems of 'representation' at the time of its occurrence, and it continues to pose problems today" (220). Despite the urgent need to tell and pass on the

traumatic history of the Holocaust, every attempt to address it necessarily ends with an acknowledgment of an impossibility. Almost sixty years later, at the dawn of the 21st century, similarly perceived as "a recalibration of feeling so violent and radical that it resists and compels memory, generating stories that cannot, yet must, be told" (Gray 129), the attacks at the Twin Towers "br[ought] us to the limits of our understanding" (Caruth *Trauma* 4) and thus once again triggered a representational issue. "September 11 has resulted in a crisis of sensibility in American life (...) [it] has plunged America—and possibly the West—into a crisis of representation itself" (Bragard et al. 8). How to tell the terror and the state of fear ensued from the attacks on the Twin Towers? As Rothberg pointed out, "post-9/11 literary works replay many familiar themes and techniques of post-World War II American literature" (123). At the wake of the liberation of the Nazi camps in 1945 as well as at the beginning of the rescue efforts on the World Trade Center, literature appeared to have "found itself at a loss for words, words suddenly seeming inadequate to the task of representing what makes an individual life a life, unable to convey its emotional truth" (Miller 21). "[T]oo dreadful for words" (Gray 132), such horrors led to a perceived failure of language. As we will see more in depth in the first chapter, Vietta considers this a symptom of the contemporary age as "all attempts at transmitting information and attaining knowledge tend to degenerate into the chaotic and labyrinthine" (qtd. in Long 9). Therefore, for him, contemporary literature is precisely characterized by the attempt to respond to and account for this "profound sense of epistemological and linguistic crisis" (qtd. in Long 9) rapidly diffusing in our society. We might argue that postmodernism, in a way, participated in the escalation of the crisis of language to the point that it caused literature to be perceived as "terminally out of touch with reality" (Franzen 35). A "new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense" is, for Jameson, "the supreme formal feature" of postmodernism (*Postmodernism* 9).

As a matter of fact, if, on the one hand, the importance language acquired in the 1960s led to a "sort of linguistic imperialism" (Mitchell *Iconology* 56), on the other the extensive use postmodernism made of self-referentiality, pastiche and parody is perceived to have "collaborate[d] with the culture of consumer technology to create a society of style without substance, of language without meaning, of cynicism without belief, of virtual communities without human connection, of rebellion without change" (McLaughlin "Post-Postmodern" 66). Thus, the direct effect of this "immersion in a world of nonreferential language" (McLaughlin "Post-Postmodern" 55) is exactly the "disappearance of the historical referent" (Jameson *Postmodernism* 25). Jameson indeed sees the progressive "weakening of historicity" as resulting from the emergence of "a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum" (*Postmodernism* 6). He believes in fact that historical past can no longer be retrieved or represented and that therefore "we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach" (Jameson *Postmodernism* 25). For Jameson, these "pop images and simulacra" merely consist of "stereotypes about that past" (25) and, as such, appear to have been "debased and contaminated in advance by their assimilation to glossy advertising images" (9). Characterized merely by "gratuitous frivolity" (10), images have apparently lost the ability to "re-create about themselves the whole missing object world which was once their lived context" (8). The final diagnosis? Images, like language, "d[o] not really speak to us at all" anymore (8). What actually seems to have caused images' loss of value and the subsequent "radical skepticism of postmodern discourse (...) toward the image, even a photographic image" (Didi-Huberman *Images in Spite* 70) is their very ubiquity. Ours is "a culture so overwhelmingly dominated by the visual and the image" (Jameson "Transformations" 100) that what we are in the process of witnessing is a fundamental devaluation of this very medium. As the centrality of

images in the cultural landscape grew, their being overused soon led to a rampant inflation of their value and, as a result, there arose an urgent need to place the ethical value of images under careful scrutiny and consideration (Ercolino "Per un'estetica" 102). Benjamin, more specifically, sees in the "mechanical reproduction" the root cause for this process of devaluation,

> The situations into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated. (…) In the case of the art object, a most sensitive nucleus—namely, its authenticity—is interfered with whereas no natural object is vulnerable on that score. The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning. (…) Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction (…). And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object. ("Work of Art" 221)

Thus, the direct consequence of "the image ha[ving] now become a mechanically reproducible commodity" (Kearney 116) is "the loss of credibility, the collapse of image" itself (Baudrillard 62). As Didi-Huberman explains, this deeply impinges on the way we approach great humanitarian tragedies,

> Viviamo all'epoca dell'immaginazione lacerata. L'informazione ci dà troppo moltiplicando le immagini, e noi siamo portati a non credere più a niente di ciò che vediamo, e infine a non volere più guardare niente di ciò che abbiamo sotto agli occhi. I massacri di Timisoara ci sono stati mostrati troppo, per venire poi a sapere che con dei veri cadaveri si possono fare dei finti massacri. Per molti l'immagine, a causa delle manipolazioni senza fine di cui è stata oggetto (…), è allora "definitivamente caduta in discredito" e, peggio, privata d'ogni attenzione critica. Ecco allora che i veri massacri di Batajnica, a circa due ore di strada da Timisoara, diventavano invisibili per molti.
>
> (We live in the era of torn imagination. By multiplying images, information gives us too much and we are led to no longer believe what we see and ultimately to no longer wish to see what we have before our own eyes. Too often we were exposed to the images of the

> massacres in Timisoara, only to later discover that with real corpses fake massacres can be created. For many, images, due to the endless manipulations they were subjected to (...), have "definitely fallen in disrepute" and, even worse, deprived of any critical attention. So here it is that the real massacres of Batajnica, roughly a two-hour drive from Timisoara, become invisible to the many. "L'immagine brucia" 258-9 my translation)

Swept over by images, spectators appear to have rapidly grown desensitized from what surrounds them and, for Sontag, the consequence is that "we are losing our capacity to react" (*Regarding* 108). Sontag here is voicing her concern for "a gaze that can no longer be returned" (Mitrano 11), that is, for a "distance" that "keeps widening, until, in the extreme example of photographs of atrocities, the tragic hiatus dividing perpetrator and victim illustrates a new metaphysical silence between observer and observed" (11). Didi-Huberman, in particular, identifies two opposite tensions which contribute to widening this gap by making the audience blind to what happens around them: "censura o distruzione da un lato, soffocamento da moltiplicazione da un altro—per ottenere i migliori risultati d'accecamento" ("censorship and destruction on one hand, suffocation from multiplication on the other—in order to achieve the best blinding effects."; 257 "L'immagine brucia" my translation). The Shoah and the attacks on the World Trade Center respectively underwent a process of censorship and multiplication. If, on the one hand, already during the war Nazis carried out a systematic destruction of all kinds of evidence, in the years following its end Sebald denounces "people's ability to forget what they do not want to know, to overlook what is before their eyes" (*NH* 41) and he therefore aims at unveiling how Germany, unable to cope with the trauma of the Holocaust, "developed an almost perfectly functioning mechanism of repression" (Sebald *NH* 11); on the other, the haunting frame of the plane crashing on the North Tower was soon spectacularized by TV screens all over the world making the audience "want to see it again and again" (Žižek 12). This multiplication, however, seem to have made the xenophobic backlash

fueled by the attacks "invisible to the many." The question that naturally arises is then, "[c]he fare contro questa doppia oppressione che vorrebbe alienarci con l'alternativa del non vedere assolutamente nulla o vedere solo dei cliché?" ("what to do against this double oppression that wants to alienate us with the alternative of seeing absolutely nothing or seeing just clichés?"; Didi-Huberman "L'immagine brucia" 257 my translation). By framing their novels in the post-Holocaust and post-9/11 era respectively, W.G. Sebald and Aleksandar Hemon seem to be keenly aware of difficulty of "fac[ing] a past such as this one at a time such as this one." By showing how the past, if not properly addressed, will keep on haunting the present, both seek to break the silence surrounding, on the one hand, the atrocities of the Holocaust and, on the other, "America's (…) deep-seated xenophobia" (Weiner 216) that was reawakened on September 11, 2001. More specifically, Sebald seems to suggest that the obliteration and the remotion of past traumatic events before having thoroughly processed them inevitably results in the fragmentation of one's consciousness; whereas the direct connection Hemon weaves between the atmosphere of terror elicited by the Haymarket riots (1886) and 9/11 is meant to bring to light how xenophobia, "[n]ever disappearing, (…) makes regular unwelcome returns" (Sundstrom 69). In order to be able to prompt a process of ethical remembrance with the past that might have a lasting positive effect on the present, however, they first needed to reclaim the validity of both images and words. Conscious of the fact that contemporary literature finds itself at the crossroads of a twofold crisis, linguistic and visual, they appear to have resorted to a hybrid form that would enable them not only to reevaluate both media but also to renew our understanding of a troubling past whose shadow still hovers over our present. *Austerlitz* and *The Lazarus Project* precisely rest on the assumption that "language and image are absolutely bound to one another" (Didi-Huberman *Images in Spite* 26) in a constant process of mutual compensation. Only in such a way can the social purpose of

language and images be reenergized and therefore make them suitable means for dealing with "a past such as this one."

Sebald's and Hemon's novels are certainly not the first literary works to hybridize with the visual and in fact great critical attention has been recently given to "iconotexts," that is, those works that stem from the encounter of verbal and visual signs. However, what makes *Austerlitz* and *The Lazarus Project* stand out is that if usually novels tap into the visual by means of rhetorical figures like ekphrasis which allow for the transposition of images into words, here pictures are visibly displayed on their pages. This is the reason why, since the term "iconotext" appears to embrace any kind of "text" generally engaging with "icons," in order to properly discuss the implications of including actual pictures in novels, it was of paramount importance finding a name to define them. Upon careful consideration, the term "Image Novel" seemed to be most appropriate one to classify them. The first chapter will therefore be entirely dedicated to providing a theoretical overview of this new novelistic form, the Image Novel, which seems to have imposed itself on the literary landscape as "an alternative model for reconstituting a cultural identity" which was reduced to ashes by the horrific events of the Second World War and 9/11. By acknowledging the instability of words and images following these two tragedies, this new form emerges from the realization that neither words nor images alone could have ever been enough to piece the fragments of this shattered identity back together but that what was needed was their collaboration. Thus if, as Frow suggests, genres "actively generate and shape knowledge of the world" and "mak[e] things happen by actively shaping the way we understand the world" (2), the Image Novel aims at providing us with a new outlook on historical traumas and on how their after-effects still reverberate in the present. As Žižek suggests,

> [T]he true choice apropos of historical traumas is not the one between remembering or forgetting them: traumas we are not ready or able to remember haunt us all the more forcefully. We should therefore accept the paradox that, in order really to forget an event, we must first summon up the strength to remember it properly. In order to account for this paradox, we should bear in mind that the opposite of existence is not nonexistence, but insistence: that which does not exist, continues to insist, striving towards existence. (22)

Sebald and Hemon precisely give proof of how "that which does not exist," that which has been buried and suppressed because too unpleasant to be remembered will keep on "scratching and knocking" (Sebald *A* 195) until it is in fact acknowledged. Thus, by means of their novels, they invite us to "summon up the strength to properly remember" the Holocaust, the Bosnian war, the pogroms in Eastern Europe and finally 9/11.

Considering that the ultimate aim of this kind of novels is that of having an effect on contemporary society, what this form calls for is not "a passive spectator but rather a spectator actively engaged with the world in both cognitive and affective registers" (Rothberg 124). It will therefore become evident that discussing the presence of images in a novel must also take the shape of a reflection on the reader. In particular, this kind investigation will try to reconcile reader-response criticism with theories proposed by prominent scholars in the context of the so-called "pictorial turn," namely David Freedberg, Hans Belting and W.J.T. Mitchell. The presence of a reader/spectator in iconotextual forms that mediates between the verbal and the visual had already been accounted for by Louvel in her *Pictorial Third*. The situation she describes, however, is not exactly the same as she discusses mainly instances of "pictorial allusions." Still, her reflections represent a valuable starting point because if already when images are simply conjured up "[t]he reader turns into spectator" (*Pictorial Third* 174), it should go without saying that the same is true for Image Novels where pictures are visible on the page. The question to pose would therefore no longer be "[w]hat happens when a reader is faced with a text that *suggests, describes, or alludes*

to the visual?" (174 emphasis mine) but rather, what happens when a reader is faced with a novel that *displays* pictures? The point of the second chapter will precisely be that of investigating not only how *Austerlitz* responds to this double devaluation of both language and images but also how it makes us *feel* the dreadful tragedy of the Shoah again. As a matter of fact, in Image Novels, the presence of images rather than fulfilling a strictly epistemological function seems to be aimed at eliciting an emotional response so that readers might be able to ethically approach and remember the past. More specifically, the process carried out by Sebald appears to be one of defamiliarization because, despite being familiar with the tragedy of the Holocaust, the reader cannot recognize it in any of the photographs displayed. Many critics have in fact discussed *Austerlitz* in terms of "Holocaust-in-absence" as the Shoah is never directly shown and yet its presence is still poignantly felt. The highly evocative photographs used precisely fulfill the purpose of providing "a mysterious surplus of pathos" (Sontag "A Mind in Mourning" 48) thus making the readers sympathize with the eponymous protagonist and, more broadly, with all the second-generation survivors. The project undertaken by Sebald therefore seems to bring Didi-Huberman's words to full realization,

> [L]a leggibilità delle immagini non sarà appunto più scontata, poiché privata dei suoi cliché, delle sue abitudini: supporrà innanzitutto la sospensione, il mutismo provvisorio davanti a un oggetto visivo che vi lascia disorientati, privi della capacità di dargli senso, forse persino di descriverlo; essa imporrà quindi la costruzione di questo silenzio in un lavoro del linguaggio capace di operare una critica dei propri cliché. *Un'immagine guardata bene sarebbe allora un'immagine che ha saputo disorientarci, e poi rinnovare il nostro linguaggio, quindi il nostro pensiero*.
>
> (When deprived of its clichés and habits, the legibility of images would not be given for granted anymore. It will presume, first of all, the suspension and the temporary mutism before a visible object that disorients you and leaves you incapable of giving it meaning

> and perhaps even describing it. The legibility will therefore impose the construction of this silence in a work of language capable of carrying out a critique of its own clichés. *An image carefully looked at would thus be an image which was able to disorient us and then to renovate our language, and thus our thoughts*. "L'immagine brucia" 254-255 my translation emphasis mine)

The third chapter will build on this premise to show that this is not far from what Hemon carries out in *The Lazarus Project*, too. The process of renewing one's language, in particular, becomes glaring in *The Lazarus Project* as the interplay of words and images together with the juxtaposition of two stories set a century apart are specifically meant to make the readers question the meaning of "America" thus suggesting that the very notion of "Americanness" needs to be reconceptualized so as it might embrace also those "liminal lives" so far overlooked in the discourses of national mythologizing. With *The Lazarus Project*, Hemon indeed attempts to "contes[t] official accounts and re-inscrib[e] counter or alternative discourses" (Awan 523) by way of giving voice to the migrants' experience of landing in the U.S. where life for them, far from being "all milk and honey" (Hemon *LP* 45), turns out to be harsher than expected. Thus, just like Sebald granted us access to Austerlitz's psychology by means of pictures, Hemon allows his readers to enter the mind of a migrant so as to make them aware of the feelings of displacement and uprooting distinctive of those lives doomed to be lived in the liminal spaces in-between borders. Despite the fact that the way in which Sebald and Hemon arrange the pictures in their novels and the relation photographs establish with the text is utterly different, the purpose is the same: enhancing an affective understanding of the historical events that underpin their novels. In such a way, they do succeed in renovating the way we think and talk about the Jewish genocide, on the one hand, and the migrants' trauma of displacement, on the other. Accordingly, since Sebald and Hemon seek to foster awareness of that side of history which is usually overlooked by eliciting

the empathy of the contemporary readers, the evocation of Stimmung and affective undertones that might resonate with the readers will play a pivotal role in the conceptualization of the Image Novel.

Thus, it will become evident that in both Sebald's *Austerlitz* and Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*, this hybridization of the verbal and the visual compels the readers to renew their stance towards images themselves and, to use Didi-Huberman's expression, to see where the it "burns." As he reminds us, "l'immagine brucia della memoria, vale a dire che essa brucia ancora, anche quando non è più che cenere: come a dire la sua essenziale vocazione alla sopravvivenza, al *malgrado tutto*" ("the image burns with memories, that is, it still burns even when it is nothing but ashes: as if to state its innate vocation for survival, for the *in spite of all*."; Didi-Huberman "L'immagine brucia" 264). Indeed, where Benjamin and Jameson saw the devaluation of images, Boehm, Mitchell and Freedberg saw their potential. For them, the centrality they acquired in the cultural landscape should be read as testimony of revived interest in images and not as an obituary,

> It may be thought that all my arguments for the power of images are invalidated by the fact of reproduction, by the fact that images have become weaker as they have become generalized, banalized, made infinitely sociable. But at the same time, what has also changed is that however much the photo may wilt and fade, however much it may be attacked by humidity and light—those remorseless phenomena of nature which also attack images of bronze and stone—the photograph is not mortal. It is not mortal because it is reproductive and reproducible. It is alive, present, and real. (Freedberg 440)

Reproduced within the very fabric of the novel, images appear to be reinvigorated and, at the same time, their presence contributes to reclaiming the power of literature to have an impact on reality. It will therefore become clear how in the Image Novel the interplay of words and images is functional to reiterate the potential of both media to foster "new, history-altering ideas" (Mitrano 8). What we need to do is simply changing our attitude towards images because after all "[s]aper

guardare un'immagine sarebbe, in qualche modo, divenire capaci di distinguere dove essa brucia, dove la sua eventuale bellezza serba il posto a 'un segno segreto,' a una crisi irrisolta, a un sintomo. Dove al cenere non si è raffreddata" ("knowing how to look at an image would mean, in a way, learning to locate where it burns, where its potential beauty holds the place for a 'secret sign,' an unresolved crisis, a symptom."; Didi-Huberman "L'immagine brucia" 253). This is exactly what Austerlitz and Brik do as, from the standpoint of the present, they make us gaze into past lives to find the symptoms of unsolved sufferings and find a cure. What Image Novels like *Austerlitz* and *The Lazarus Project* give rise to is precisely a "work of language" that might release images from their clichés, reestablish their validity and ultimately "renovate our language and our thoughts". Thus, always drawing from Didi-Huberman, the question underlying this thesis would be "a quale genere di conoscenza può dare luogo l'immagine? Che genere di contributo alla conoscenza storica è capace di dare questa 'conoscenza attraverso l'immagine'?" ("what kind of knowledge can the image generate? In what way can this 'knowledge through images' contribute to historical knowledge?"; Didi-Huberman "L'immagine brucia" 244 my translation) or, more precisely, what contribution can the Image Novel make to the historical knowledge of the Shoah, the pogroms in Eastern Europe, the Bosnian war, 9/11…? By giving voice to what was being silenced, it prompts a process of ethical remembrance of "that which [appears] difficult or impossible to remember" (Hemon *This Does Not Belong* 64) because "it is precisely where thought falters that we ought to persist in our thought or, rather, give it a new turn" (Didi-Huberman *Images in Spite* 25). By making us listen to the *gémissements de désespoir* that emanate from the pictures displayed, the Image Novel seeks to provide a new understanding of reality.

Chapter 1

Iconotextual in Mode, Novelistic in Kind

> Language and image are absolutely bound to one another, never ceasing to exchange their reciprocal lacunae. An image often appears where a word seems to fail; a word often appears where the imagination seems to fail.
>
> —Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*

1.1 A Genealogy of Iconotexts

Conveying in its very name the dualistic nature of its essence, an iconotext is "an artifact in which the verbal and the visual signs mingle to produce rhetoric that depends on the co-presence of words and images" (Wagner 16). As a fundamentally hybrid form, the iconotext thrives on the liminal—and often contended—space between two conflicting domains: the visual and the verbal. Indeed, by fostering the indubitable reconciliation between two media that have long been deemed binary opposites, iconotexts seem to have finally succeeded in carrying out the ultimate attempt to bring the hostilities between image and word to an end. This willingness to assert equal primacy for both media is embedded in their very name as the "word 'iconotext' conveys the desire to bring together two irreducible objects and form a new object in a fruitful tension in which each object maintains its specificity" (Louvel *Poetics* 15). Still, even though prominent critics like Peter Wagner, Liliane Louvel and Michele Cometa were very keen in emphasizing that the reciprocal interaction between these two media gave rise to a new form, the contours of this "object" still seem to remain quite blurred. What is an "iconotext," exactly? In a parenthetical aside, Wagner

specifies that images can irrupt into the text "by way of reference or allusion, in an explicit or implicit way" (15). Accordingly, in her *Poetics of Iconotexts*, Louvel claims that her focus is "on such occurrences of word/image apparatus as are exemplified in fiction under the guise of images translated or converted into words or visible images included in a novel as a prop to fiction" (15). The label "iconotext" seems in fact to refer more broadly to all those works (poems, essays, novels, journals…) in which images enter—be it by means of rhetorical figures like ekphrasis, whereby an image is translated into words, or, more concretely, in the form of actual pictures. However, while it is true that the origins of this hybridization might be dated back to the first examples of ekphrasis[1], this fails to explain how and why pictures are literally able to gain access to the domain of the novel without being converted in the verbal form. In the case of such novels, while we might still have examples of ekphrasis and similar rhetorical figures that introduce the visual into the verbal, what is really their distinguishing feature is the concrete insertion of pictures. Therefore, what needs to be addressed is the way in which iconotexts engage with more specific genres such as the novel and in order to do so—and to understand whether or not the presence of images might affect how these works are received—distinctions ought to be made.

Drawing from Fowler's *Kinds of Literature*, it seems of primary importance at least to reflect on whether the term "iconotext" might refer to a "kind"—which he uses as "equivalent to 'historical genre,' or the unhappily named 'fixed genre'" (56)—, a "subgenre" or a "mode." Starting from the compelling argument that "a kind is a type of literary work of a definite size, marked by a complex of substantive and formal features that always include a distinctive (though not usually unique) external structure" (74), Fowler walks us through this notion by providing the

[1] Louvel, for instance, mentions Achilles' and Perseus' shields as among the first examples of the "opening [of] the legible to the visible" (*Poetics* 15). For an overview of the origins of the interplay between words and images see also Fusillo, *Estetica della letteratura* (pp. 177-178).

example of the novel which, as a kind, "has been divided into a great many subgenres" (122). This leaves us with the task of establishing whether an "iconotext" is a "mode" or a "subgenre" of the novel. Looking more closely at the definition of these two concepts, Fowler explains that,

> In subgenre we find *the same external characteristics with the corresponding kind*, together with additional specification of content (...). Mode, by contrast, is a *selection or abstraction from kind*. It has few if any external rules, but evokes a historical kind through samples of its internal repertoire. (56 emphasis mine)

This implies that while subgenres, "over and above [the common features of the kind,] add special substantive features" (112), mode "announces itself by distinct signal[s which] may be of a wide variety: a characteristic motif, perhaps; a formula; a rhetorical proportion or quality" (107); and, one might argue, what clearer signal if not the presence itself of a picture in a novel? What is being introduced is in fact not a mere additional "specification of content"—which would make iconotexts a subgenre—but a literal "abstraction from kind." In this regard, to explain what a mode is, Fowler mainly focuses on what he calls "combined genre"—a phenomenon which takes place "when a modal term is linked with the name of a kind (...) [and] the overall form is determined by the kind alone" (107). In actual fact, Fowler restricts himself to mentioning modes which evoke literary kinds other than that of reference, as, for instance, in "comic novel" where the adjective "comic" features as a mode inasmuch as it adds to the kind of reference—the novel—external rules that belong to another historical kind, comedy. Therefore, it is not surprising that in all the examples he provides the "additional subject matter" refers merely to setting and plot,

> Setting is so decisive (...) that it often provides the basis of typology. So we have the factory novel, the school novel, the rustic novel, the city novel, the university novel, the provincial novel (and now the "regional novel"), the Indian novel, and the like. Obviously overlapping with this typology is another, partly distinct, based on plot or mythos. Hence the adventure

> novel, abolition novel, war novel, crime novel, espionage novel, political novel, novel of faith and doubt, *Frauenroman*, *Familienromanor* domestic novel, nature novel, *Bildungsroman*. (122)

In the case of iconotexts, instead, what we are dealing with is not a literary work drawing from other literary kinds but a literary (sub-)genre that taps into a completely different domain, the visual. Likewise, Louvel explains that "while allusion to a work of literature consists in a concentric (centripetal) evocation, allusion to a painting performs an excentric (centrifugal) movement" (Louvel *Pictorial* 174) and, we might argue, this is brought to an extreme when it is not a mere allusion that we witness but an actual picture. With this kind of novels, in fact, the "additional features," which the mode typically adds, do not merely refer to the subject matter but they give proof of a departure from the literary domain. Hence, precisely because the image in itself introduces elements completely exterior to the genre of the novel *per se*, it seems to be more appropriate to use the term "iconotext" to define an overarching mode—encompassing perhaps different kinds—rather than a subgenre since the latter always necessarily share with the corresponding kind some features. This is made clear also by what Wagner argues, that is, that iconotexts can generally be considered any kind of "tex[t] that work[s] with images" (17). By using the ambiguously vast term "text" and the equally vague verb "to work," we are led to conclude that the term "iconotext" refers to the general principle whereby "two semiotic systems which are fundamentally heterogeneous" blend together (Louvel *Poetics* 15) in a written form which eludes specific generic categorization. Therefore, if we wanted to outline a genealogy of iconotexts, we would have: "the novel" as the kind, "iconotext" as the mode and we would be left to define the subgenre. Cometa seems to go in this direction when he argues that a photo-text is an "iconotextual form" (76). This would in fact be perfectly in keeping with the argument proposed by Fowler whereby "modal terms tend to be adjectival" (106) and would thus further corroborate the

hypothesis that, given its general character, the term "iconotext" might be said to refer to a mode. However, if, on the one hand, this solution seems to clarify matters; on the other, the term "photo-text" raises more questions than it answers. Indeed, Cometa lists a number of terms that might be said to denote precisely "iconotextual forms," such as, the "photo-essay" and "the photographic novel" to which we might add, just to name a few, "the photo-journal" and the "graphic novel"—in other words, all artifacts that emerge from the interaction between these two fundamentally heterogeneous semiotic systems. Interestingly, despite being all grouped together under the label of "iconotextual forms," they all differ not only from the point of view of the intensity with which the visual intrudes but also of genre inasmuch as, for instance, a graphic novel will be fundamentally different from a photo-essay. Precisely by virtue of their structural difference, these two forms perfectly lend themselves to a broader reflection on how the interrelationship that exists between "icons" and "text" is functional to the purpose of a given genre.

First of all, starting from an issue of generic categorization, as their very names suggest, what we are dealing with are two completely different forms: a literary one (novel) and an epistemological one (essay). Indeed, always using Fowler's concepts, we might agree on the fact that, despite not being a novel through and through, the graphic novel can in fact be considered a subgenre of it since it shares with the kind of reference some substantial features—namely, the length and the role of the narrator. This is exactly what Baetens argues, "the graphic novel tends to adopt a format that resembles that of the traditional novel (in size, cover, paper, number of pages, etc.)" (14)[2]. With regards to the photo-essay, instead, Mitchell writes that "the

[2] In *The Graphic Novel*, Baetens provides a definition of "graphic novel" trying to explain how it differs from comic books. In particular, he identifies four different features which contribute to make the graphic novels substantially different from comics: form, content, publication format, and production and distribution aspects. While the point that he makes on the length of graphic novels is the most compelling one in this context, what he says with regards to the presence of the narrator is equally interesting when reflecting on the novel, as a form: "in the graphic novel (...), the narrator is much more present, both verbally and visually, than in the case of a comic book, where the story seems to tell itself, without any direct intervention from the narrator" (10).

'photographic essay' (...) give[s] us a literal conjunction of photographs and text—usually united by a documentary purpose, often political, journalistic, sometimes scientific" ("Photographic Essay" 285) to the point that even the images acquire an "epistemological power" (286). The difference between these two forms is therefore downright evident: perfectly in keeping with their corresponding kinds, the photo-essay aims at imparting knowledge, whereas the purpose of the graphic novel remains that of storytelling[3].

Secondly, the graphic novel and the photo-essay also differ from the point of view of the visual dimension, in both form and intensity (or, in other words, quality and quantity). The graphic novel, in fact, is usually characterized by a predominance of drawings that take up the great majority of the page (and therefore even appear in greater quantity than words) to the point that sometimes the "text [itself] reads as an image" (Eisner 10). Accordingly, Baetens insists on the importance of the purely visual aspect of words in this context since "[i]n the graphic novel words are not only meant to be read, but they must also be looked at, both in themselves and in relation to the place they occupy in the work" (152). On the contrary, the photo-essay consists mainly (if not only) of photographs—rather than drawings—but the main vehicle of information remains the written word. In this regard, Mitchell emphasizes the privileged relation that exists between photography and essay mainly because "not 'realism' but 'reality,' nonfictionality, even 'scientificity' are the generic connotations that link the essay with the photograph" ("Photographic Essay" 289).

The same reasoning that has been applied to the graphic novel and the photo-essay might be carried out for the photo-journal and the photographic novel as well. This is possible because,

[3] Baetens explains that "[w]ithin the domain of graphic literature, the basic categories are the difference between graphic novel and newspaper political cartooning or caricature (roughly speaking, the distinctive feature is storytelling: the graphic novel is a storytelling medium; short political cartoons or single-image caricatures can tell stories as well, but this is not their primary aim)." (7)

despite their structural differences, there is one aspect that each of these names seems to share: they all allow us to visualize a polarity which is always the same (image and word) but declined in different forms of representation—image, photo, sequential art, on the one hand; novel, essay, journal, on the other. Usually, the rationale seems to be the following: the second element of the compound refers to the kind of reference, whereas the first one hints at the visual elements which are being added. Yet, even if there appears to exist a name for every form, of all the terms mentioned so far none of them seems to do justice to those novels whose pages are interspersed with pictures—only "photo-text" might be said to work, though very loosely. What is interesting, in fact, is that while all of these forms mentioned above are iconotexts, not all of them might be considered photo-texts. The shortcoming of using such a term is precisely that, on the one hand, it fails to account for the specific genre of the work and, at the same time, it cannot be thought to designate a "mode" since the first element of the compound (photo-) restricts the scope by referring to those works that include not images in general but *just* photographs. Thus, neither a mode, nor a subgenre, the term "photo-text" requires an operation of narrowing down and opening up. Always using "graphic novel" and "photo-essay" as examples, what we need to learn from these two terms is to keep their direct reference to the kind they belong to, in this case, the novel. Instead, what needs to be changed is the first element because while we might encounter novels with vignettes and drawings (as is the case of *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*), this is usually not the rule as in this very novel by Eco there are also covers of music albums, newspaper front pages, film stills…. For the same reason, using the adjectival element "photographic" would be doubly misleading because, first, we would be evoking a completely different genre (the photographic novel) and, at the same time, even in novels displaying a predominance of photographs, such as *Austerlitz*, that is not the sole visual form employed as post stamps and maps

are shown as well. It therefore appears that if we were to account for the diversity of visual elements while also emphasizing the intimate relation with the corresponding kind, the only possible terms that remain are: Image Novel or Picture Novel.

1.1.1 A Matter of Names

In order to decide the most appropriate name for this form, we need to draw from key figures in the domain of visual studies: J.W.T. Mitchell, Hans Belting and Georges Didi-Huberman. While the difference between "image" and "picture" might seem of secondary importance, it might in fact change the way these works are perceived.

In his *An Anthropology of Images*, Belting draws a clear distinction between "image" and "picture," or rather, as he calls it, "medium." For him, in fact, the image comes before the picture and it is turned into picture only by virtue of the presence of a medium,

> The distinction between image and medium becomes equally apparent when we consider the inherent nature of images as the presence of an absence. The image is present to our gaze, certainly. But that presence, or visibility, relies on the medium in which the image appears, whether on a monitor or embodied in an old statue. (6)

Similarly, when in the Preface of *What Do Pictures Want?* Mitchell returns on the issue of the difference between image and picture, which he had previously tackled in *Iconology*, he seems to agree with Belting,

> By "image" I mean any likeness, figure, motif, or form that appears in some medium or other. (...) By "medium" I mean the set of material practices that brings an image together with an object to produce a picture. The book as a whole, then, is about pictures, understood as complex assemblages of virtual, material, and symbolic elements. (xiii)

Therefore, provided that "the picture is the image with a medium" (Belting 10), we might think of the novel itself a type of medium that allows us to perceive images. This idea seems to be further reinforced by Didi-Huberman who borrows Benjamin's words,

> "The past is marked by a secret sign, which sends it back to redemption. Do we not, ourselves, feel a faint breath of the air in which the people of yesterday lived? Do not the voices to which we lend our ears carry an echo of voices now extinguished?"
>
> The "breath of air" and the "echo": Benjamin called them images. (*In Spite* 170)

Lacking the materiality and concreteness of pictures, images are as intangible and as faint as a "breath of air" and an "echo." The term "Picture Novel" would thus seem more appropriate than "Image Novel" as it would account for the materiality of the object itself. However, in *Iconology*, Mitchell had already traced a genealogy of images and he pointed out that the term "image" is an umbrella term which subsumes many other forms: "[w]e speak of pictures, statues, optical illusions, maps, diagrams, dreams, hallucinations, spectacles, projections, poems, patterns, memories, and even ideas as images" (9). This brief and essential list is enough to show us that calling novels such as *Austerlitz* "Picture Novels" would once again be reductive. Sebald's novel in fact displays almost all the elements that Mitchell mentions as belonging to the broader family of "images," namely pictures and maps—and actually, the list could be further expanded if we wanted to view as "patterns" the series of pictures of eyes and doors or to focus on all the architectural details without treating them as mere photographs. Therefore, using the term "picture" would result too limiting especially for works like *Austerlitz* whose visual dimension is particularly layered. Furthermore, considering that these works frequently deal with the issue of memory and trauma while also opening up to atmospheres or, more specifically, to Stimmung the term "image" with its vagueness might prove useful precisely in the attempt to grasp what seems too intangible. Gumbrecht explains that the term Stimmung denotes in fact "specific moods and

atmospheres [which] present themselves to us as nuances that challenge (...) the potential of language to capture them" (1). As we will see in the following chapters, images become a vector of Stimmung, that is, "a means of accessing truths that would otherwise have been impossible to phrase" (Louvel *Pictorial* 184). Therefore, if at a first glance the term "picture" might seem more appropriate merely because of the materiality of the medium (the book itself), on the other hand, it would once again figure as a category which is too narrow. In this way, by calling it "Image Novel" we are able not only to acknowledge the fundamental dichotomy of word and image which characterizes all iconotextual forms, but also to clearly present it as a subgenre where the second item of the name refers to the kind of reference while the first one to the added characteristics which, in this case, could not be more external to the novel, as a genre.

In terms of word order, placing "image" before "novel" enables us to give prominence to the external features that move away from the main kind. What is more, considering that the elements that this form hybridizes are markedly different, one might think of hyphenating the two words so as to give a sense of tighter unity between the two media. However, while it is true that the hyphen is usually employed with compound nouns, not using it does not bind them forcefully and thus allows us to show how, despite their interdependence, they maintain a sort of "autonomy" from one another. In this regard, Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* will figure as a prominent example since its images do not really blend in the text—or at least not as much as in *Austerlitz*. In fact, while there certainly is a conversation between the two media, it is not the same as in Sebald's novel. Thus, not using the hyphen gives more plasticity to the name as it concurs in showing precisely what Louvel pointed out, that is, how in such forms images and text remain "in a fruitful tension in which each object maintains its specificity" (15). The advantage of using a hyphen would be that of emphasizing the reciprocal interaction, or to use Wagner's words, the "co-

presence" of these two media but at the same time it would perhaps lead us to overlook the distinctive features of each respective media which are in fact functional to the creation of a more cohesive whole[4]. Indeed, what needs to be emphasized is that this interdependence is created precisely by virtue of their divergence. Referring back to the epigraph, words and images complement each other exactly because they "appear where [the other] seems to fail" (*In Spite* 25).

1.1.2 Looking for a Definition

Despite having traced a genealogy of iconotexts and having identified the subgenre of the Image Novel, the issue of how images are visibly able to enter the novel has not been tackled yet. Indeed, most of the studies on iconotextual forms focus primarily on "how an image *suggested* by a text manifests itself" (Louvel *Pictorial* 3 emphasis mine) but little, if none, space is left to those instances where images are not translated into words. For instance, before, when discussing all the different names for iconotextual forms, one was left out, that is, photo-novel, since in order to understand why this term does not work, first it was necessary to better define the Image Novel itself. Now, in *The Pictorial Third*, Louvel talks about Jonathan Coe's *The Rain Before It Falls* in the terms of a photo-novel. Assuming that the term "photo-novel" could be adopted as a sort of sub-category to "Image Novel" to refer just to those works displaying solely photographs (as *The Lazarus Project* might be), the issue lies on the way she used it—that is, which novels she was referring to while presenting this term,

[4] See Massimo Fusillo, "Intermediality and Literary History." In his article, he traces the origins of the concept of "intermediality," a term which "labels any kind of synergy between different artistic languages: it is no mere juxtaposition, as in the case of multimedia, but *a potential fusion, a profound interaction*" (217 emphasis mine). Not using the hyphen precisely goes in the direction of an "intermedial analysis" which requires an "anti-hierarchical approach," that is, one that aims to give equal validity to the media involved.

> This novel [*The Rain Before It Falls*], a photo-novel in a way, is structured by the photographs placed at the beginning of each chapter. Their classic thematic role, that of triggering remembrance, is renewed by the diegetic necessity. (66)

This phrasing is misleading because, for someone who has not read the novel, it might make one think that each chapter is visually introduced by a photograph. However, this is not the case because in Coe's novel pictures are just alluded to and described. The question thus arises naturally: is it really the mere conjuring up of images enough to categorize such works as Image Novels? Provided that it is, where should the boundary be drawn? If *The Rain Before It Falls* can be considered a photo-novel, would it be possible to define novels like DeLillo's *Underworld*, which regularly engage with the visual, Image Novels as well? In fact, besides the ekphrastic description of Bruegel's *The Triumph of Death*, the pages of DeLillo's novel are interspersed with numerous allusions to images. A prominent example might be the extremely accurate and vivid description of a photograph provided by Klara Sax during an interview that we find in the first chapter of the first part, "Long Tall Sally",

> She said, "Not long ago I saw an old photograph, a picture taken in the midsixties, and there is a woman at the edge of the picture. The picture is crowded with people and they are in a doorway, it looks like the entranceway to a grand ballroom, and they are all wearing black and white, men and women both, and they are wearing masks as well, and I looked at the picture and I realized this was the famous party, the famous even of the era, Truman Capote's Black & White Ball (...) it took me maybe half a minute to understand that the woman at the edge of the frame was me (...) What is it about this picture that makes it so hard for me to remember myself? I thought, I don't know who that person is. (DeLillo 78-79)

The description continues but this is enough for us to wonder: if what Louvel argues is true, would this make DeLillo's novel a photo-novel as well? And, thus, what does it take for a novel to be

considered an Image Novel? As for *Underworld*, there is a clear explanation for this intense engagement with the visual: its "totalizing narrative tension" and encyclopedic yearning (Ercolino *Maximalist* 39). In fact, as a maximalist novel, we can notice that it is "literally overrun with images (...) the visual dimension cloaks and molds [its] maximalist imagery; a *hybrid* imagery which, at its intersection with other artistic media, acquires powerful expressive tools and obsessive themes" (123). In addition to this, we might argue that more in general the mere ekphrastic allusion to a photograph, a painting, a picture… or any other visual element is not enough to define such works as Image Novels. What is required, instead, is the direct and visible insertion of the image without it being transposed into words—a literal breach in the fabric of the text. Thus, the image never "loses its material quality" (Louvel *Pictorial* 191) as it keeps on existing *within* the text. As a matter of fact, as Louvel explains, whenever a "text calls the image forth, or "speaks" the image, it produces an *a fortiori pictorial discourse* during which the image exists outside the text, for discourse moulds itself on the image" (190). Therefore, while it is certainly true that when the image is translated into words it always "loses its material quality" (191), this cannot be the case with the Image Novel in which pictures intrude in the verbal without losing their visual dimension. In other words, in Image Novels the image neither "has to go through language" nor "has to be 'translated' by language" (Louvel *Pictorial* 165). Thence, even if *The Rain Before It Falls* and *Underworld* apparently seem to have everything that it takes to be classified as Image Novels, they lack one core feature: the actual presence of pictures. For this reason, it is clear that, to dispel any further doubts, we must now try to better define the boundaries of this form by addressing two paramount questions: what was it that made the hybridization of the novel with pictures possible? Why were pictures able to enter the novel at a certain moment in time?

1.2 Images Reclaiming Centrality: From the Imperialism of Language to a Dialectic

> By showing, each one shows itself, and therefore also shows the other one across from it and facing it. It therefore also shows itself to it: image shows itself to text, which shows itself to image.
>
> —Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*.

"Condemned to live in the labyrinth of our own languages" (Belting 4), for a long time we have tended to overlook the role of images by favoring that of language, which, in the constant battle for supremacy, has therefore always emerged victorious. As Louvel explains in her *Pictorial Third*, "if one wants to deal with the relationship between image and language in fairness, one has to take into account the age-long submission of the former to the latter" (1). As Pinotti and Somaini explain in the introduction to *Theories of the Image*, Rorty's codification of the linguistic turn in 1967 as well as the emergence of structuralism contributed to reinforcing the power of language to the point that in the 1960s "ogni questione gnoseologica [veniva ricondotta] in senso lato a un problema del linguaggio, da risolversi con gli strumenti della linguistica" ("every epistemological issue was treated as a problem of language that could be solved with the tools of linguistics."; Pinotti & Somaini 16 my translation). Accordingly, Gilman explains the supremacy of language in the following terms,

> linguistics, semiotics, and structuralism, all developed within and first applied to the study of language, have tended to regard language as the 'primary modeling system' on the basis of which all other semiotic systems, if not all cultural phenomena, can be understood. (17)

Language was in fact starting to be perceived as a weapon for "colonizing, reducing, and ultimately burying the natives of the visual realm" (Gilman 5). It is therefore not surprising that Mitchell himself goes as far as talking about an actual "linguistic imperialism" (*Iconology* 55) since "it appear[ed] increasingly more difficult to conceive a system of images and objects whose signifieds [could] exist independently of language" (Barthes qtd. in Mitchell *Iconology* 56). In this regard, Boehm explains that "[t]he linguistic turn seemed to undermine all attempts to make further progress with the image, unless one was attempting to show that images are themselves linguistic occurrences, or that they participate in a universal system of signs" (Boehm and Mitchell 105). The iconic/pictorial turn, as it was theorized respectively by Mitchell and Boehm, is therefore to be understood as committed to "address the conditions for representation in a broader sense" (Bohem and Mitchell 105) and to reclaim the centrality of images in the cultural landscape. How is it then possible that from a position of submission visual images rose to the point of "replac[ing] words as the dominant mode of expression in our time" (Mitchell *What* 5)? What was it then that marked the end of this "linguistic imperialism" and paved the way for the pictorial turn? While Somaini and Pinotti frame this shift of interest from "words" to "images" as a reaction against this "pan-linguistic invasion" (17), for Boehm, rather than a reaction, it was "a consequence of the turn towards language" itself (Boehm and Mitchell 105). For him in fact,

> [T]he structural thought of linguistics or the continual reference to the communicative superiority of verbal language had led to a narrowing of what classical philosophy had termed *'logos'* (...) Understanding the image as *'logos'*, as a meaning-generating process, this vision of a non-verbal, iconic *logos* was in short my motivation for ascribing paradigmatic meaning to the growing interest in the image. (Boehm and Mitchell 105-6)

In answering Boehm's letter, Mitchell does agree with him when he says,

> [T]he pictorial turn is a direct outgrowth of this development. It was inevitable that when language became the paradigmatic object of philosophy, replacing (as Rorty summarised it) 'ideas' and 'things', that images would soon be on the horizon as well. (...) it is the role of images as a 'significant other' to language that most often provides the master terms for a pictorial turn. (Boehm and Mitchell 117)

Thus, this "dangerous verbocentric dogmatism" (Eco qtd. in Mitchell *Iconology* 56 n5) was in fact the necessary precondition for what was about to follow. Indeed, Boehm saw in the attempt of linguistics to change our understanding of images the seed of a growing interest in the epistemological potential of the visual and thus an opportunity for images to restore "the long-neglected cognitive possibilities that lie in non-verbal representation" (Boehm and Mitchell 104). Having finally imposed themselves as the "significant other" to language, images were able to refute the assumption that would demote them to a "silent or mute sign, incapable of speech, sound, and negation" (Mitchell *What* 29 n2). Yet, it would be wrong to imply that these two media exist in complete isolation from one another as images do need language just like language does need images,

> [S]e la rigorosa delimitazione dei due ambiti è necessaria per evitare nocivi atteggiamenti riduzionistici della figura alla parola (e anche, perché no, viceversa), cionondimeno le due sfere dialogano nella concreta prassi espressiva e interpretativa (…) la parola e l'immagine si alleano e si sostengono vicendevolmente, consentendo di venire reciprocamente trasformate.
>
> (Although the thick line of demarcation between these two domains is necessary to avoid any harmful behavior claiming to reduce images to words—and why not perhaps the other way around as well?—the two spheres still converse with each other in the actual

> expressive and interpretative process (...) images and words join forces and reciprocally support one another—this is what allows them to be mutually transformed. Pinotti & Somaini 18 my translation)

Only by acknowledging the substantial difference between them, might we be able to see how these two domains are mutually dependent and how they in fact rely on their reciprocal support. As Pinotti and Somaini pointed out, any attempt to level the differences between them and to reduce images to words and words to images would preclude any possibility of dialogue. In this regard, to concretely explain the dynamic of this co-presence and to demonstrate how language and images mutually transform one another, it might be interesting to go back to Belting's difference between image and medium. He argues that "the image is not present in the same way the medium is present. It needs the act of animation by which our imagination draws it from its medium" (20). By applying these notions to the Image Novel, it might be argued that this act of animation is enhanced precisely by the written words that surround the image, but at the same time the latter as well has the potential to help the verbal to create new and deeper nuances of meaning. In other words, they need one another because if, on the one hand, the ability of language to account for all the complexities of reality is being doubted, on the other, we cannot but acknowledge that images still need language to make their message as effective as possible. Thus, the same questions that Mitchell poses should be pondered also when encountering a picture in a novel: "[w]hat is an image? What is the difference between images and words?" (*Iconology* 1). Or, in simpler terms, what can images tell that words cannot? And what can words illustrate that images fail to? In this regard, Vietta argues that "the literature of the modern age (...) [is] dominated by a profound sense of epistemological and *linguistic crisis*, in which the apprehension of any kind of totality is

impossible, and the fragment or detail all that remains" (qtd. in Long 9 emphasis mine). If it is actually as Vietta argues that modern literature is characterized by a linguistic crisis, it might be plausible to think of a process like the pictorial turn as also unfolding in the context of contemporary literature and to see the emergence of the Image Novel as a way to respond to this linguistic crisis. As language fails, images take over. It is exactly this perceived failure of language along with the effects of the pictorial turn in the cultural landscape that seem to enable us to explain the presence of pictures in contemporary novels. As Belting argues, "restrict[ing] and clos[ing] off part of the semantic spectrum limit[s] our ability to describe and at the same time also narrow[s] our very thinking" (4). Accordingly, in the attempt to achieve a more complex understanding of reality and to piece together the fragments of this lost totality, Image Novels sought a reconciliation between these two media in which as one (language) was failing the other (images) came to the rescue. Their representation of reality becomes indeed more accurate and detailed precisely because they make two different perspectives on reality converge and, in such a way, they redress the perceived lacunae of language. Thus, if their relation was so far thought in terms of "a struggle for territory [and] a contest of rival ideologies" (Mitchell *Iconology* 43), the battle is in fact not one for supremacy but rather, as Mitchell says, one for "equal rights with language, not to be turned into language" (Mitchell *What* 47). When it comes to Image Novels then the process does not appear to be as Louvel explains it, "[w]hen the image (outside the text) is translated by the text, it becomes an image-in-text that produces a text/image; it loses its pictorial permanence to be de/recomposed in a chain of language" (*Pictorial* 189). The visual elements in an Image Novel in fact never lose their "pictorial permanence" because they are never reduced to text. Likewise, "[w]hen the iconic is invoked, *it never implies a withdrawal from language*, but rather that a

difference vis à vis language comes into play" (Boehm and Mitchell 107 emphasis mine). It is exactly on this *difference* that the Image Novel thrives—"le immagini non sono parole, non si comportano come parole, non sono strutturate (né semanticamente né sintatticamente) come il linguaggio, fanno venire all'essere mondi radicalmente diversi da quelli che emergono nel proferimento di una parola" ("images are not words, they do not behave as words, they are not structured (neither semantically nor syntactically) like words, they allow for the emergence of realities which are radically different from those that surface from the utterance of a word."; Pinotti & Somaini 17 my translation). Therefore, it is not a negation of their alterity but rather an acknowledgement of it as it is by not "turning images into language" that the extreme potential of both media might be illuminated. Thus, what we have to look for is not when and how pictures took the upper hand on language but simply when and how they began to be interlocked as it is precisely by virtue of their being fundamentally distinct that they are able to complement each other.

1.2.1 Unity in Heterogeneity

If, as Cassirer pointed out, it is true that "[e]very great work of art is characterized by a deep structural unity" (163), the inherent cohesiveness of Image Novels—as fundamentally iconotextual forms—relies primarily on the cooperation between these two media which nonetheless remain fundamentally different. This "co-presence" certainly does not annul their dissimilarity; on the contrary, "such differences are a necessary condition for hybridization" (Mitchell *Iconology* 55) and it is therefore they which allow for a more complex and vivid

representation of reality. Words and pictures in fact should not be seen as simply juxtaposed one next to the other but rather as symbiotically interlocked by virtue of their divergence. Thus, the "deep structural unity" which characterizes the Image Novel is one born out of a tension between two opposing forces which still need one another in order to create a more cohesive whole. This is in keeping with what Frow argues concerning the origins of genres; in fact, in answering the question "[w]here do genres come from?" he emphasizes that they usually arise from a "process of inversion, or displacement, or *combination*" (150). The last one, in particular, neatly encloses the dynamics underlying the formation of iconotexts and, more specifically, Image Novels as they originate from a synthetic act of combination of two media. In actual fact, the importance of questioning and investigating the presence of a strong visual dimension in novels lies precisely in what Boehm suggests, "'image' is not simply some new topic, but relates much more to a different mode of thinking"—a new thinking, one perhaps might suggest, of reality (Boehm and Mitchell 104). This is in stark contrast to what Heusser and Eco argue as they emphasize the exclusive reliance of images on words—the former believes that "if we do not know what a given image depicts, the image has no way of conveying the knowledge to us." (qtd. in Louvel *Pictorial* 40), likewise the latter writes, "[w]ithout text, the image lies or gives way to a multitude of interpretations" (qtd. in Wagner 30). However, this is only partially true when it comes to Image Novels because neither images function as a mere decor to words, nor words figure as a simple caption to images. In fact, it is not the text alone that clarifies the image as the presence of the image as well "enlightens the text, supplementing and complementing it, bringing in meaning and energy that would not have been possible otherwise" (Louvel *Pictorial* 191). Indeed, the insertion of images in novels should not be regarded as having a merely "decorative" function but as an

embracing of—and an accounting for—a new mode of conceptualizing reality so as to make its representation more vivid. In fact, as Gilman explains,

> Language may annex but it can never completely subjugate the image. If the image lurks in the heart of language as its unspeakable other, criticism of the visual arts should be open to the possibility that pictures harbor a similarly charged connection with language—as an invisible other. (23)

It therefore appears clear that just like "[f]or a great painter, a great musician, or a great poet, the colors, the line, rhythms, and words are not merely a part of his technical apparatus [but rather] necessary moments of the productive process itself" (Carriser 141-2); "icons" and "text" (with their respective declensions) as well should not be looked at as two separate tools but rather as "necessary moments of the productive process" which exist in reciprocal interaction. Therefore, with iconotextual forms, it becomes particularly evident that "[o]ur aesthetic perception exhibits a much greater variety and belongs to a much more complex order than our ordinary sense perception" (Cassier 144) because not only do they aim at granting us access to the realm of life, but they also provide "an intensification of life" (Cassirer 143). By opening themselves up to the domain of the visual and not restricting themselves to that of the verbal, iconotexts are able to account for this complexity. Cassirer's words therefore come to full realization as in the very aesthetic project of Image Novels we are made aware of the fact that "no one symbolic form possesses a monopoly on the truth [and] only the systematic totality of the different modes of understanding can serve as the expression of 'truth' and 'reality.'" (Lofts xxvi). According to Mitchell, this happens because images and words have access to different aspects of reality and it exists a gap between what they can respectively express,

> The image is the sign that pretends not to be a sign, masquerading as (or, for the believer, actually achieving) natural immediacy and presence. The word is its "other," the artificial, arbitrary production of human will that disrupts natural presence by introducing unnatural elements into the world—time, consciousness, history, and the alienating intervention of symbolic mediation. (*Iconology* 43)

Thus, just like the pieces of a puzzle, when assembled, these two symbolic forms create a more comprehensive view of reality precisely because they approach it from two different perspectives at once. Mitchell, however, does not see this process as one of reconciliation but rather as a struggle for dominance,

> The dialectic of word and image seems to be a constant in the fabric of signs that a culture weaves around itself. (…) The history of culture is in part the story of a protracted struggle for dominance between pictorial and linguistic signs, each claiming for itself certain proprietary rights on a "nature" to which only it has access. (*Iconology* 43-44)

This is not far from what Lofts argues in his introduction to Cassirer's first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* where he introduces the concept of *Auseinandersetzung* (confrontation),

> Although Cassirer never explicitly designates or defines the term "Auseinandersetzung" as a *terminus technicus*, it is clear that it operates in Cassirer's work (...) and goes to the core of his conception of symbolic reality. (...) Each symbolic form is said to constitute itself only in and through its *Auseinandersetzung* with each of the other symbolic forms. (xlvii)

As an inherently dialectic process, *Auseinandersetzung* becomes particularly useful when discussing Image Novels. In fact, this very term gives voice to this "unity in heterogeneity" as, on the one hand, the first part of the term accounts for the structural difference that exists between

images and words—"[t]he *Aus-einander*-, the out-and-apart-from-one-another, articulates the differentiation and distinctness of entities" (Fried 173)—while the second half emphasizes the unity that necessarily needs to be postulated—"[t]he *-setzung* indicates a positing, a setting forth or out of entities (…) as an articulated whole" (Fried 173). What is interesting in fact is that, while so far, the relation between word and image has been defined in terms of a "co-presence," Mitchell's argument along with the concept of *Auseinandersetzung* allow us to speak of it in terms of a dialectic. This, however, raises a number of questions that need to be addressed: What would be the implications of talking about a dialectic? Is it really, as Mitchell says, a constant protracted struggle for dominance between pictorial and linguistic signs" (*Iconology* 43-44)? Or, do perhaps the terms "dialectic" and "*Auseinandersetzung*" harbor some hope for a reconciliation and thus illuminates that "deep unity" Cassirer talks about?

Following Plato's definition, a dialectical process is one which implies "some sort of contradictory process between opposing sides" and "a back-and-forth dialogue or debate" (Maybee). Thus, just like "Socrates' interlocutors [would] change or refine their views in response to Socrates' challenges and [eventually would] come to adopt more sophisticated views" (Maybee), in Image Novels the visual and the verbal exist in an ongoing debate which, as it moves along, leads towards an increasingly more refined vision of reality. In this regard, Gilman seems to be perfectly outlining the mechanisms underlying the formation of Image Novels,

> language must be curbed in its tendency to replace the picture with a verbal substitute that threatens not only to rearrange or blunt its visual impact but to falsify it. As a check on this tendency, the language of description and analysis must enter into a *symbiotic* relationship with the picture, *a dialectic of mutual illumination and correction*. (12 emphasis mine)

Having relinquished any claim to "replace the picture with a verbal substitute," Image Novels welcomed the visual by allowing it to keep its very form. It is precisely this opening up that engenders a process which is not only one of mutual illumination—since language and image "never ceas[e] to exchange their reciprocal lacunae" (Didi-Huberman *In Spite* 26)—but also one of correction because, by exposing each other's shortcomings they remedy them and allow themselves "to be mutually transformed" (Pinotti & Somaini 18). It is therefore not surprising that Gilman himself, defines the dynamics of this relation of "mutual illumination and correction" in terms of a "dialectic" and, accordingly, Louvel emphasizes that "one cannot but perceive word/image relationship in terms of reconciliation, as a mutual approach, dialectic cooperation" (*Pictorial Third* 38). It might in fact be argued that, as an iconotextual form, it is precisely this contrastive unity that the Image Novel fosters between words and images that grants it access to a higher and more complex truth. Similarly, Heiddeger's take on *Auseinandersetzung* suggests "a method that achieves an understanding of one thing by examining it in its opposition to another" (qtd. in Fried 173). This is not far from what Gilman pointed out as this method of confrontation itself aims at a form of mutual illumination as its ultimate purpose is "to interpret the opponent in such a way as to challenge oneself as deeply as possible so that the fundamental questions at issue emerge" (Fried 173). Accordingly, in Image Novels, the verbal and the visual co-exist in a state of constant confrontation [*Auseinandersetzung*] where the two media question and challenge one another thus making their respective weaknesses emerge. In this sense, the dialectic between them rather than being a "struggle for dominance" appears like a constructive dialogue that leads to mutual improvement. As Heidegger explains, this method of "confrontation does not express itself in 'polemic' but rather in the manner of interpretive construction, of the placement of the

antagonist in his most potent and most dangerous position" (qtd. in Fried 173). Thus, if Mitchell still envisioned this dialectic as a "constant struggle for dominance,"

> An *Auseinandersetzung* is [in fact] the strife that divides and unites two antagonistic positions of a conflictual relationship of opposition. The *Auseinandersetzung* only appears at first to have a negative and defensive character: in truth, it is productive of the positions. Thus, it is not that two already-existing unrelated positions clash but that the positions themselves are a product of the strife of opposition and thus exist only in the unity of their antithetical opposition to each other. (Lofts xlix)

It is precisely by recognizing the Image Novel as the outcome of a relation which is quintessentially dialectic that we might be able to acknowledge that "*Auseinandersetzung* [between image and language] does not divide unity, much less destroy it. It builds unity; it is the gathering" (Heidegger qtd. in Fried 174). Therefore, for them to be considered "symbolic in a new and deeper sense," what needs to be acknowledged is that they are in fact characterized by "a deep unity and continuity" (Cassirer 146) which is achieved by a process of mutual implementation between words and images. As a result, discussing the dialectic between them in terms of *Auseinandersetzung* allows us to think of their relation "not as an interrelationship based on the imperialism of language" (Louvel *Pictorial Third* 1) but rather as one that wants to reclaim equal primacy for both. As Marin suggests,

> The highest meaning, the most sublime meaning, is at work within the gap between the visible (what is shown, represented, depicted, put on the stage) and the legible (what can be said, formulated, asserted, put into words and sentences). (16)

While it is true that he was talking about a letter the French painter Poussin wrote to his friend Chantelou in 1603 to comment on a painting he was sending him, we might still use his words to

our advantage. Thus, rather than being a source of division, this gap overbrims with possibilities. By putting into conversation these two media, the Image Novel makes the most of this gap and allows us to experience "these contrasts (...) in their full strength" (Cassirer 150). The responsibility of this confrontation, however, does not rest solely on the medium of the book (which is concretely bringing these two symbolic forms together) because, as Cassirer argues, we––the recipients—in the first place need to be able to recognize the usefulness of contrasting these two "unrelated positions" (Lofts xlix). It is in fact only in this way that "in our aesthetic experience [these contrasts] coalesce into one indivisible whole" (Cassirer 150). If we were yet to see this opposition as a "struggle for dominance," the promise of unity would remain unfulfilled. This is the reason why what needs to be investigated now is the unifying principle that actually makes this dialectic relation possible—what is needed is in fact a mediator that might act as the actual catalyst of this synthesis.

1.3 The Human Factor

> Like the process of speech the artistic process is a dialogical and dialectic one. Not even the spectator is left to a merely passive role
>
> —Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*

In Cassirer's acknowledgment of the active role of the spectator, we find validation of the idea that what makes this synthesis between "image" and "novel" possible is the recipient who, in the case of Image Novels, is at once "spectator" and "reader"—two roles, taken up by the same person, that complement each other as not only one could not exist without the other but also

because their disjunction would imply the failure of this synthetic project.[5] Indeed, this very view of the reader as the one who allows for the realization of the text, or more generally, the artistic project can be found in Iser's *The Act of Reading a Theory of Aesthetic Response* where he explains that "the reader must participate in the assembly of meaning by realizing the structure inherent in the text" (152). Thus, just like in any other fictional work, the "role of the reader emerges from this interplay of perspectives, for he finds himself called upon to mediate between them" (Iser 33). The same is true for the reader of iconotextual forms with the sole difference that while the mediation Iser is alluding to is one between "narrator, characters, plot-line"—what he calls "textual perspectives" (33)—in the case of the Image Novel, the perspectives involved are not merely textual but also visual. The reader/spectator, in fact, figures as the mediator of images and words and, as such, guarantees the success of the dialectic between them. As Flint suggests,

> This reciprocity takes place most interestingly not at the level of fictional representation, nor even in the pages of those novelists, from André Breton to W. G. Sebald to Marianne Wiggins, who insist that their readers engage with image alongside text. It lies in the imaginative power that can be generated by practitioners in both media when they hand the interpretation of their work over to the reader or viewer (...) dissolving the barriers of space and time that lie between the words on the page, or the flat surface of print or light box, and the viewer's psychic investment. The Barthes that matters here is not the late elegiac writer of *Camera Lucida* but the killer of the author, the liberator of the reader. (397-398)

Having been finally recognized as "that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted" (Barthes "Death" 148), the readers can reclaim their active

[5] This synthetizing action has already been accounted for in reader-response criticism. Iser, for instance, believes that "apperception [of a work of fiction] can only take place in phases, each of which contains aspects of the object to be constituted, but none of which can claim to be representative of it (...) The incompleteness of each manifestation necessitates syntheses, which in turn bring about the transfer of the text to the reader's consciousness. The synthetizing process, however, is not sporadic—it continues throughout every phase of the journey" (109). Crucially, he continues by emphasizing that "[t]he fulfillment [of this synthetizing process] takes place not in the text, but in the reader, who must 'activate' the interplay" of the parts (110).

role in the construction of meaning. This is the common ground that functions as the unifying element which allows us to see unity in heterogeneity and to explain the actual presence of pictures in novels because, as Barthes suggests, "there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader" ("Death" 148). As Iser explains,

> the literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the aesthetic: the artistic pole is the author's text and the aesthetic is the realization accomplished by the reader. In view of this polarity, it is clear that the word itself cannot be identical with the text or with the concretization, but must be situated somewhere between the two. It must inevitably be virtual in character, as it cannot be reduced to the reality of the text or to the subjectivity of the reader, and it is from this virtuality that it derives its dynamism. (21)

While he was certainly not referring to iconotextual forms, we can extend this reasoning to Image Novels as well which therefore might be said to exist "somewhere between" the artistic and the aesthetic pole. In other words, we might argue that it is not just the material presence of the book––or, in Iser's words, "the reality of the text"—which "triggers an interplay between the two" media (Louvel *Pictorial* 189) as it happens also by virtue of the readers themselves who are willing (or rather required) to reconcile them in their reading experience. The process of synthesis takes place in fact on two levels: one unfolds on the pages of the book (where images and words are materially fused together), the other in the mind of the reader. Louvel, in particular, already acknowledged the role of the readers as she saw their presence as essential for the emergence of what she calls the "pictorial third image, [which] is the property and invention of the reader" (Louvel *Pictorial* 189). Yet, despite having revealed the presence of the reader, she believes that there can be no common ground between these two media as for her "[w]ord and image are irreducible in spite of their convergence and complementarity" (*Pictorial* 37). Indeed, she does not see this "third image" as the outcome of the synthesis between "image" and "word" operated in (and by) the reader's

mind but rather as resulting from the apperception of an instability within the text brought about "the linguistic description of a pictorial phenomenon" (Leblanc ix). However, accounting for the creation of this "third" image means jumping right to the conclusion thus overlooking the importance of the presence of an "embodied" reader. In fact, as Iser explains, "although the reader[s] must participate in the assembly of meaning by realizing the structure inherent in the text, it must not be forgotten that [they] stan[d] outside the text" (Iser 152). While it is certainly true that the encounter of these two media generates in the mind of the reader a new "image," it is in fact the living body itself of the reader that seems to represent a third external medium that exists alongside the verbal and the visual ones. Indeed, as Belting suggests, "our bodies themselves constitute a place, a locus, where the images we receive leave behind an invisible trace" (38). It might be argued that this "trace" is precisely the third pictorial image Louvel talks about which results from the reader's perception of the actual images displayed on the pages of the novel. For this reason, it seems of paramount importance to focus not only on the product of this synthesis between words and images operated in (and by) the readers' mind but also on the process that leads to this "third" image, that is, on the conditions that allow for this synthetic endeavor. In order to do so, what is required is an effort to try to reconcile literary theory with visual studies so as to see whether or not there exists any similarities between the way in which words and images appeal to the reader. Accordingly, Frow suggests that it is always "important to stress the open-endedness of genres and the irreducibility of texts to a single interpretative framework" (Frow 30). This is particularly true for Image Novels that display a recurrent use of pictures and which would therefore be reductive to study solely from the standpoint of literary studies; instead, an appropriate analysis of this specific works should draw from the interpretative framework of visual studies as well. In particular, the study on "image" and "novel" seem to converge on the issue of response

because, as we were saying before, the receiver of an iconotextual form is not merely a reader but also a viewer. Indeed, both reader-response criticism and visual theorists like Freedberg, Belting and Mitchell endow the reader and the viewer, respectively, with an animating and enlivening power. As we shall see, be it a novel or a picture, the art object analyzed is said to come into being precisely thanks to the recipient. Therefore, it might be argued that even though the response elicited by Image Novels is dualistic in nature, the effects produced by images and words do not come to the readers as two distinct entities but rather as an indivisible whole to the point that discerning whether a given effect was aroused by the text or the picture becomes impossible. This is part and parcel of these works' opening up to Stimmung because, as Gumbrecht explains, these atmospheres and moods "are experienced on a continuum" (2) and therefore "challenge our powers of discernment and description" (2). Thus, considering that Image Novels seem to fuse together in a continuum two different art forms with the intent of creating specific effects, a reflection on these novels is deeply tied to the study of *Stimmung*. What is more, while it is true that this phenomenon "never exist[s] wholly independent of the material components of works" (Gumbrecht 3)—in this case the interlocking of the verbal and the visual—it also important to acknowledge that *Stimmung* "stand[s] in a necessary relationship to our bodies" (6). This is precisely the reason why, when analyzing such works, we cannot overlook the "human factor," that is, the readers' personal engagement.

1.3.1 At Once Reader… and Spectator

> De même que les vingt-quatre lettres de l'alphabet servent à former nos paroles et exprimer nos pensées, de même les linéaments du corps humain servent à exprimer les diverses passions de l'âme pour faire paraître au dehors ce que l'on a dans l'esprit.
>
> —Nicolas Poussin

Echoing Cassirer, Rosenblatt pointed out that "critical theory and practice both suffer from failure to recognize that the reader carries on a dynamic, personal, and unique activity (15). Likewise, Iser argues that "it scarcely seemed to occur to critics that the text could only have a meaning when it was read" (20). For this reason, Rosenblatt asserts the necessity of reclaiming the centrality of the readers by recognizing their fundamentally active role,

> As we survey the field of literary theory, then, the reader is often mentioned, but is not given the center of the stage. The reason is simple; the reader is usually cast as a passive recipient, whether for good or ill, of the impact of the work. (...) Within the past few years, the spotlight has started to move in the direction of the reader. (4)

Before delving into what Rosemblatt says concerning the relation between text and reader, it might be useful to try and apply reader-response criticism to iconotextual forms. Iser, in fact, argues that "[i]n every literary work (...) the message is transmitted in two ways, in that the reader 'receives' it by composing it" (21) and he explains it by saying that "[p]ractically every discernible structure in fiction has this two-sidedness: it is verbal and affective. The verbal aspect guides the reaction (...); the affective aspect is the fulfillment of that which has been prestrcutured by the language of the text" (21). Now, this formula has to be slightly altered. In the case of Image Novels, the first "aspect" Iser mentions does not consist merely of a verbal dimension, but it is rather the result of

the cooperation between the verbal and the visual. Thus, in order to account for both dimensions, rather than "verbal aspect" we might call it the "iconotextual variant." As for the second one, without having to change it, it might be sufficient to simply specify that with "language of the text" we are not strictly referring to linguistic elements and structures but rather more broadly to all the systems of communication employed—in this way, language would be endowed with a broader meaning suggesting a sort of "language of iconotexts" whose lexis consists not only of words but also of images. In this way, saying that the "emotional component" is the realization of what the text's language has prestructured works as a confirmation of what was previously discussed, that the response induced by Image Novels is dualistic in nature. In fact, what has been prestructured by the "language" of these novels is precisely the merging of images and words—a process that reaches utter fulfillment with the active role of the reader/spectator who is invested by the effect elicited by words and images but perceives them in unison rather than separately thus contributing to the realization of a more stratified atmosphere. This approach would allow us to think of images and words as bound to one another forming a self-standing pole that the iconotextual form has prestructured and that the readers bring to full realization. Accordingly, Iser argues that "the constituting of meaning and the constituting of the reading subject are (...) interacting operations that are both structured by the aspects of the text" (Iser 152)—in this case, its being an iconotext. Indeed, he specifies that "the constitution of meaning (...) gains its full significance when something *happens* to the reader" (Iser 152). Interestingly, not only both reader-response criticism and visual studies seem to agree on this point, but Belting even brings it to an extreme by suggesting that images "colonize our bodies" (9). He explains in fact that "[f]rom the perspective of anthropology, we are not the masters of our images, but rather in a sense at their mercy; they colonize our bodies (our brains)" (10). Yet, even if it is true that "it is (...) the images

that are in control" (Belting 10) and that therefore "[a]ll we can do is remain alert to the pull of the image" (Freedberg 27), at the same time we cannot deny the active role of the spectator because in the end "an image can't be anything but an image. Whatever its power, it is we who have endowed it with its power" (Augé qtd. in Belting 57). From the point of view of the verbal dimension, Rosenblatt certainly agrees because, on the one hand, she acknowledges that it is the text that appeals to the reader, "the text produces a response in the reader. (The text acts on the reader.)" (16), but, on the other hand, she also accounts for the active role of the reader, "[t]he reader, we can say, interprets the text. (The reader acts on the text.)" (16). Thus, considering the decisive role played by readers and spectators, it might be useful to reflect on Louvel's questions "What happens when the body is brought into play? An opening? A type of dreaming also? A shiver, an emotion?" (*Pictorial* 185). To these issues, Freedberg would perhaps have answered by saying that when faced with a picture we "replenish such banality with all the elan of an emotion which belongs only to myself (...) supplement it—*flesh it out*—by looking more deeply into ourselves" (430 emphasis mine). What is interesting here is the choice of words operated by Freedberg as he says "flesh it out." This is in keeping with what Belting as well suggests,

> Tom Mitchell's question "What do pictures want?" is in fact the question "What do we want from pictures?" The answer is that *we want them to be alive* even though we know very well that it is we who are lending them a life, a life that is none other than our own. (130 emphasis mine)

In Freedberg's case the issue is therefore brought a step forward as it is not merely that we want them to be alive but that we want them to be in the flesh. In fact, he argues that "the effectiveness (good and bad) of images is the tacit belief that the bodies represented on or in them somehow have the status of *living bodies*" (Freedberg 12 emphasis mine). This is not far from what Rosenblatt says concerning literary works as she believes that it is the presence of the reader that

"bring[s] a poem into being" (Rosemblatt 15). This happens because, using Belting's words, "we internalize them in such a way that we come to consider them as our own. (…) we endow them with personal meaning" (16) which is perfectly in keeping with what Rosenblatt suggests, "[t]he reader brings to the text his past experience and present personality" (12). More specifically, she explains,

> The reader's main purpose is to participate as fully as possible in the potentialities of the text. But much of the interest and vitality and texture of the total literary experience arises from the intensely personal activity of thought and feeling with which the literary transaction is impregnated and surrounded. And the matrix of this is, of course, the personality and world of the individual reader. (Rosenblatt 69)

This is exactly what Belting meant when he said that "we endow them with personal meaning" (16). This back and forth between literary and visual studies enables us to conclude that "our bodies themselves operate as a living medium by processing, receiving, and transmitting images" and words (Belting 5). This is the reason why the presence of an embodied reader necessarily needs to be postulated especially in the case of iconotextual forms where the effect of the presence of the reader is necessarily twofold as it allows us to think not only of the images but also of the "text" itself—be it a poem or a novel—as living things. Interestingly, it is Belting himself that reclaims the centrality of the body—and, surprisingly, of language as well,

> Semiotics, one of modernity's great achievements in abstraction, has separated the world of signs from the world of bodies. And signs belong to the cognitive rather than the sensory realm, so much so that in semiotic discourse even pictures often seem to be reduced to iconic signs, a symmetry between linguistic and visual signs (as well as the primacy of language as the guiding system) being elementary for semiotics. Such a functionalist approach was soon imposed on the concept of image. It did away with the body, just as it discarded language. (Belting 11)

This passage from Belting's *An Anthropology of Images* is particularly useful to our ends as first it laments how language has been elected to *the* "guiding system" but at the same time he acknowledges how this functionalist approach was contributing to making it more and more abstract. Thus, not only does he reclaim a space for images in the cultural landscape, but he is also committed to reasserting the centrality of language, not as a mere system of signs but as bound to "the world of bodies"—as images are. By reestablishing the connection of both images and language to the body, Belting introduces a common ground between the two media and reclaims equal primacy for both. As Fusillo pointed out,

> [P]arola e immagine si sono fronteggiate più volte nel corso della storia, in una lotta anche ideologica per il predominio nel campo artistico; tuttora numerosi pensatori apocalittici lamentano il rischio che la letteratura sia fagocitata dalla potenza mediatica della civiltà dell'immagine. In realtà (…) la cultura e l'estetica contemporanee auspicano un'interazione fra parola e immagine, superando (…) ogni dicotomia netta. (175)
>
> (Throughout history, word and image have repeatedly confronted each other in a struggle–also ideological—for the supremacy in the artistic landscape; to this day, many apocalyptic thinkers lament the risk that literature will be phagocytized by the mediatic power of the visual culture. In fact, (…) contemporary culture and aesthetics wish for an interplay between word and image so as to overcome (…) sharp dichotomies. Fusillo *Estetica* 175 my translation)

Indeed, what we might have expected was for language to be completely discarded in favor of images but instead, even someone like Freedberg, who is convinced of the fact that "pictures are more eloquent than words" (184), cannot deny that "it is the correlation with the text that [i]s significant" (181). This suggests that we are moving in the direction of an attempt to transcend the dichotomy between these two media—in this case, under the sign of the recipient. Therefore, were we to ponder Louvel's question "[i]s it once more the power of the text (still envisaged in its

masculine dimension) to give the image back its flesh, to, once again, give it life?" (Louvel *Pictorial* 154), Belting's argument on Semiotics and Freedberg's acknowledgment of the cooperation between the verbal and the visual would enable us to honestly answer that it is not the text that "fleshes the image out" but rather the reader/spectator.

Thus, from the standpoint of the reader, it appears that "[t]he phenomenon occurring once a text refers to an image and attempts to make the reader "see" constitutes a superimposition of visions, where the reading/legible vision produces a modality of the visual reaching out toward the visible" (Louvel *Pictorial* 175). At the crossroads of this superimposition of visions lies the reader who has to make a compromise between the input that comes from images and the one that comes from words. The product will inevitably be a synthesis of the two that will have preserved some elements coming from what has been *seen* while abandoning others and, vice versa, keeping some features of what has been *read* while disposing of some others. In fact, to circle back to Didi-Huberman, what happens is precisely a process of constant oscillation whereby the lacunae of language are made up by the visual instances and the shortcomings of images are redressed by the verbal,

> This is because they are such strangers to each other and because, at the same time, each discerns itself in the other: each one distinguishes a tinge, a vague outline of itself in the ground of the other, deep in its eye or its throat. Each one draws the other toward itself or is drawn toward it. There is always a tension. (Nancy 64)

Constantly moving back and forth from the verbal to the visual and vice versa, Image Novels have proven fertile ground for the appeasement of these two "strangers." This reconciliation, however, could not be possible without the readers who in fact figure as the point of equilibrium of this oscillation. Endowed with an active mediating power, readers are able to make the most of the

apparent contradictions that exist between word and image and therefore it is they who allow for the mutual illumination of these two media. Cassirer once wrote,

> In the work of the artist the power of passion itself has been made a formative power. (…) Not even the spectator is left to a merely passive role. (…) But art turns all these pains and outrages, these cruelties and atrocities, into a means of self-liberation, thus giving us an inner freedom which cannot be attained in any other way. (…) Art must always give us motion rather than mere emotion. (…) If we were unable to grasp the most delicate nuances of the different shades of feeling, unable to follow the continuous variations in rhythm and tone, if unmoved by sudden dynamic changes, we could not understand and feel [these works]. (149-150)

In Image Novels like Sebald's *Austerlitz* and Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*, these "sudden dynamic changes" involve their very core structure as what we witness are formal shifts from the verbal to the visual, from words to images. "[A] text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination," Barthes would say ("Death" 148) and, in fact, were the readers not to see unity in their substantial heterogeneity, the realization of the symbolic project of Image Novels would not come to utter fulfillment and therefore the representation of reality they offer will inevitably appear fragmentary. Whereas, when committed to participate in the formation of meaning, readers will be invested by the power of art to elicit "motion rather than mere emotion."

In this regard, these two novels will figure as a prominent example since with them it becomes particularly evident that "the choice of pictures, indeed the introduction of visual art, is correlated with themes and topics" (Fowler 116) which, more specifically, include—as Cometa already mentioned—a fundamental "rielaborazione del passato traumatico dei singoli e della collettività. La questione del fototesto attraversa quella dell'autobiografia, della memoria (e della *post-memory*) e del tragico" ("problematization of the traumatic past buried in the history of both single individuals and the collectivity. The issue of the photo-text intersects those of

autobiography, memory (and *post-memory*) as well as the tragic."; 113 my translation). Indeed, the images displayed have a very specific aim, that of eliciting both an emotional and ethical response in the readers towards—in Sebald's case—the horrors of the Second World War and—in Hemon's—the atrocious acts of violence migrants had to endure upon their arrival on the "land of freedom and great opportunities" at the beginning of the twentieth century. As we will see, on the one hand, Hemon questions the very core values usually associated with the ideal of "Americanness" by giving voice to "the fragmented consciousness of the migrant" both on a thematic and structural level (Weinger 215); on the other, Sebald with his works aims at finding a cure for the "individual and collective amnesia" (*Natural History* 10) by encouraging his readers to "look backward" and to reflect on "what has been largely obliterated" (4). As a matter of fact, having realized that his compatriots were growing apathetic towards those "horrors which, at that time, surrounded them on all sides" (Sebald *Natural History* 9), Sebald makes the stylistic and conscious decision not to display in *Austerlitz* the most widely known pictures of the Holocaust––to which perhaps people no longer emotionally respond—but rather, images which are necessarily different from the ones belonging to our collective cultural memory. In the next chapter, it will in fact be pointed out that this creates a friction between—to use Belting's terminology—the "traces" left in our minds by the images coming from the collective narratives of the Holocaust and those displayed in the Sebald's novel. This tension arises precisely because, as Belting explains, "our natural body represents a collective body" (Belting 38) and therefore in our reading experience we always bring our "environment, historical time, education, and upbringing" (38). Hence, Sebald's choice to insert pictures radically different from the ones we are used to has the effect of showing us how "ephemeral [our personal images]" can be (Belting 38) and how susceptible they are to alterations. It will indeed become clear that "[w]hen we

suddenly rediscover our own culture in images preserved in museums[,] archives," and novels, even the most "[f]amiliar images strike us as foreign and in need of explanation" (Belting 44). Therefore, what this novel foster in our minds is a process of readjustment as it wants us to superimpose Austerlitz's private photographs on the ones with which we are more familiar thus forcing us to look at those events from a different perspective. In this, art's ability to give "motion" beside "mere emotion" becomes evident as Sebald's novel not only aims at eliciting an emotional response in the readers to counteract the "apathy" which was perceived to be spreading, but—like Hemon's—it also invites us to take active part in the process of remembering as it encourages us to consciously direct our gaze towards the past. Both of them are in fact able to turn "these pains and outrages, these cruelties and atrocities, into a means of self-liberation" as with their works they allow us to let go of "inherited and produced images" (Eshel 91) and to recover all those private stories that, like Austerlitz's and Lazarus', had fallen into oblivion. In particular, in its both visual and verbal engagement with the tragically known history of the Holocaust, *Austerlitz* figures as a prominent example to start reflecting on the Image Novel as it will provide us with some useful insights on how such form explores themes of memory, trauma and loss on both a collective and personal level.

Chapter 2

An Image Novel to Remember: Illustrating the Past in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*

2.1 Children of the War: How to Tell Unspeakable Horrors

> At the end of the war I was just one year old, so I can hardly have any impressions of that period of destruction based on personal experience. Yet to this day, when I see photographs or documentary films dating from the war I feel as if I were its child, so to speak, as if those horrors I did not experience cast a shadow over me, and one from which I shall never entirely emerge.
>
> —W.G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*

> We live in a culture where we're encouraged to forget.
>
> —Robert L. McLaughlin, "Post-Postmodern Discontent"

In *On the Natural History of Destruction*, Sebald mentions Jean Améry's memoirs as one of the very few examples of accounts documenting the atrocities of the Second World War written by a victim of the genocide. Interestingly, as Sebald explains, if on the one hand Améry's appearance on the literary landscape was favored by the fact that in the mid-sixties "experiences such as his own were no longer taboo in the public discourse (...); on the other hand, his task was made more difficult by the very circumstance that so few authentic voices had been raised" (*NH* 146). In fact, what Sebald noticed is, starting from the 1960s, an overcompensation of the previous

silence surrounding the genocide as "literature was now reclaiming 'Auschwitz' as its own territory" and this, for him, "was no less repellent than its previous refusal to broach that monstrous subject at all" (Sebald *NH* 146). Indeed, while it is important to remember that these literary works "do constitute the first step in the attempt to reveal the truth," that is, a first step in the process of working through a trauma, "only a few authors (...) managed to find the requisite gravity of language for the subject" (*NH* 146). Sebald emphasizes that almost all "the works produced by German authors after the war are often marked by a half-consciousness or false consciousness" (*NH* ix) and therefore even for Améry there was the risk that his account would be read just as "a dutiful exercise marked by involuntary infelicities" (146). However, what definitely enabled Améry to stand out is that "he had not become aware of the realities of genocide merely through historical and juridical analysis; for two and a half decades he had himself been literally occupied with the destruction inflicted on him and those like him" (147). More specifically,

> What raised Améry's work above the literary activity surrounding it was the way in which he tried to break through the silence imposed on him by terrorism, in the face of a situation where those who came after the Fascist regime, and were at most indirectly affected themselves, were usurping the victims' cause. (147).

Indeed, while "to the overwhelming majority of writers who stayed on in Germany under the Third Reich, the redefinition of their idea of themselves after 1945 was a more urgent business than depiction of real conditions surrounding them" (Sebald *NH* ix); for the victims of the Holocaust, instead, the "imperative to tell and to be heard (...) bec[a]me itself an all-consuming life task" (Laub 63). Yet, "the imperative to tell the story of the Holocaust [was] inhabited by the impossibility of telling, and therefore, silence about the truth commonly prevail[ed]" (Laub 64). How to tell the story of such unimaginable horrors? Sebald seems to be mentioning Améry's

detailed description of his torture to suggest that this is one of the ways in which this chain of silence might be broken,

> I was led to the instrument. The hook gripped into the shackle that held my hands together behind my back. Then I was raised with the chain until I hung about a metre above the floor. (...) there was a cracking and splintering in my shoulders that my body has not forgotten to this hour. The balls sprang from their sockets. (...) I fell into a void and now hung by my dislocated arms which had been torn high from behind and were now twisted over my head. (Améry qtd. in Sebald *NH* 151-152)

In commenting on this passage, Sebald emphasizes and praises Améry's "objective" (Sebald *NH* 152) and "lapidary" (153) tone which does not betray "the slightest attempt to emotionalize his case" (*NH* 153). This is perfectly in keeping with Améry's purpose which was in fact first and foremost that of informing about a practice so horrendous that it exhausted the very possibilities of language. Indeed, aware of the fact that "he was operating on the borders of what language can convey" (Sebald *NH* 153), the only genre that would allow him to give voice to "the extremes of torture and the pain they cause" was the essay. Améry realized that "the open method of the essay genre [enabled him to] conve[y] both the damaged emotions of a man brought to the brink of death and the supremacy of a mind intent on thinking freely even in extremis" (Sebald *NH* 151). It is precisely in this that, for Sebald, "lies the specific importance of Améry's work in the context of literary approaches to the German past" (*NH* 154), his refusal to make "any compromise with history" and just tell the whole—and brutal—truth.

Thus, if this was a survivor's successful attempt to tell an unspeakable story that needed to be passed on, what choices does an author who "at the end of the war (...) was just one year old" and who therefore "can hardly have any impressions of that period of destruction based on personal experience" (Sebald *NH* 71) to "convey [that story] to our minds" (Sebald *NH* x), in the 21st

century? “Having been born in Germany in 1944 and raised in a society that willed itself into amnesia” (Dyer et al. 20), Sebald as well aspires to encourage his compatriots to start ethically approaching a painful part of their history which was largely obliterated. As Williams suggests, Sebald is “a writer driven by his hidden German past to revisit history in order to set it in motion” (Williams 86). From this point of view, Améry’s and Sebald’s purpose do seem to converge as they both want to counteract the tendency of forgetting and silencing they witnessed; however, it should be kept in mind that the way in which they actualized it is utterly different. In the following section it will in fact appear clear that “the quest for a form of language in which experiences paralyzing the power of articulation can be expressed” (Sebald *NH* 150) took two different forms for Améry and Sebald, respectively: for the former this quest led to the “language” of the essay, for the latter to that of the novel or, more specifically, to that “language of iconotexts” which was introduced in the first chapter. The fact that Améry’s description of his torture is mentioned in *Austerlitz* as well precisely allows us to infer that what Sebald wanted to suggest is that he could have never adopted Améry’s language because it was too “objective” and factual for what he wanted to convey. Thus, while Sebald does acknowledge the efficacy of Améry’s tone for *his* purpose, at the same time he also provides us with a reason why in *Austerlitz* he opted for the form of the novel and, in a way, for the insertion of pictures, too. Indeed, since Sebald’s ultimate aim was that of triggering “a constant process of responsible remembrance in the name of victims” (Williams 86) by reconnecting with his audience, the essay as a form with its purely epistemological intent would have never allowed him to pursue it. In fact, he emphasizes that “his [Améry’s] memoirs could not, of course, be a narrative in any traditional sense, and they therefore dispense with any kind of literary stylization which might encourage a sense of complicity between the writer and his readers” (*NH* 151). This happens because, as a victim of the very violence he

describes, Améry would have run the risk of evoking just "pity and self-pity" (Sebald *NH* 151) had he used any other form which does not partake in the same objectivity and "detachment" that the essay offers. Conversely, rather than providing a meticulous and precise representation of the atrocities, Sebald wants to "writ[e] of the contamination of those who have escaped it, of effects that radiate up to the present" (Eder). The next sections therefore aim at showing how *Austerlitz* not only gives proof of how the tragedy of the Second World War caused a short circuit in the privileged media of literature, language, thus forcing Sebald to resort to a whole different domain, the visual, but it also thematizes the choice of using pictures within the narrative of people born in the post-Holocaust era for whom photographs are all that remains to remember. With this novel Sebald in fact aims at breaking the silence around the tragedy of the Holocaust and make "a nation strikingly blind to history" (Sebald *NH* viii) finally see.

2.1.1 A Postmemorial Narrative

Having no first-hand experiences of the atrocities of the Holocaust, what second-generation survivors like Austerlitz and the narrator are left with are merely stories, the stories of those like Jean Améry who endured such unimaginable pains.

> [I]t was only a few years later that I read Jean Améry's description (...) of the tortures he himself suffered in Breendonk when he was hoisted aloft by his hands, tied behind his back, so that with a crack and a splintering sound which, as he says, he had not yet forgotten when he came to write his account, his arms dislocated from the sockets in his shoulder joints, and he was left dangling as they were wrenched up behind him and twisted together above his head. (Sebald *A* 33-34)

The tone with which the narrator reports Améry's account of his torture is not much different from the original but there is one crucial aspect that marks the temporal and generational gap that exists between them: the presence of pictures. Accompanied by the photographs of the very place in which Améry was tortured (see fig. 1), his words are revived with a new and deeper resonance. What Sebald is accounting for is in fact no longer the experience of those who lived such horrors but rather of those like himself who never lived the war and yet felt it like a shadow hovering around them,

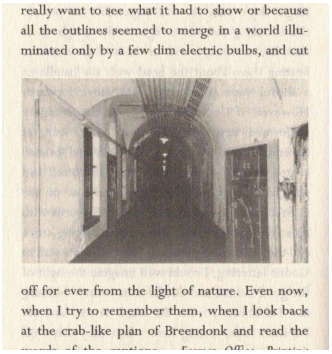

really want to see what it had to show or because all the outlines seemed to merge in a world illuminated only by a few dim electric bulbs, and cut
off for ever from the light of nature. Even now, when I try to remember them, when I look back at the crab-like plan of Breendonk and read the

Fig. 1. Alley of the Breendonk fortress (Sebald *A* 30)

> Yet to this day, when I see photographs or documentary films dating from the war I feel as if I were its child, so to speak, as if those horrors I did not experience cast a shadow over me, and one from which I shall never entirely emerge. (Sebald *NH* 71)

Despite being the most appropriate one in the mid-1960s, Améry's objective and factual tone was no longer right for Sebald's aims—what was needed was rather a way to make his readers *feel* the repercussions of the war in the mind of a second-generation survivor whose "memory consists not of events but of representations" (Hirsch "Surviving Images" 8). Thus, supplementing a survivor's story (in this specific case Améry's) with pictures perfectly epitomizes what Hirsch calls "postmemory," that is, "the response of the second generation to the trauma of the first" ("Surviving Images" 8). As Hirsch explains, "[t]he aesthetic strategies of postmemory are specifically about such an attempted (...) repositioning and reintegration" ("Surviving Images" 29). Indeed, the way in which second- and third-generation survivors would typically become familiar with the tragic history of the Holocaust was precisely by means of their parents' and grandparents' stories which they supplemented with the pictures they would find either "in the privacy of the desk drawer or even the public space of the bookstore" (Hirsch "Surviving Images" 6). These very

photographs, however, would frequently come to represent "the mark of a limit of what can and should be seen" (Hirsch "Surviving Images" 6). As we will see, this limit is particularly felt in *Austerlitz* as in none of the pictures displayed the appalling reality of the Holocaust is directly shown and yet its presence is still poignantly and disturbingly felt. This feeling of both "absence" and "presence" is perfectly achieved by Sebald because in *Austerlitz*, despite never being either mentioned or represented, the Holocaust still "cast[s] its noisome cloud" (Coe). This mirrors the second- and third-generation survivors' experience with the horrors of the Second World War which fundamentally is a reality that they have never directly seen or experienced but that nonetheless have always felt as engulfing them—as Sebald confessed regarding himself. Indeed, the "experiences that they 'remember' [are] only (...) the narratives and images with which they grew up" (Hirsch "Surviving Images" 9) and yet these stories and these pictures are just as "powerful, [as] monumental, (...) to constitute memories in their own right" (9) and to make them feel like they will "never entirely emerge" from that shadow (Sebald *NH* 71). The result is that they tend to "adop[t] the traumatic experiences—and thus also the memories—of others as experiences one might oneself have had" (Hirsch "Surviving Images" 10). They, children of survivors, despite not having lived the atrocities Améry had to endure, still grew up with a "shadow over" them and the mere sight of pictures related to that period is enough to trigger in them "emotional and bodily memories" (Hirsch "Surviving Images" 15). In a way, we might argue that this is what happens in *Austerlitz* because the narrator himself, despite having never experienced those tortures, feels necessarily implicated in "the kind of third-degree interrogations which were being conducted here around the time [he] was born" (Sebald *A* 33) and he thus seems to be "inscribing [Améry's story] into [his own] life story" (Hirsch "Surviving Images" 10)[1]. This, for

[1] Interestingly, this might be explained also from a historical point of view. As Santner pointed out, "[Margarete] Mitscherlich has reiterated the centrality of the psychological dimension in general and the question of

Hirsch, contributes to establishing "an ethical relation to the [stories of the] oppressed or persecuted" ("Surviving Images" 11) because, in fact, the kind of reasoning engendered by the process of postmemory is "as I can 'remember' my parents' memories, I can also 'remember' the suffering of others" (10-11) and this is exactly not only what Austerlitz and the narrator go through but also what Sebald wants to convey to his own readers.

To better contextualize Sebald's decision to have an impact on his readers, it might be worth it to briefly engage with the criticism that has been recently developing around the figure of Sebald and his works. In particular, it can be noticed that recently the focus has been mainly on whether or not he might be appointed the label "postmodernist."[2] Many in fact see his experimentation with different media and his blurring the line between genres as typical of the postmodern technique. Santner, instead, has a different take on the matter as he interprets "postmodern" not merely as referring to typically postmodernist features such as "irony; self-referentiality; experiments in form and style (…), [the] subver[sion of] totalizing systems (…)" (McLaughlin "After the Revolution" 285); but rather,

> [As] the general remapping of political, technological, cultural, economic, and sexual power that has taken place since World War II. These shifts and developments include: a redistribution of power and alliances within Europe as well as a general destabilization of European hegemony in the world; the ascendancy of the United States as a world power; the decolonization of the Third World (…); the women's movement and the emergence of

mourning in particular for any understanding of the generations born during and after the Nazi period. These generations, born too late to become complicitous in the crimes of Nazism, can still be understood, according to Mitscherlich, in terms of an inability to mourn" (34). Thus, since we know that the narrator is in fact from Germany and we are told that he was born around the time in which these "third-degree interrogations (...) were being conducted" (Sebald *A* 33), we might advance the hypothesis that he still feels complicitous of these crimes. This would therefore reinforce the idea whereby he actually assimilated Améry's experiences into his own life story.

[2] See J.J. Long, *W. G. Sebald - Image, Archive, Modernity*. In his conclusion he provides a detailed overview of the major studies which attempted to either categorize Sebald as postmodernist or that saw him at the intersection of modernism and postmodernism.

> gender issues more generally in the figuration and theorization of 'otherness' (...). (Santner 164 n12).

The list he provides is extremely long and there is not enough space here for it to be quoted in its entirety. However, it suffices to mention that, always borrowing Santner's words, "the perhaps all too familiar postmodern preoccupation with historical representations, images, and discourses" (164 n12) may certainly represent the bedrock on which *Austerlitz* rests but they cannot be said to appear as prominent themes in the novel. As Long himself similarly pointed out,

> It is certainly possible to find formal features of Sebald's work that tally with this or that definition of postmodernism. The ontological uncertainty produced by all his prose works is a defining feature of postmodernist fiction according to Brian McHale (1987), while the self-reflexive thematisation of history corresponds to Linda Hutcheon's concept of 'historiographic metafiction' (1988). (...) To understand Sebald's position within literary history, [however], it is not enough to list formal features; we need also to consider how his texts respond to the specific historical constellation. (172)

Indeed, what Sebald wants to achieve is encouraging his readers—specifically those who were born in the post-Holocaust era—not to forget thus enhancing a process of ethical remembrance among them. Thus, while these features certainly represent a core interpretative key in understanding his works, it is also true that "[t]he concepts of modernism and postmodernism often seem to divert attention from significant problems rather than to illuminate them, particularly when they are confined to 'aesthetic'" (LaCapra 221). When it comes to Sebald, focusing solely on the "postmodernist" features might lead us to overlook one fundamental aspect of his works, that is, their potential role in initiating a healing process meant to repair the tear in the fabric of history caused by this "self-imposed amnesia" (Sebald "Up Against"). We might precisely think of Sebald's aim "as being inspired by a desire to reconnect language to the social sphere or, to put it

another way, to reenergize literature's social mission, its ability to intervene in the social world, to have an impact on actual people and the actual social institutions in which they live their lives" (McLaughlin "Post-Postmodern" 55). These considerations certainly do not wish to discard Sebald's experimentations with genres and different media; on the contrary, using the label "post-postmodernist" to talk about his works would enable us to emphasize their social mission while also acknowledging his experimentations. Indeed, the very concept of "post-postmodernism" entails the idea that "the return to a state of pre-postmodern innocence regarding language and the process of representation" is impossible (McLaughlin "Post-Postmodern" 65). Thus, having been written at the turn of the 21st century, *Austerlitz* might be said to appear as the outcome of an "aesthetic sea change" that not only hit the U.S. but that arrived in Europe as well. The experimentations operated by the postmodernists could certainly not be overlooked but at the same time the need of reviving fiction's social mission was starting to be felt with greater urgency. Therefore, the Image Novel becomes functional to Sebald's purposes not only because, being a novelistic form, it allows him to connect with his audience at an emotional level but also because it gives voice to those generations who were born either during the last years of the war (and were therefore too young to remember anything) or right after the war. With its blending of words and images, *Austerlitz* aims at eliciting this ominous "shadow" by making the readers participate in the emotional distress felt by a second-generation survivor.

2.1.2 The Internal Dynamics of an Image Novel and the Functions of Pictures

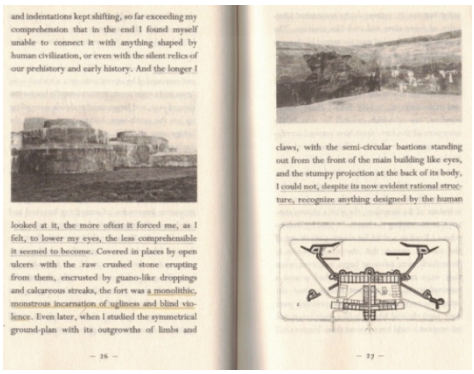
To better understand the function played by images in Sebald's novel, it might be interesting to compare its visual dimension to that of *On the Natural History of Destruction.* It will appear clear that one of the reasons why *Austerlitz* can be defined as an Image Novel resides

precisely in the role played by images as not only pictures materially appear on its pages, but they also figure as a medium to reach what is too intangible to grasp with words. As a matter of fact, what we are dealing with is two iconotextual forms written by the same author but, on the one hand, we have what Mitchell might call a "photographic essay" and, on the other, an Image Novel. The difference between these two works precisely involves the "icons" themselves and the relation they establish with the "text." Thus, by looking at what Sebald does *not* do in *On the Natural History* will help us disentangle the intricate relationship between words and images that Image Novels, like *Austerlitz*, foster. To this end, it might be useful to see what Baetens, drawing from Benoît Peeters, says concerning the Graphic Novel and try to apply his theory to the works under analysis here,

> In "Four Conceptions of the Page," (...) Benoît Peeters rejects any purely formalist analysis of the division of the page, articulating a taxonomy based on the various relationships between two basic elements: narrative (the graphic novel as storytelling device) and composition (the graphic novel as a device for the production of images, visual patterns, and spatial forms). (Baetens 108)

While, *On the Natural History*, as a photographic essay, cannot be characterized by a "narrative element" because, just like Améry's memoirs, its ultimate goal is not that of telling a story but rather that of providing information, *Austerlitz*, as a novelistic form, shares with the graphic novel its narrative dimension. Baetens then proceeds explaining that "either form can be dominant (at the automatic expense of the other: the more we follow the story, the less we notice the visual components of the panels and vice versa)" (108). Thus, we might argue that in the case of *Austerlitz*, and more in general Image Novels, what we are dealing with is first and foremost a storytelling device whose dominant is therefore narrative. Indeed, despite pictures playing a central role, *Austerlitz* is only on a secondary level a "device for the production of images."

Notwithstanding this, the role of the visual should not be underestimated, in particular, in its interaction with the verbal dimension. In this regard, Baetens points out that "the connection between narrative and composition can be either autonomous (in that case, there is no direct interaction between both dimensions) or interdependent (in that case, both dimensions will influence each other)" (108). Supposing the dominant was that of "composition," we would have a merely "*decorative* use of the page [which] emphasizes the visual properties of the layout, independent of any given content" (Baetens 110). Instead, when it comes to Image Novels, the connection seems to be one of interdependence as the atmospheres evoked in these works gain resonance and strength precisely by means of the interaction between images and words. The point of starting our reflection on Améry's memoirs was precisely due to the fact that a glaring example of this interdependence can be seen in the very passage of *Austerlitz* dealing with Améry's description of his torture. As a matter of fact, the pages concerning the Breendonk fortress culminating with the narrator recounting Améry's and Gastone Novelli's imprisonment in that same place are interspersed with images of the fortress's dark alleys (see fig. 1) and the thickness of its ramparts (see fig. 2) which contribute to provide a sense of both claustrophobia and the inescapability of one's fate. While it is true that, as Ercolino argues, "le immagini della fortezza di Breendonk si offrono al lettore con una piattezza che stride con la forza della parola che descrive, invece, le torture subite dai prigionieri di Breendonk" ("the pictures of the Breendonk fortress lend themselves to the readers with a flatness in stark contrast to the force of the language, which instead describes the tortures Breendonk prisoners had to endure."; "Per un'estetica" 97 my translation); they also gain a deeper value when


and indentations kept shifting, so far exceeding my comprehension that in the end I found myself unable to connect it with anything shaped by human civilization, or even with the silent relics of our prehistory and early history. And the longer I looked at it, the more often it forced me, as I felt, to lower my eyes, the less comprehensible it seemed to become. Covered in places by open ulcers with the raw crushed stone erupting from them, encrusted by guano-like droppings and calcareous streaks, the fort was a monolithic, monstrous incarnation of ugliness and blind violence. Even later, when I studied the symmetrical ground-plan with its outgrowths of limbs and

claws, with the semi-circular bastions standing out from the front of the main building like eyes, and the stumpy projection at the back of its body, I could not, despite its now evident rational structure, recognize anything designed by the human

Fig. 2. The Breendonk fortress
(Sebald *A* 26-27)

juxtaposed with Austerlitz's words—"a monolithic, monstrous incarnation of ugliness and blind violence" (Sebald *A* 26)—and the narrator's description of what he felt in the fortress—"as I went on down the tunnel (...), I had to resist the feeling taking root in my heart, one which to this day often comes over me in macabre places, a sense that with every forward step the air was growing thinner and the weight above me heavier" (Sebald *A* 31). This is crucial because these remarks allow us to introduce the two main functions that pictures in *Austerlitz* have: expository and metaphorical.

As for the former, we might argue that in both *On the Natural History* and *Austerlitz* their "hybrid quality," as Baetens suggests, "introduces a split at the level of the dispatching of information, which is presented through the visual as well as the verbal channel[; therefore w]hat one needs to understand is that the story is provided not just by the images but also by the text"—or, in our case, not just by the words but also by the images (143). However, while in both *On the Natural History* and in *Austerlitz* we have a split, images still have different functions. In Sebald's photographic essay images themselves acquire an epistemological value, a glaring example of this might be the two photographs of the tattered shoes (see. fig 3).

Fig. 3. Tattered shoes (Sebald *NH* 39)

While alone they do not have a specific epistemological value, they do acquire it when we see them in the context of the essay. More specifically, Sebald in these pages is talking about Stig

Dagerman and Victor Gollancz who both wrote about the extreme conditions faced by the Germans living in the cities devastated by the air raids,

> Like Dagerman, Gollancz speaks of people's profound lethargy, describing it as the most striking characteristics of the contemporary urban population at the time (...). Perhaps the most startling of Gollancz's reports from defeated Germany is his brief piece entitled "The Misery of Boots," about the wretched footwear of the Germans—startling not so much for the text itself as for the photographs that illustrated it when Gollancz's article came out later in book form (...) Photographs like these, making the process of degradation visible in very concrete form, are surely part of a natural history of destruction. (Sebald *NH* 38)

By providing his readers with the exact pictures that appeared with Gollancz text, Sebald is endowing them with an epistemological power—in other words, they work as a piece of evidence corroborating the words of the writer. As Baetens suggests,

> [Such hybrid forms] can display either a convergence or a divergence between the verbal and the visual. For instance, text and image can meet or depart at temporal level (we see before we read or vice versa), or they can overlap or contradict each other (we do not see what we read, we see something completely different, we don't see anything, and in all three cases, vice versa). (143-146)

In *On the Natural History*, being the purpose strictly epistemological, images tend to always display what the text is describing and thus verbal and visual never contradict each other; the only divergence one might notice is a temporal one because, for instance, in the case of the pictures of the tattered shoes (see fig. 3), "we read before we see." In *Austerlitz*, instead, it frequently happens that "we do not see what we read" or that "we see something completely different." It is the case of, for instance, the photograph of the window of the Antikos Bazar

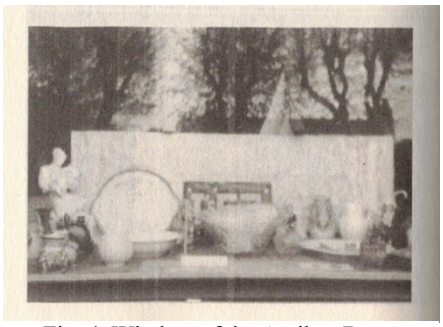


Fig. 4. Window of the Antikos Bazar (Sebald *A* 274)

(see fig. 4). At first the description is extremely accurate as it accounts for the shade of the "the black branches of the lime trees (...) reflected in the glass of the windows" (Sebald *A* 274) and it lists almost all the objects that we can see in the picture,

> What was the meaning of the festive white tablecloth hanging over the back of the ottoman (...) What secret lay behind the three brass mortars of different sizes, or the cut-glass bowl, ceramic vases and earthenware jugs, the tin advertising sign bearing the words *Theresienstäder Wasser*, the little box of seashells. (Sebald *A* 275)

Then, however, Austerlitz's words lead us outside the frame of the picture, and we are left imagining all the other memorabilia he describes, "the outsize Russian officer's cap and the olive-green uniform tunic with gilt epaulettes that went with it, the fishing rod, the hunter's bag, the Japanese fan, the endless landscape painted around a lampshade in fine brushstrokes" (Sebald *A* 275).

This, in a way, is strictly related to the metaphorical function because it primarily concerns those pictures which might still represent what we read but their meaning lies somewhere else. The most prominent examples can be considered the photographs of the Breendonk fortress itself as they come to represent the defensive mechanism Austerlitz developed in order to protect himself from a past which was too painful to be dealt with. In fact, talking about the fortifications, he will admit that "it is often the mightiest projects that most obviously betray the degree of our insecurity. The construction of fortifications (…) clearly showed how we feel obliged to keep surrounding ourselves with defenses, built in successive phases as a precaution against any incursion by enemy powers" (Sebald *A* 17). Thus, even if, as the narrator notes, during those first conversations taking place in 1967, "it was almost impossible to talk to him about anything personal" (42), Austerlitz is already saying much about himself. As Eshel suggests, "*Austerlitz* addresses the fate of a Jew who struggles to overcome his own forgetting and thus to metaphorize the tension between

remembrance and oblivion" (76). This can already be seen in this passage inasmuch as those "intricately sketched plans of such fortified complexes (…) [which] immediately strik[e] the layman as an emblem of both absolute power and of the *ingenuity* the engineers put to the service of that power" (Sebald *A* 19 emphasis mine) stand as the objective correlative for the fortifications Austerlitz himself has erected in order to fend off any incursion of the past. Therefore, we can see how if at a first glance these pictures might appear simple and at times puzzling (namely, the one representing just the corner of the ramparts in the upper left corner of the page in fig. 2) their juxtaposition with Austerlitz's words contribute to charge them with meaning. In *Austerlitz*, in fact, pictures "are never reduced to mere 'illustrations,' their role is to complete the text in a very specific sense" (Baetens 147) which is not simply that of providing information, as in *On the Natural History*, but to "emphasiz[e] some nuances" (Baetens 149). It is therefore clear that these pictures of the fortress might certainly have an expository function as they show us what both the narrator and Austerlitz see (Ercolino "Per un'estetica" 96) but at the same time they also stand to signify Austerlitz's entrapment in his own barricades which allegedly should defend him from any unwanted irruption of his past. This is precisely the reason why also at the moment of choosing a name for this form, Image Novel seemed more appropriate than Picture Novel because, while it is true that what we find in the pages of *Austerlitz* are pictures, we cannot deny that all of them are charged with deep evocative meanings and that therefore contribute to elicit Stimmung. The term "image" thus precisely allows us to account for these atmospheres that defy both language and pictures. It is therefore clear that this effect could be created neither by words nor by images alone, it is rather the outcome of their dialectic and of the process of mutual confrontation since in the mind of the reader the effect created by the two media are perceived together in an all-encompassing atmosphere. This kind of reading is made possible also by the fact that for this form

we postulated a narrative dominant because, as Baetens explains, when the dominant is narrative "the reader (...) feels that there is 'room' for him or for her" (110). In such a way we are able to acknowledge not only the interdependence of the two forms but also the role of the reader/viewer. Thus, having explained the theory and the rationale between image/text relation in *Austerlitz* it is high time we focused precisely on how this dialectic unfolds at a thematic level.

2.2 Image and Word: Oblivion and Memory

The peculiarity of *Austerlitz* is that the very process of dialectic and confrontation between images and words, typical of Image Novels, takes place not only at a structural level—that, is, on the very pages of the book—but also at a thematic one as it seems to be constantly staged in the conversations between Austerlitz and the narrator. The two characters might in fact be said to stand as representatives of the two domains with one embodying the visual and the other the verbal. Starting from the premise that the narrator of *Austerlitz* is most likely to be a writer and that most of the pictures displayed are taken by Austerlitz himself, their respective inclinations and predispositions immediately stand out. Thus, if, on the one hand, the narrator admits being afflicted by a "constant compulsion to read and write" (Sebald *A* 48), Austerlitz, on the other, having grown disillusioned towards the power of language, resorts to pictures to compensate for a temporal lacuna that subconsciously afflicts him. One might in fact argue that Austerlitz is the one of the two who sees the potential in photographs to access some other realm, their ability to go beyond the mere appearances of things. Interestingly, Cometa suggests that for "Sebald (...) la differenza decisiva tra il metodo dello scrittore e quello del fotografo è che la descrizione stimola la memoria mentre la fotografia stimola la dimenticanza" ("Sebald … the fundamental difference between the method of the writer and that of the photographer is that description favors memory while

photography induces forgetfulness."; 114 my translation). By bringing the confrontation between these two media at a thematic level, Sebald therefore seems to be pointing us precisely in the direction introduced in the first chapter. The constant dialogue between Austerlitz and the narrator mirrors and represents in fact the ongoing confrontation between the two media and eventually, the very existence of the novel we are reading is proof of the fact that images and words do need each other in order to mutually compensate one another. It will thus be useful to look more closely at the role of both Austerlitz and narrator to better understand how this dialectic between words and images is actually staged.

2.2.1 Austerlitz, a Survivor

> [T]he Shoah is an extreme instance of a traumatic series of events that pose the problem of denial or disavowal, acting-out, and working-through. In different ways this problem has affected victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and those born later who have various subject-positions with respect to those more immediately involved in the events of the Holocaust. In this context, I suggest that the Shoah has often been in the position of the repressed in the post-World War II West and that those trying to lift this repression have faced incredible difficulties and temptations both in terms of the resistance of others and in terms of their own problems in putting things into acceptable language.
>
> —Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*

Austerlitz is the story of a survivor.

> She finally decided, Věra told me, said Austerlitz, that she would send me at least to England, having succeeded through the good offices of one of her theatrical friends in

> getting my name put down for one of the few children's transports leaving Prague for London during those months. (Sebald *A* 245)

"A little leather suitcase, and food for the journey in a rucksack—*un petit sac à dos avec quelques viatiques*" (Sebald *A* 245) is all the not-yet-five-year-old Jacques Austerlitz is bringing with himself to London, leaving everything and everyone he has known so far behind. This was the difficult decision of a mother who sends her only child away to spare him unspeakable horrors. "Torn between wishful thinking and her fear that she was doing something irresponsible and unforgivable" (Sebald *A* 245), in the summer of 1939 Agáta Austerlitzová makes up her mind and takes her little Jacquot to the Wilsonova station where, as he will later recall, he "wait[ed] on a quay in a long crocodile of children lined up two by two" (200) as they were about to be "sent to England on a special transport" (200). Saved. What he does not know is that as he was traveling westwards, the life he left behind "was caught in a vortex whirling downwards at ever-increasing speed" (248). The "ever-extended list of bans" (243) was in fact about to reshape Agáta's life until "the means [she] still had at her disposal were barely enough for the necessities" (249). Thereafter, while he was introduced to his new foster parents, Emyr and Gwendolyn Elias, Agáta was banned from banks, parks, coffee-houses, cinemas (243). While he was "go[ing] around dressed in the English fashion" (62), "Agáta had to take her wireless, her gramophone and the records she loved so much, her binoculars and opera glasses, musical instruments, jewellery, furs (…) to the so-called Compulsory Collection Centre" (250). While he was familiarizing himself with "the little country town of Bala in Wales" (61), Agáta was "forced to leave her flat" (254). While he was beginning to understand English and Welsh at the cost of "the dying away of [his] native tongue" (195), "a troop of very shady characters arrived to clear away everything that had been left behind, the furniture, the lamps and candelabra, the carpets and curtains, the books and musical scores, the clothes from the wardrobes and drawers (…)" (255). While he was given the name Dafydd Elias,

"personal details were taken down, questionnaires handed out, and identity papers stamped EVACUATED or GHETTOIZED" (253-254). Lastly, while he was shown the house in which he would grow up, Agáta was deported to Theresienstadt.

Saved, but with a price. As Hirsch explains, "children of those directly affected by collective trauma inherit a horrific, unknown, and unknowable past" ("The Generation of Postmemory" 112). The stories of second-generation survivors "are shaped by the child's confusion and responsibility, by the desire to repair, and by the consciousness that the child's own existence may well be a form of compensation for unspeakable loss. Loss of family, of home, of a feeling of belonging and safety in the world 'bleed' from one generation to the next" (112). *Austerlitz* precisely thematizes not only a nation's effort to process the horrors of the Holocaust but, more specifically, the attempt of the children of survivors to try to make sense of their parents' "much tainted, much poisoned legacy" (Santner 30). This is crucial because, at a historical level, children of the Kindertransport—like Austerlitz—at the time were not regarded as actual survivors and therefore were not allowed to grieve their losses,

> [F]or a long time, children were not permitted to mourn their experiences and losses. Their surrounding and their own consciousness suggested that the only "real survivors" where those who had returned from concentration camps, whereas nothing had happened to the Kinder because they had spent the worst times safely in Great Britain. (Körte 115)

This is part and parcel of *Austerlitz*'s social mission because with this novel Sebald is giving voice to the children who left with the Kindertransport by suggesting that they are as much mourner-survivors as those who came back from the concentration camps. Borrowing Freud's words Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart explain it from a psychological point of view, "what children have experienced at the age of two and have not understood, need never be remembered by them... But at some later time it will break into their life with obsessional impulses, it will govern their actions"

(167). Accordingly, the concept of postmemory "is meant to convey its temporal and qualitative difference from survivor memory, its secondary, or second-generation memory quality, its basis in displacement, its vicariousness and belatedness" (Hirsch "Surviving Images" 9). Unable to "assimilate the totality of what was really happening at the time" (Laub 69) and the very rupture he felt at being taken away from his family and home, Austerlitz will unconsciously live his life at the mercy of "an agency greater than or superior to [his] own capacity for thought (…) [which] has always preserved [him] from [his] own secret, systematically preventing [him] from drawing the obvious conclusions and embarking on the inquiries they would have suggested to [him]" (Sebald *A* 60-1). A new name and a new home do not make up for the fact that "when one's history is abolished, one's identity ceases to exist as well" (Laub 67) and in fact the obliteration of everything that has come before has the effect of "soon extinguish[ing] every sense of self-awareness in [him]" (61) to the point that he will later have to acknowledge that "since [his] childhood and youth (…) [he] ha[s] never known who [he] really was" (60). Only belatedly will he be able to admit that the unconscious act of "constant suppression of the memories surfacing in [him] (...) led to the almost total paralysis of [his] linguistic faculty" (Sebald *A* 198). Indeed, when Austerlitz starts piecing together the fragments of his lost past, he realizes that what was emerging was "something inexpressible because we have no words for it" (Sebald *A* 194). In dealing with such unimaginable realities, Austerlitz starts to perceive "the awkward falsity of [his] constructions and the inadequacy of all the words [he] had employed" (Sebald *A* 172) to the point that language eventually becomes to him "[f]undamentally flawed" (Sebald *A* 172), "precarious" (173), "false and hollow" (173). Austerlitz's loss of faith in the possibilities of language can be read against the broader canvas of a widespread difficulty, as LaCapra suggests, among "victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and those born later" (97) in conceptualizing the Shoah and in trying to translate into words the experience of the Holocaust. As a matter of fact, "[f]in dalle prime testimonianze dei

sopravvissuti, il racconto dello sterminio nazista degli Ebrei si è dovuto misurare con un'esperienza del limite. Il limite del dicibile, derivante dalla disarmante inadeguatezza della parola dinanzi a ciò che era stato" ("from the very first testimonies of the survivors, the accounts of the Nazi extermination of the Jews had to measure itself with an experience at the limit. The limits of what can be said deriving from the disarming inadequacy of the word against everything that happened."; Ercolino "Per un'estetica" 93 my translation). Yet, the existential dilemma inherent in the tragic history of the Holocaust is that only by "telling" can a trauma be effectively worked through. As Caruth explains, "the history of a trauma, in its inherent belatedness can only take place through the listening of another. (…) This speaking and this listening—a speaking and a listening *from the site of trauma*—does not rely (...) on what we simply know of each other, but on what we don't yet know of our own traumatic pasts" (Introduction 11) and, accordingly, Laub adds that precisely "[t]his joint responsibility is the source of the reemerging truth" (69). Thus, if, "the Holocaust has damaged the tool of language" (Körte & Axelrod 119), how, then, can one even begin to effectively deal with a traumatic history such as this? Didi-Huberman would perhaps answer by saying that "where 'all words stop and all categories fail' (…) that is where an image can suddenly appear" (*In Spite* 80). And this is exactly what happens in *Austerlitz*, where language fails, pictures emerge. The eponymous protagonist, not being able to rely on language anymore, needs the support of photography before he is able to start telling his story to the narrator and, in fact, almost all the photographs in the novel are the ones taken by Austerlitz himself on his journey back to "the site of trauma." This is crucial because, as it was previously mentioned, despite constantly casting its shadow, the Holocaust surprisingly never "appears" in the pictures displayed. As a matter of fact, what Sebald's novel seems to problematize is precisely "our concern with history (...) [which] is a concern with pre-formed images already imprinted in our brains, images at which we keep staring while the truth lies elsewhere, away from it all, somewhere as yet

undiscovered" (Sebald *A* 101). The question thus arises spontaneously: where does the truth about the Holocaust lie, then? As Eshel explains,

> Sebald's interest is focused on modern, man-made catastrophes marked by their "paradigmatic senselessness," by the fact that any attempt to distill sense from them would result in questionable mythological narratives. (…) What we grapple with, Sebald's narratives seem to suggest, is not only the catastrophic, the historical event, the *kairos*, but also their distance, their presentness in the form of inherited and produced images, their senselessness. Writing is the measuring of this distance, and photography can only thematize the absence of the "real," of the event as such. (91)

With *Austerlitz*, Sebald seems to suggest that the "pre-formed images" we have of the Shoah are just a small part of the totality of its story. Therefore, the choice of having as a protagonist a second-generation survivor is functional to this purpose as it allows him to register the distance that it exists and to show us that the truth about the Holocaust does not lie solely on "the catastrophic, the historical event" as such but also on the effects it still has on the present. This is the reason why, in the attempt not to turn the Holocaust into a senseless "mythological narrative" but into something that might resonate with the generations of the Post-Holocaust era, he made the stylistic choice not to use the most widely known pictures of the Shoah—"the inherited and produced images"—but rather highly evocative ones. For him, in fact, the only way to talk about the Holocaust was by mentioning it sideways; "I don't think," Sebald once explained, "you can focus on the horror of the Holocaust. It's like the head of the Medusa: you carry it with you in a sack, but if you looked at it you'd be petrified" (qtd. in Jaggi). Thus, aware of the fact that "the Holocaust will always elude final explanation or comprehension" (Long 160), Sebald decided to use pictures which do not have a strictly epistemological value, but which rather aim at providing an understanding of the Holocaust by making us see deep into Austerlitz's psychological landscape. Indeed, as we mentioned before, in *Austerlitz*, pictures mainly have a metaphorical

function, and the most compelling example is perhaps the one of the closed doors (see fig. 5) with which many critics have engaged. For instance, Long—drawing from the work of Alexandra Tischel—suggests that "these [the doors] are part of a topical model of memory that permeates the text, and also represent that which cannot be shown, namely the horrors of the Holocaust" (160). The images of the closed doors in fact not only symbolize the limit of what one should be allowed to see of the Holocaust, but they also provide us with a deeper understanding of Austerlitz's psyche. In fact, the metaphor of the door is a somewhat recurring one as, for instance, Austerlitz himself uses it when talking about his childhood at the Eliases' house in Bala—"Even today, I still sometimes dream that one of those locked doors opens and I step through it, into a friendlier, more familiar world" (Sebald *A* 61)—or to describe what he felt when visiting Marienbad—"it's as if you stood on a threshold and you dared not step over it" (Sebald *A* 304). Even the narrator employs it, "No one can explain exactly what happens within us when the doors behind which our childhood terrors lurk are flung open" (Sebald *A 33*) thus precisely giving voice to what not only Austerlitz but all the survivors must have felt in crossing the threshold of their traumatic past. However, emblematic of the phenomenon of the "Holocaust-in-absence" are perhaps the maps displayed, namely the one of Theresienstadt (see fig. 6). Hardly anything is more neutral and objective than a map, and yet Austerlitz's words contribute to charge them with deeper meaning and nuances. To better understand this process, it might be useful to reflect on what Didi-Huberman writes, "[a]ura secolarizzata, evidentemente: non è più la presenza mitica del dio o della ninfa che ci fa tremare davanti all'immagine, ma, più intuitivamente

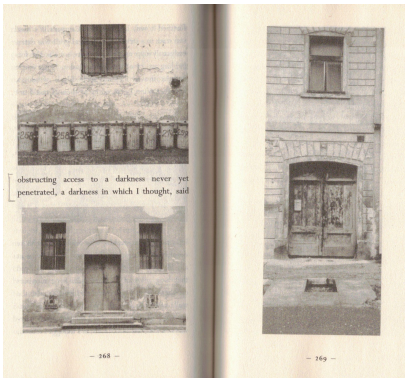


Fig. 5. Closed doors (Sebald *A* 268-269)

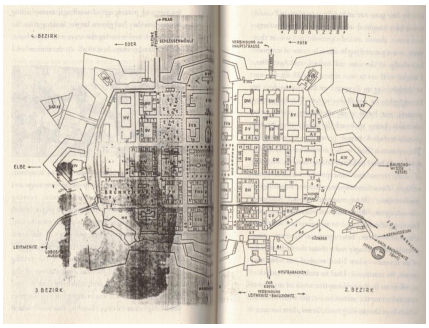


Fig. 6. Map of Theresienstadt (Sebald *A* 228-229)

e più crucialmente, il reale storico del luogo fotografato" ("Secularized aura, clearly: it is no longer the god's or the nymph's mythic presence that makes us shiver in front of an image, but, more intuitively and more crucially, the historical reality of the place photographed."; "L'immagine brucia" 255 my translation). This is exactly what happens in *Austerlitz*, the map of Theresienstadt and the pictures of the Breendonk fortress certainly do not directly engage with the inhumane practices inflicted within those walls but they succeed in making us perceive the extent of the atrocities of the Holocaust by showing us the actual places in which they were committed. The pictures thus make *concrete* what words describe because they give us proof of the historical reality of the place and, at the same time, they are able to "communicate [the] emotional or bodily experience" of those who were there (Hirsch "Surviving Images" 15). This is crucial especially in the context of postmemory and those generations born in the post-Holocaust era because, as we mentioned before, they need to supplement the stories they inherited with pictures attesting that tragedy. Therefore, we might argue that if even the pictures of tattered shoes (see fig. 3) can become "surely part of a natural history of destruction" (Sebald *NH* 38), then also the pictures displayed in *Austerlitz*—despite their apparent "flatness"—can be considered part of that same natural history as they contribute to make the process of the repression of traumatic events (e.g. the doors) and of systemic violence (e.g. the maps of the ghetto) "visible in a very concrete form" (Sebald *NH* 38).

It is therefore clear that the choice of pictures in *Austerlitz* is deeply "correlated with themes and topics," as Fowler suggests (116), but it should also be pointed out that they have a "revelatory value (...) in terms of characterization" as well (Louvel *Poetics* 119). As a matter of fact, pictures in Sebald's novel not only "serve as relays between what is said and what is thought so as to express the inexpressible" (Louvel *Poetics* 17) but they concur in the characterization of the protagonist. For this reason, it might be worth looking more closely at his engagement with the

medium of photography. Austerlitz—as it is typical with second- and third-generation survivors––"inherited not only the unmourned traumas of the parents but also the psychic structures that impeded mourning in the older generation" (Santner 37). Since "[n]o writing can give [him any] certainty" (Barthes *Camera Lucida* 87), Austerlitz needs to rely on the medium of photography because, as it happens to Barthes, "[t]he effect it produces upon [him] is not to restore what has been abolished (by time, and by distance) but to attest that what [he] see[s] has indeed existed" (82). Thus, with his past life in Prague having been largely obliterated and his defensive mechanisms protecting him against anything that might be related to the Second World War, he resorts to the comforting support of photography because he seems to feel "as if (...) the pictures had a memory of their own and remembered us, remembered the roles that we, *the survivors*, and those no longer among us had played in our former lives" (Sebald *A* 258). Therefore, borrowing Belting's words, the question one should ask when reading *Austerlitz* is no longer "what do pictures want?" but rather "what does Austerlitz want from pictures?" and the answer would be that he wants them to be alive. Indeed, "men and women persist in responses that arise from believing, assuming, and feeling that living and lively qualities inhere in the figured object" (Freedberg 315); similarly, Austerlitz so desperately longs for a picture of his parents that he projects his desire on the pictures he finds during his research. Thus, just like Věra wanted the two figures in the photograph portraying the stage of a theater to be Agáta and Maximilian only to realize that "they were other people" (Sebald *A* 257); Austerlitz convinces himself that the "strange and familiar" face of a woman who briefly appears in the film shot in Theresienstadt is in fact Agáta. Indeed, having discovered, thanks to Věra, that his mother was secluded in the ghetto of Terezín in 1944, he decides to go visit it and it is in that moment that he learns about the film which was shot in the ghetto on the day of the visit of the Red Cross in 1944. He immediately realizes that "if only the film could be found I might perhaps be able to see or gain some inkling

of what it was really like, and then I imagined recognizing Agáta there at the time" (Sebald *A* 342). At the mercy of these "wishful fantasies" (343), he embarks on this research in the attempt to find the film. When he succeeds, he realizes that "despite the hopes [he] had entertained, [he] could not see Agáta anywhere, however often [he] ran the tape and however hard [he] strained to make her out among those fleeting faces" (345). Eventually, to increase the likelihood of discerning her among the people, he decides to ask for a slow-motion copy of the tape. Austerlitz's decision can be read in terms of what Benjamin argues, "photographic reproduction, with the aid of certain processes, such as enlargement or slow motion, can capture images which escape natural vision" ("Work of Art" 220) and, more specifically "the enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject" (Benjamin "Work of Art" 236). While Austerlitz realizes that the slow-motion "did reveal previously hidden objects and people" (Sebald *A* 345)—like, for instance, the woman he believes to be Agáta—at the same time he also has to acknowledge that enlarging a photograph gives only an *illusion* of better clarity as it in fact makes the subject represented almost fade away. As he himself notices, after having altered the tape, "the figures seem[ed] to be hovering rather than walking" and "the contours of their bodies were blurred" (Sebald *A* 348). Interestingly, what happens to Austerlitz has some similarities with what Barthes does in *Camera Lucida.* The French literary theorist as well, when scrutinizing a photograph of his mother, tried to enlarge it in the attempt to "finally reach [his] mother's very being" (Barthes *Camera Lucida* 99)—which is not far from Austerlitz's intention as well—only to realize that,

> I live in the illusion that it suffices to clean the surface of the image in order to accede to what is behind: to scrutinize means to turn the photograph over, to enter into the paper's depth, to reach its other side (what is hidden is for us Westerners more "true" than what is

> visible). Alas, however hard I look, I discover nothing: if I enlarge, I see nothing but the grain of the paper. (Barthes *Camera Lucida* 100).

This same reasoning could be carried out to analyze Austerlitz's frantic search for a picture of his parents. His desire to *see* his mother in that tape is doomed to remain unfulfilled because in fact Věra, "after having spent some time studying the face of the woman in the concert audience which [he] had copied from the Theresienstadt film, (...) sh[ook] her head and pu[t] it aside" (Sebald *A* 353). Thus, he enlivens the photograph of this woman who resembles his mother because he needs to know that she has existed. Thus, just like the pictures of the ghetto and of the Breendonk fortress carried within themselves the power of the historical reality of those places, Austerlitz's desire to find a picture of his parents can be understood in similar terms as, in Austerlitz's eyes, "[t]he photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here" (Barthes *Camera Lucida* 80). Austerlitz is compulsively looking for his parents' pictures because he wants to feel them again right beside him.

Yet precisely the fact that he relies on the support of photography allows us to infer that Austerlitz's search is doomed to remain incomplete. As Eshel suggests, "the tension between [Austerlitz's] wish to uncover the past and his fear of its eternal dwelling in the present results in open-ended exploration" (Eshel 79) precisely because, despite being "haunted (...) by the paralyzing power of forgetting" (Eshel 81), he relies on a medium which does not help him overcome his fear, but conversely fuels it. For Austerlitz, who has no recollection of his previous life in Prague and who has obliterated everything related to the Second World War, "[p]hotography appears restrictive, inadequate, repressive in fact: it (…) wipes out the memory and therefore the symbolization of significant events" (Mitrano 131). Accordingly, Barthes suggests that ultimately "[t]he Photograph gives a little truth" (*Camera Lucida* 103) and that "[n]ot only is the Photograph

never, in essence, a memory (…) but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory" (91). This was evident with Austerlitz's reaction to the tape because what he was doing was forcing it to reproduce his memories by superimposing a constructed and distorted narrative of it. Therefore, while it is true that, "[t]hrough visual traces, Austerlitz experiences the pain of dim recollections, a pain which underscores the idea that he is working through trauma" (Straus 49), the medium of photography "rather than reflecting a hope to clarify or to recover times past, suggests the simultaneity of all times in the realm of memory and the existential inability to mark the past as gone" (Eshel 79) thus preventing Austerlitz from actually coming to terms with his history. This is particularly evident with the picture of himself as a child. Crucially, while Austerlitz desperately wants his parents' pictures to be alive, when it comes to his own photograph, he does not even dare to touch it (Sebald *A* 259) and, despite "recogniz[ing] the usual hairline running at a slant over the forehead," he "could not recollect [him]self" (259). This happens because, in the end, as Barthes suggests, "the Photograph is the advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity" (*Camera Lucida* 12). Similarly, from the very beginning we have been repeatedly told that Austerlitz felt "a constant wrenching inside [him], a kind of heartache" (Sebald *A* 182) as well as "a sense of disjunction" (154) and of being "broken from within" (323) as if he was "being carried away and out of [him]self" (62). Therefore, it is clear that while photography might give *him* the illusion of safety and comfort, it is in fact evident that what it does is reinforcing these very feelings of "dissociation of consciousness from identity" that he was already experiencing. Austerlitz, in the end, will be able to retrieve an actual picture of his mother in the Prague theatrical archive; however, we can suppose that in the long run he will have to come to terms with the true nature of photography,

> In its relation to loss and death, photography does not mediate the process of individual and collective memory but brings the past back in the form of a ghostly revenant, emphasizing, at the same time, its immutable and irreversible pastness and irretrievability. The encounter with the photograph is the encounter between two presents, one of which, already past, can be reanimated in the act of looking" (Hirsch "Surviving Images" 21).

Thus, retrieving Agáta's photograph only emphasizes the "immutable and irreversible pastness" of what happened to his parents. Austerlitz's trauma is doomed to remain unresolved precisely because he demands too much from photographs when in fact what they give is just a partial truth. It might therefore be argued that *Austerlitz* appears to thematize the process of constant confrontation between images and words precisely because it acknowledges their respective shortcomings. If neither words nor pictures alone are enough to deal with such a traumatic legacy as the one left by the Holocaust, this means that what is needed is the cooperation of the two. The next section will therefore be devoted to the second element of the dialectic Image/Word and, more specifically, to the role played by the narrator in the fulfillment of the very iconotextual project of *Austerlitz*.

2.2.2 The Narrator, a Compulsive Writer

Austerlitz is "more like 'a real novel'" (Zilcosky 685). Defying generic categorization, Sebald's works tend to blur the line between fact and fiction, memoir and novel. Yet, of all his works *Austerlitz* is perhaps the one that is the easiest to define. For Zilcosky, in fact, while "the earlier three fictions [—*Vertigo* (1990), *The Emigrants* (1992) and *The Rings of Saturn* (1995)—] all wandered along the borders between travel diary, memoir, collage, and short story" (685), *Austerlitz* is characterized precisely by a "de-emphasis of the peculiarly Sebaldian confusion between memoir and fiction" (685). Zilcosky provides two main reasons to support his idea; first

of all, Max Aurach in *The Emigrants* is "so clearly a replica of a living artist, Frank Auerbach, that Sebald had to change the name for the English Edition (to 'Max Ferber')" (685), whereas Austerlitz is a "*fictional* amalgam (...) of real-life figures [which] is somewhat normal (...) for 'fiction'" (Zilcosky 685). The second reason is particularly interesting in our attempt to try to define *Austerlitz* as an Image Novel because it is centered on the issue of *Austerlitz*'s peculiar visual dimension. As a matter of fact, Sebald explains that in *The Emigrants*—"Austerlitz's closest literary relative," as Zilcosky defines it (685)—"nearly all of the images were historic and authentic" taken from the biographies narrated (qtd. in Zilcosky 685 n20). For Zilcosky, this had the effect of alienating the readers as the pictures appeared to be "placed into the text by the author himself as documentary proofs" (687). The photographs in *Austerlitz*, instead, inherently belong in the narrative realm and it is easy to naturalize their presence as being taken by Austerlitz himself as we are repeatedly told that he always carries a camera in his rucksack (Sebald *A* 7) but also that, most importantly, he will later hand his photographs over to the narrator—"many hundreds of pictures, most of them unsorted, that he entrusted to me soon after we met again in the winter of 1996" (Sebald *A* 7). While it is true that the photographs displayed in *Austerlitz* might still produce in the readers an effect of defamiliarization, this is not related to an issue of authoriality but merely to the fact that the pictures used, as we previously mentioned, are not the ones usually associated to the history of the Holocaust. In fact, what contributes to dispelling any doubt concerning the question of the presence of photographs in this novel is the fact that not only we are made aware of the narrator's "constant compulsion to write" (Sebald *A* 48) but also sentences such as "and now, in writing this" (Sebald *A* 31) or "as I write this" (Sebald *A* 53) as well as the footnote at page ten are all textual clues hinting at the fact that this is not a simple first-person narrator but a writer who has carefully edited his text. In other words, we are not led to question the presence of images

because, first of all, the very organization of the novel can be naturalized by the narrator's being a writer who is arranging the contents for his readers and, second of all, repeated times we are given textual hints aimed at assuring the readers of his reliability. The narrator in fact needs the readers to trust him because he is taking charge of telling someone else's story. In this case, from the very outset, the narrator appears to be a keen observer who is able to see deep into human nature. For instance, he immediately notices that of all people at the Antwerp station Austerlitz was "the only one who was not staring apathetically into space, but instead was occupied in making notes and sketches obviously related to the room where we were both sitting" (Sebald *A* 6-7). He therefore decides to approach Austerlitz because he knows that "solitary travellers (...) are glad to be spoken to" (7) and he is tactful enough to begin the conversation "with a question about his obvious interest" (Sebald *A* 7). Just one glance is all he needs to understand Austerlitz's innate passion for architecture.

What is more, one of the first things that we notice is the emphasis of his "sense of indisposition" and his feeling "unwell" and "uncertain" (Sebald *A* 1). These details are already functional to start setting the tone of the novel and to make the readers receptive to what is about to follow. In other words, he needs to show us that the reason why Austerlitz of all people is able to open up with him is the same that should make us trust him: he understands Austerlitz. In fact, despite never being mentioned, we are made aware of the fact that he must deeply sympathize with him. For instance, at the very beginning he indirectly describes Austerlitz as one of those "last members of a diminutive race which had perished or had been expelled from the homeland" (Sebald *A* 6) only to admit, thirty pages later, that he himself has spent nine years out of his country of origin "to which," he says, "I felt I had become a stranger" (45). Thus, when we are told that Austerlitz decided in the 1990s to travel back to Prague, the place in which he was born and of

which he does not remember anything, his words must resonate with the narrator more than we can imagine. In this regard, the most compelling piece of evidence is that even someone like Austerlitz, so reticent in talking about his origins and his life, decides to tell him everything to the point of entrusting him with the keys of his home. In fact, the narrator's notation that Austerlitz "[did not] subsequently tell [him] very much about his origins and his own life" (Sebald *A* 8) must refer just to their "Antwerp conversations" taking place around the 1967 because when they meet again in 1996 Austerlitz will tell him all his story from the beginning—"Since my childhood and youth, he finally began" (60). Crucially, as Austerlitz starts telling his story, we had just learned that the narrator happens to suffer from "difficult period[s] which dul[l his] sense of other people's existence" (46). This, along with the fact that his desire to pass on forgotten pieces of history comes from his being keenly aware of the fallacious nature of memory and "how everything is constantly lapsing into oblivion" (30-31), contribute to show us how committed he is to passing on Austerlitz's story. If notations like "over the years, images of the interior of the Nocturama have become confused in my mind with my memories" (4) might instill a seed of doubt as one might start pondering how he is able to write their conversations down in the smallest detail when he himself "does not trust" the validity of memories, he is honest about his method: "I sat until almost three in the morning at a secretaire faintly illuminated by the street lightning (...) writing down, in the form of notes and disconnected sentences, as much as possible of what Austerlitz had told me that evening" (Sebald *A* 138). Thus, his desire not to contribute to the process of forgetting is so strong that despite experiencing difficult periods which, as Nick Carraway would put it, make him long for "no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart" (Fitzgerald 2), he takes responsibility for the transmission of another person's life story. This desire to "pass on" a story like Austerlitz's is deeply tied to the novel's social purpose as one of Sebald's aim was

precisely that of showing the importance of remembering as a way to counterbalance the "individual and collective amnesia" (Sebald *NH* 10) that he registered in post-war Germany at the end of the Second World War with regards to the human tragedy the nation had just gone through. Even Sebald's very decision to opt for a first-person narrative might be contextualized from a historical perspective. As Santner explains,

> [T]he second and third generations face the task of saying 'we' in the knowledge that the social mechanisms and rituals in and through which the signification of this 'we' was stabilized in the generation of the elders had catastrophic conse-quences that continue to resonate in that little pronoun. (35)

Thus, by opting for a first-person narrative where the "I" belongs to someone who is originally from Germany, Sebald is trying to problematize an issue that many of his compatriots were experiencing. This is one of the reasons why *Austerlitz* is not merely the story of his eponymous protagonist but rather Austerlitz's search for identity symbolically represents the struggle of a whole nation that, despite the difficulty in coping with a traumatic event, has to try and recover from it by piecing together the fragments of its lost past. Only by acknowledging its history, it might therefore be able to forge a new identity on the ruins of the former.

Finally, another interesting detail of the incipit of the novel—perhaps the most interesting one considering the present context—is that the first thing that the narrator does is giving the temporal and spatial coordinates, "In the second half of the 1960s I travelled repeatedly from England to Belgium (...) On one of these Belgian excursions (...) I came on a glorious early summer's day to the city of Antwerp" (Sebald *A* 1). Within the span of the first ten lines of the novel, we discover, first of all, where the events take place, that is, between England and Belgium because, in fact—even if Austerlitz's story will lead us also in Czech Republic, Germany and France—the narrator will meet him mainly in London and Antwerp (only at the end in Paris too).

Secondly, we realize that the time of the story does not coincide with the time of the discourse. In other words, by foregrounding his narrating-I perspective, he is suggesting that there is a temporal gap between the events he is narrating—which unfold from the second half of the 1960s until the end of the 1990s, with glimpses up to 1938—and the present moment when he started writing this story—presumably after "the winter of 1996" (Sebald *A* 8) which is the year of their last conversation when Austerlitz gives him the keys to his studio before leaving to find his father. This is crucial because telling the events with hindsight allows him to take up a privileged perspective. The frequent prolepsis help the readers to navigate with more ease the layered and labyrinthine temporality of this novel—examples of this might be "on all our later meetings" (Sebald *A* 6) or, talking about the picture of the rugger team, "scarcely a week after our reunion at the Great Eastern Hotel [he] sent me a postcard copy of the picture he had mentioned, without further comment" (106). This is extremely relevant in the present discussion because, in fact, this retrospective narration is functional to the fundamentally iconotextual structure of *Austerlitz*. As Eshel explains,

> Since the book is told from a temporal perspective that succeeds this and all other events, the symbolic order of this key moment suggests a different reading of the plot altogether. The black and white photographs scattered throughout the book — indistinguishable from the narrative itself — were configured with the text *after* the narrator received the keys to Austerlitz's interior, both literally and metaphorically. (79 emphasis mine)

The fact that the pictures were included in the text which the narrator was writing only *after* Austerlitz left him the keys to his house in Alderney Street is of paramount importance because, to go back to what Zilcosky suggested, this is exactly what allows for the naturalization of its strong visual dimension. Unlike in *The Emigrants* where "the images interrupted the narrative, estranging the reader from the story" (Zilcosky 687), readers of *Austerlitz* are not led to question

their presence on its pages because they know where they come from. It might even be argued that it is Austerlitz himself who introduces the narrator to the power of images. As a matter of fact, proof of the narrator's newly found interest in photographs might be considered the fact that, of all the pictures displayed, only the last one was taken by the narrator and that happens when Austerlitz has just left. Even the first pictures representing the eyes were taken in all likelihood by the narrator and a notation at the end of the book specifying that he "stopped in Antwerp on [his] way back from Paris, to see the Nocturama again" (Sebald *A* 410) might suggest that those first four pictures as well were not taken in the second half of the 1960s—immediately before meeting Austerlitz—but rather in the 1990s—immediately after they parted in Paris. In fact, all the pictures that follow, like for instance, the one of the dome of the station, while it might have been taken by the narrator, it also comes right after the passage saying that Austerlitz took "several pictures" in the waiting-room (Sebald *A* 7) thus perhaps hinting at the fact that all the photographs that follow will be Austerlitz's. On the other hand, however, it must not be forgotten that the narrator is also keenly aware of the fact that "the history of countless places and objects which themselves have no power of memory is never heard, *never described or passed on*" (Sebald *A* 31). Thus, even if it might be argued that Austerlitz did in fact make him realize the evocative power that pictures—and perhaps even objects[3]—might have, the narrator still seems to remain convinced that pictures alone cannot counteract the process of forgetting but that they also need language. This would therefore explain the "final result" which is indeed a novel that opens up to the visual. In fact, if many recognize in Sebald the figure of the "postmodern *bricoleur*,"[4] within the narrative frame of

[3] This is evident, for instance, when he recounts his visit in Terezín and his stumbling upon the Antikos Bazar: "They were all as timeless as that moment of rescue, perpetuated but for ever just occurring, these ornaments, utensils and mementos stranded in the Terezín bazaar, objects that for reasons one could never know had outlived their former owners and survived the process of destruction" (Sebald *A* 277).

[4] Sebald's familiarity with Lévi-Strauss's concept of the bricoleur is by now widely known. Accounts of this might be found, for instance, in *W.G. Sebald in Context* edited by Schütte.

the novel it is in fact already the narrator himself that undertakes the project of merging words and images,

> Consider him at work and excited by his project. His first practical step is retrospective. He has to turn back to an already existent set made up of tools and materials, to consider or reconsider what it contains and, finally and above all, to engage in a sort of dialogue with it (...). He interrogates all the heterogeneous objects of which his treasury is composed to discover that each of them could 'signify'. (Lévi-Strauss 18)

This is how Lévi-Strauss describes the work of the *bricoleur* and the resemblance between this passage and the creative process undertaken by the narrator of Sebald's novel is striking: he works in retrospective, he has an "already existent set" of materials—we might argue both Austerlitz's photographs and his own notes—and "engages in a sort of dialogue" with them. The idea of the narrator as "postmodern *bricoleur*" appears to be further reinforced by Terry Eagleton who believes that "nothing could more aptly exemplify such a condition than the practice of writing itself, which draws its atomized material fragments into endless, unmotivated constellations of meaning" (qtd. in Santner 166 n23). Thus, following what Eagleton's says, for a novel like *Austerlitz* to be possible, having a narrator who is also a writer was crucial because the very act of writing implies the creation of unity from a heterogeneity of atomized materials in the ultimate attempt to create meaning. In fact, it might be argued that as soon as the narrator realized that both media—the pictures and the written notes—could "signify," he decided to use both thus making them converse. Accordingly, drawing from Lévi-Strauss, the "postmodern *bricoleur*," Santner explains, "engage[s] in signifying practices that depend on a previous dispersion, on a certain state of diaspora" (12). Santner clarifies what he means with "dispersion" and "state of diaspora" by using Benjamin's image of the angel of history,

> This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin "Theses" 257)

Thus, considering what Santner says, that "it is precisely this work of denial and repression of the inherent fragmentation of a life in the symbolic order which produces the pile of wreckage" (9), it might be argued that Austerlitz—and to a certain extent the narrator himself—as a second-generation survivor, has grown up in a society in which it appeared to be "prohibited any look backward" (Sebald *NH* 7). The diaspora experienced by Austerlitz is thus both spatial and temporal because first, as a child, he was forced to leave his country of origin and, second, everything he knew about his childhood was soon obliterated. It is as if he was exiled from his own time to the point that, as Caruth says, to compensate for the traumatic loss he started to "carry an impossible history within" himself (Introduction 5)—an "impossible history" because as he himself admitted, in order to survive he had to create for himself a partial narrative of the twentieth century that categorically shunned everything related to the Second World War and Germany, "[a]s far as I was concerned the world ended in the late nineteenth century, I dared go no further than that" (Sebald *A* 197). Therefore, as soon as Austerlitz learns to look back at the past, like the angel in Benjamin's parable, he feels impotent against this violence—he wishes to remember, redeem and save but he is constantly being swept back in the future. It is the narrator that comes to his rescue by means of his work. Committed to passing on Austerlitz's story, the narrator, as a postmodern *bricoleur*, "while insisting on this condition of loss and dispersion, tries to move beyond mourning

and invest his or her libidinal energies in the process of improvising new associations and correspondences in this open field of semiotic excess" (Santner 12).

If Austerlitz's search for his origins is doomed to remain open-ended, the narrator represents a solution, that is, that "compensatory aesthetics" which precisely connects what has been disconnected. As a matter of fact, when it comes to the trauma of the Holocaust not even photographs seem to be enough because "[l]'immagine non giunge mai al limite, non arriva mai a toccare l'orrore, e lì dove essa si ferma, subentra la parola. Si tratta di una chiara estetica compensativa fra parola e immagine" ("images will never reach the limit, they will never touch the horror, and there where they stop, words take over. It is a compensatory aesthetics between words and image."; Ercolino "Per un'estetica" 97 my translation). The narrator, then, succeeds in carrying out the ultimate process of mediation between the verbal and the visual and this is why, in his hands, the "exhibition of the eighty-one photos 'entrusted' to [him] by Austerlitz becomes a mnemonic device aimed at triggering buried connections that unlock parts of Holocaust history" (Straus 48). As a consequence, "a form of pictorial healing is symbolically achieved by connecting what has been disconnected through the juxtaposition of language and photographs" (Straus 46). The "signifying practices" in which the narrator *bricoleur* engages lead to the formation of these new associations and correspondences between images and words which allow us to bring order in the shattered fragments of history and to move beyond mourning. The compensatory aesthetics from which the Image Novel rises perfectly lends itself to foster a process of ethical remembrance of those horrors that, despite going "beyond powers of both imagination and conceptualization" (LaCapra 220), need to be told. This novelistic form does not dare grasping the totality of it but embraces the principle that what is needed is instead "an acceptable rhythm between language and silence" (LaCapra 215). The Image Novel as a form precisely rests on the awareness that neither

words nor images will ever be enough and yet their collaboration allows for the evocation of emotional and affective undertones that might resonate even with contemporary readers.

Chapter 3

Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*: The Image Novel as Objective Correlative of the Migrants' Ontological Displacement

> For what interests and attracts me is what is not in the photograph – the absence that the photograph signifies. If home is the place where somebody notices your absence, then the photographs are home for the worlds we have lost.
>
> —Velibor Božović

3.1 Pictures In-Between

All iconotextual forms rest on the interplay between the verbal and the visual. Yet, the way in which words and images interact is not always the same. Cometa proposed three different "rhetorics" to be adopted that might help identify the operative principles underlying the word/image relation of a given iconotext: the rhetoric of the gaze, the rhetoric of the layout and the rhetoric of *parerga* (Cometa 78). It consists of three different "reading techniques" that bring into focus a specific aspect of the visual dimension. An iconotext may, for instance, be studied from the point of view of the "gaze," that is, by investigating "tutte le implicazioni che lo sguardo fotografico può avere per la letteratura" ("all the implications that the photographic gaze might have for literature,"; Cometa 78 my translation). This kind of research would therefore call for notions originally belonging to the domain of photography, namely "il dettaglio, la messa a fuoco, il primo piano, lo sfocato, il blow up, il panorama, la dimensione istantanea" ("the detail, the focus, the close-up, the out-of-focus, the blow up, the panorama, the snapshot."; Cometa 79 my

translation). One, however, might decide to study how images are arranged on the page. Cometa in fact emphasizes that "l'impaginazione è essenziale per comprendere il funzionamento" of iconotexts ("the layout is fundamental to understand the mechanics" of iconotexts; Cometa 78 my translation). This kind of analysis should certainly "ten[ere] conto delle possibili relazioni tra testo e immagine (inserto dell'immagine nel testo, interdipendenza, interruzione etc.)" ("take into account the possible relations between text and image (insertion of an image in a text, interdependence, suspension etc.)."; Cometa 87 my translation) but it might even "studiare i rapporti che si creano tra immagine e immagine, a prescindere dal testo" ("study the relations established solely among images, thus overlooking the text."; Cometa 83 my translation). For Cometa, this kind of analysis is particularly fitting for Sebald's novels as,

> [L]e immagini sono disposte liberamente con scarse o nulle relazioni con il testo che le circonda, o comunque con referenze che presuppongono un'attività intensa del lettore e non sono sottolineate né dalla cronologia naturale della narrazione né tantomeno da didascalie e altri apparati paratestuali.
>
> (Images are arranged freely with little or no relation to the text that surrounds them, or in any case with references that require protracted efforts on the reader's part as they are underlined neither by the natural chronology of the narration nor by captions or other paratextual supplements.) (87 my translation)

While our analysis did aim at underlining the interconnectedness between text and image in *Austerlitz*, it is in fact true that what concurs in clarifying the presence of images in a given point on the page of Sebald's novel are just faint echoes found in the text. The simple fact of stating that pictures in *Austerlitz* have mainly a metaphorical function does find confirmation in Cometa's words because it suggests that the meaning of a picture is not immediately given but rather needs to be deduced from what the text says and thus requires an attentive and laborious reading activity.

Bereft of captions or paratextual supplements, this iconotextual maze asks readers to abandon themselves to the uninterrupted flow of images and text. The hypothetical presence of a paratextual apparatus would have in fact made the narrative less fluid as the readers would have been required to interrupt their reading to focus on the comment accompanying the text. Thus, if on the one hand captions might make the reading of images more immediate as their meaning would be clearly and unequivocally stated, on the other hand it would also mark a pause and redirect the reader's attention outside the text. Without captions instead the focus remains on the story and what the readers are left to do is simply abandon themselves to its constant flux. Thus, as Cometa suggests "[i]l lettore deve semplicemente abbandonarsi al flusso delle immagini che scorrono come in sovraimpressione sul/accanto al testo" ("readers simply have to abandon themselves to the flux of images that flow as superimposed on/next to the text."; Cometa 87 my translation) but this "abandoning oneself"—far for implying a superficial reading—is necessary to be open to the response evoked by Image Novels that, as mentioned in the first chapter, is indeed dualistic in nature. As soon as the meaning of pictures is no longer immediately given, what is required is in fact a more accurate reading which might make one receptive to the smallest textual hints. Finally, there is the third (and the most relevant one in the present context) kind of rhetoric, that is, the rhetoric of *parerga*. In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida defines "parerga" as "what is only an adjunct, and not an intrinsic constituent in the complete representation of the object" (53). Thus,

> The notion of this *hors-d'oeuvre* which (…) does not stand simply outside the work [*hors d'oeuvre*], also acting alongside, right up against the work (*ergon*). Dictionaries most often give "hors-d'oeuvre," which is the strictest translation, but also "accessory, foreign or secondary object," "supplement," "aside," "remainder." (…) A parergon comes against, beside, and in addition to the *ergon*, the work done [*fait*], the fact [*le fait*], the work, but it does not fall to one side, it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside. (Derrida *The Truth* 54)

The kind of analysis required for Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* is in fact one that accounts for those elements, *parerga*, that "giocano un ruolo decisivo nella costituzione complessiva del layout e dunque concorrono alle sue retoriche" ("play a pivotal role in the overall organization of the layout and therefore participate in its rhetoric."; Cometa 90 my translation). As Cometa explains, they can be either "integrazioni testuali dell'immagine [o] integrazioni visuali al testo [che] rend[ono] la lettura del fototesto un'esperienza molto più complessa di quella di un qualunque testo prevalentemente verbale" ("textual integrations to the image or visual integrations to the text that make the reading of the photo-text an experience far more complex of any other text which is mainly verbal."; Cometa 78 my translation). While Cometa focuses on "textual parerga," namely captions and epigrams, as he believes that "non vanno per altro considerati come meri elementi testuali" ("they should not be considered mere textual elements."; 90 my translation), what is required for *The Lazarus Project* is an investigation of photographs precisely in the role of "graphic *parerga*" despite Cometa saying that "*parerga* grafici (...) nei fototesti sono un'eccezione" ("in the photo-texts graphic *parerga* are an exception."; 90 my translation). In Hemon's novel, pictures in fact are not integrated in the text as smoothly as in Sebald's but they rather seem to be located "neither inside nor outside" (Derrida *The Truth* 55). What safely allows us to state that it is the pictures which work as *parerga* of the text—and not the other way around—derives from that same "genealogy of iconotexts" traced in the first chapter as we ought not to forget that in the name "Image Novel" it is the second term that sets the "genre" of the work while the first one refers to the *additional* features. Thus, if the parergon refers to what is being *added* we can argue that, being an Image Novel, in *The Lazarus Project* pictures work as *parerga* to the text. While it is true that this same reasoning might be carried out for all Image Novels, it appears particularly suited for Hemon's work precisely because of the liminal space occupied by images. Interestingly,

to shed some light on the peculiar structure of *The Lazarus Project* it might be useful to see it in relation to Coe's *The Rain before it Falls.* While it is true that, as we mentioned in the first chapter, Coe's novel may certainly be considered iconotextual in mode as it deeply engages with the visual but cannot be considered an Image Novel, it still bears more than a passing resemblance, structure-wise, to Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*. In both novels in fact each chapter is introduced by a photograph but, on the one hand, Coe made the conscious stylistic choice *not* to include them while, on the other, Hemon inserted them. Let us see more in depth the implications of their respective choices. This is an extract taken from *The Rain Before It Falls*,

> Very well. I'm going to start, now. Picture number one: a suburban house in Hall Green, a few miles from the center of Birmingham. (...) This is a rather tiny picture. I'm not sure how much I'm going to be able to describe to you. Taken in winter, and the winter of 1938 or '39, I would have thought. It shows the whole of the front of the house. The drive is on the left: it rises steeply from the road to the side gate and is very short, just about long enough to hold a car. (...) A thin layer of snow covers almost everything. This is a little wrought-iron gate at the side of the horse, but you cannot see down the passageway into the yard. (...) To the far left of the picture, slightly overhanging the wrought-iron gate, you can see a few withered branches (...). (Coe *The Rain* 35-36)

The description continues but this is enough to show with which precision photographs are delineated to the point that most of the times it takes the whole chapter to cover the subject in its entirety. It is the case, for instance, of the fifth picture (roughly the seventh chapter even though they are unnumbered). The description begins with Rosamond saying that "there are four distinct 'layers' to the picture, if that is the correct term, and I shall try to describe them to you one by one" (Coe *The Rain* 71). Then, she meticulously starts, "First of all, in the far background…" (71) and one "layer" after another she covers the entirety of it while interspersing her description with anecdotes which contribute to coloring her verbal account of the photographs. "[T]he images we

remember, the ones we carry inside our heads," Rosamond says, "can be more vivid than anything a camera is able to preserve on film" (Coe *The Rain* 80). What she seems to be suggesting is not far from what Freedberg himself pointed out, "[w]hen we have no image before us, we can only be compassionate by reforming mental images on the basis of what we have seen and known" (191). Compassionate about Imogen's inability to see these family pictures, Rosamond attempts to make up for this loss by delving deeper into the photographs and enriching the simple description of them with what she herself "ha[s] seen and known" (Freedberg 191). As Louvel explains,

> This novel, a photo-novel in a way, is structured by the photographs placed at the beginning of each chapter. Their classic thematic role, that of triggering remembrance, is renewed by the diegetic necessity. But the blind addressee will never receive these tapes, as her accidental death, reproducing an old incident (hence the construction of "pattern"), precedes the death of the old lady. (...) The *ekphraseis* intertwine with the memories and endow the text with a hybrid quality mixing together time and space, oral and visual references, cause and consequence. (Louvel *Pictorial* 66)

While the issue of the terminological ambiguity in defining this kind of novels has already been tackled in the first chapter, it is still useful to see that, despite having opted for the same structure as Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*, Coe relied solely on the rhetorical figure of ekphrasis thus avoiding tapping into the visual domain. The absence of the actual photographs in *The Rain Before It Falls* consequently requires a punctual description of them whereas, since in Hemon they are actually present, there is no urgent need to describe them and in fact they are simply alluded to. We might take as an example of this the picture of the dog which opens the tenth chapter (again unnumbered). Despite not stating it clearly, the narrator tells us that at the entrance of their hotel "there lay a mangy dog who raised his head and sniffed the air when we passed but did not move" (Hemon *LP* 123). Thus, what we are dealing with seems to be perfectly encapsulated by Varga's

words, "[w]ord and image are not presented on the same page but refer, *independently* from each other, to the same event or thing in the natural world" (42 emphasis mine). While we cannot be sure that the dog he is referring to is the same one that is portrayed in the picture, this is what the juxtaposition of text and image seems to suggest. What we can notice in Hemon's novel is precisely that the pictures displayed are never described and yet each chapter contains an oblique reference explaining the presence of that given picture at the beginning of the chapter. In this way, text and image are certainly bound together from the point of view of their "subject-matter" but they also maintain their independence. Louvel explains the logic of *parergon* in these terms,

> [I]n-between, neither within nor without the text, as characterizes the *parergon*. The in-between position of the reproduction of course shows it for what it is: an element exterior to the book (...) but it is also part of the book as its main (...) structural organizing principle. (*Poetics* 68)

Thus, it is possible to think of the pictures in *The Lazarus Project* as graphic *parerga* to the text precisely because they are neither inside the text (as they were in *Austerlitz*, that is, seamlessly integrated into the fabric of the text) nor outside (as frequent allusions contribute to tightly bind them to the text and they still participate in the overall structure of the novel). The question thus arises spontaneously. Considering *The Rain Before It Falls* and *The Lazarus Project* in comparison, do pictures share the same rhetorical function of ekphrasis?

3.1.1 The Rhythm of Pictures

Jameson once wrote,

> [T]he most inveterate alternative to narrative as such reminds us that storytelling is a temporal art, and always seems to single out a painterly moment in which the onward drive of narrative is checked if not suspended altogether. The shield of Achilles!: this is the most famous instance of that suspension of narrative. (*Antinomies* 8)

Is this the case in Hemon's novel as well? Do pictures stop the narrative flow or enhance it? In *The Antinomies of Realism*, Jameson identifies two impulses as twin sources of realism, narrative and scenic (mainly identified with affect). If, on the one hand, the narrative impulse corresponds to the ordinary flow of time (past, present, and future), on the other,

> [T]he opposite number of that chronological temporality of the récit has somehow to do with a present; but with a different kind of presence than the one marked out by the tripartite temporal system of past-present-future, or even by that of the before and after. For all kinds of reasons, to be developed in the following pages, I will identify this present (...) as the realm of affect. (10)

Described "as an eternal present, as an element which is somehow self-sufficient, feeding on itself, and perpetuating its own existence" (36), affect opposes the narrative impulse in the genesis of realism and introduces a new temporality, the present of consciousness. What is functional to the present context is that, for Jameson, "the impersonal consciousness of an eternal or existential present would at its outer limit govern pure scene, a showing that was altogether divorced and separated from telling and purified of it" (25). Thus, we might think of the presence of pictures as a sudden break in the narrative flow which contributes to "detemporaliz[ing] existence, to dechronologiz[ing] and denarrativiz[ing] the present, indeed, to construct[ing] or reconstruct[ing] a new temporal present which we are so oddly tempted to call eternal" (26). While it is true that in

the present context we cannot properly talk about "scenic impulse" because with the presence of the visual we literally exit the realm of literature; still, the material alternation of pictures and narration concurs in placing two different temporalities one next to the other. Indeed, in discussing the implications of the presence of photographs in Sebald's works, Eshel suggests that the "dramatic effect originates from visual and temporal propositions that structure and mark time" (94) as "images relate the spectator to temporality" (94). On the one hand, the reader is faced with the temporality of the narrative and, on the other, that of photographs which is not much different from that of affect because, as Orlan explains, "the power of photography consists in creating sudden death. … The camera's click *suspends* life" (qtd. in Cadava 7 emphasis mine). The insertion of pictures therefore brings in the novel a kind of temporality that defies any "sense of successivity, chronology, and coherence" (Eshel 93). This would once again allow us to talk about the Image Novel as a dialectical form in which the encounter of its two main structural elements, which collide at the level of temporality, give way to Stimmung. In this regard, Böhme himself defines "atmospheres" as "*affective* powers of feeling, spatial bearers of moods" (16 emphasis mine) and, more importantly, he believes that Stimmung "takes away the homogeneity of the surrounding space and fills it with tensions and suggestions of movement" (Böhme 19). More specifically, "[a]tmospheres are produced by certain agents or factors, in particular by sound and illumination, but also by the geometry of a room, by signs, *pictures*, etc." (Böhme 3 emphasis mine). Thus, if we think of the novel as the "surrounding space" whose "homogeneity" is being unsettled, pictures themselves would be the very agents of this disruption. As a matter of fact, as it is "words themselves (…) which are incompatible with the body and its affects" (Jameson *Antinomies* 37) as soon as "the realm of the visual begins to separate from that of the verbal and conceptual and to float away in a new kind of autonomy[, p]recisely this autonomy will create the

space for affect" (55). Defying language, atmosphere cannot but belong in the domain of affect whose "positive content (...) is to activate the body. Language is here opposed to the body, or at least the lived body" (Jameson *Antinomies* 32). The origin of the Image Novel, thus, rests precisely on the encounter—at once disruptive and fruitful—of these two temporalities one bound to the chronological order of past-present-future and the other which presupposes "giving oneself over to them [atmospheres] affectively and bodily" (Gumbrecht 18). Going back to Hemon's novel, *The Lazarus Project* makes one feel this tension with particular strength precisely due to its structure based on the marked alternation of words and images which, however, does not imperil the unity of the novel. Indeed, despite marking a break in the narrative continuum, because Stimmung "fills [the surrounding space] with tensions" (Böhme 19) it also conveys "suggestions of movement" (Böhme 19). Accordingly, Louvel explains that not only does "the visual sto[p] the flow of the text and confirms or, on the contrary, provokes a deflation of the text [but t]he image may [also] create a rhythm in the text" (*Poetics* 67). This seems to be the case with Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* as not only do we find a rhythm in the oscillation between verbal and visual but also in the very order with which pictures are organized. The narration, in fact, is punctuated with photographs which introduce a shift in time and place and thus set the rhythm of the narration itself. As Ward suggests, pictures in *The Lazarus Project* seem to be working as if they were portals between "one narrative and the other" but also "between history and memory, past and present, America and Europe" (196). The photographs in Hemon's novel might be divided into two categories: the archival pictures dating back to 1908 which document Lazarus Averbuch's story in Chicago and the contemporary pictures which in the novel are said to have been taken by Rora Halilbašić who accompanied the narrator, Vladimir Brik, in his search for traces of Lazarus' previous life in the area occupied by the former Russian Empire. The two sets of pictures alternate

each other thus endowing the narration with a rhythmic cadence and suggesting that their "place is related to meaning; the[ir] location has a semantic value" (Varga 35). Therefore, on the one hand, in Hemon's novel, "[t]he image contributes to create an effect of suspense when it modifies the treatment of time in the narrative, producing an effect of deceleration" (Louvel *Poetics* 109). This is evident, for instance, in the very first chapter which closes with Chief Shippy—who just shot Lazarus—standing "frozen, holding his breath, exhaling with relief as the young man dies, the gun smoke slowly moving across the room, like a school of fish" (Hemon *LP* 9) only to resume fifteen pages later, "Assistant Chief of Police Schuettler immediately takes charge of the investigation" (25). It is precisely as Louvel explains, "[b]y delaying the action, the image increases the tension towards the revelation, the desire to know" (*Poetics* 109) and in fact the truth surrounding Lazarus' death is always postponed thus constantly nourishing and renewing the reader's need to know. On the other hand, however, the novel leads us to look at "the image as a phenomenon that exposes the structure of the work while implementing an apparatus" (Louvel *Pictorial* 184). In fact, in *The Lazarus Project* not only do images set the rhythm of the novel but they also reinforce its structure as the archival photographs introduce the "old chapters" set in Chicago in 1908 while the other pictures open the chapters recounting the contemporary story which follows Brik's travel eastward at the turn of the twenty-first century (post 9/11). Thus, it is possible to see that the "suggestion of movement" Böhme talks about can be evinced by the fact that the disposition of the photographs enhances the narrative distribution of the contents of the novel thus allowing the story to move forward. In fact, it ought not to be forgotten that just like for *Austerlitz*—and, by extension, for all Image Novels—we postulated a narrative dominant. Even though in *The Lazarus Project* pictures might be said to have reclaimed an even bigger autonomy, they are still subsumed under a system which is primarily a storytelling device and therefore they

participate in the achievement of *its* aims. In particular, what Hemon wants to convey is first and foremost the feelings of displacement and deracination felt by migrants. In the next sections we will therefore investigate exactly how the structure and the pictures he chose for *The Lazarus Project* are functional to these themes as they are meant to give voice to the torn psyche of the migrants.

3.2 Reinventing a Space for Liminal Lives

Between Icarus and Odysseus
–Søren Frank

Now, "[t]he crucial question will be[:] how [does] the migrant writer respon[d] to both these aspects of migration, the one full of hopes of freedom and promises of alternative ways of being human, the other characterized by an agonizing and potentially destructive detachment from history and territory[?]" (Frank 79). No other arrangement of the visual elements gives voice to the migrant's perpetual feeling of (not-)belonging as the *parergon* does. The very structure of *The Lazarus Project* seems in fact fully functional to the themes tackled as the fundamental "in-betweenness" of the photographs—neither fully inside nor outside—mirrors what migrants feel when forced to find a new home in a foreign country. Interestingly, despite having been specifically tailored for Sebald's *Austerlitz*, Zilcosky's reading proposal might actually be used to start reflecting on how themes and structure are deeply intertwined in Hemon's novel. Drawing from Freud's concept of the *fort*/*da* game[1], Zilcosky suggests,

[1] In his essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", Freud observes that his grandson has the "disturbing habit of taking any small object he could get hold of and throwing them away from him (...) As he did this he gave vent to a loud, long-drawn-out 'o-o-o-o', accompanied by an expression of interest and satisfaction" (14). Freud deduces that

> Open-endedness, here, is part of the larger structure of the *nostos*: the new journey allows for the new possibility of coming home; "fort/da" all over again. Far from undermining a nostalgic narration, Austerlitz's journey south only sets the stage for another homecoming. (693)

More specifically, Zilcosky explains that the "'fort/da' game thus gave way in Sebald's (…) work to an uncanny paradigm: the subject did not get lost (with the implied hope of getting found); rather, he incessantly returned against his will to hauntingly familiar places" (683). As Ha Jin explains, the desire to come back is innate in the mindscape of the migrant,

> Many exiles, emigrants, expatriates, and even some immigrants are possessed with the desire to someday return to their native lands. The nostalgia often deprives them of a sense of direction and prevents them from putting down roots anywhere. (…) The present and the future have been impaired by their displacements. (63)

Both Austerlitz's and Brik's *nostos* to their homeland is tarnished by the disturbing awareness that "everything was familiar and incomprehensible" (Hemon *LP* 68). Everything looks the same and "yet entirely different" (278) as all familiar places appear to have an uncanny character attached to them. As a consequence, however nostalgic one might be for the place of origin, Jin believes that what needs to be acknowledged is that

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"this was not a mere interjection but represented the German word 'fort' ['gone']" (15) as he "realized that the meaning of this game was precisely "to play 'gone' with them [his toys]" (15). In particular, what contributed to corroborate this hypothesis was observing the child play with a wooden reel,

> The child had a wooden reel with a piece of string tied round it. It never occurred to him to pull it along the floor behind him, for instance, and play at its being a carriage. What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skillfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive 'o-o-o-o'. He then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful '*da*' ['there']. This, then, was the complete game—disappearance and return (15).

The meaning laying behind this game, for Freud, is related to the fact that whenever the child's mother would have to go away "the child cannot possibly have felt his mother's departure as something agreeable or even indifferent" (15) and therefore must have compensated this disappearance with this game that assured him of the systematic return of the toys.

> [T]he word "homeland" has two meanings—one meaning refers to one's native land, and the other to the land where one's home is at present. (…) homeland is no longer a place that exists in one's past but a place also relevant to one's present and future (65).

Brik seems to be acutely aware of this fracture within the meaning of "homeland" when he admits, "my life was neatly divided: all of my now in America, all of my past in Sarajevo. Because there is no now in Sarajevo" (Hemon *LP* 208). Yet, despite knowing that his future is in America, the deracination from his home country cannot but make him feel constantly "in-between." As "the eternal transient, always adrift, never 'at home'" (Weiner 230), migrants frequently harbor within themselves this feeling of uprooting and displacement. Brik in fact feels like "[t]here was home and away-from-home transitions, and the space between the two was rife with borders" (Hemon *LP* 182). Thus, while Long suggests that "[t]he notion of *Heimat* [homeland] is, of course, dependant on its opposite and other, namely 'die Fremde' – the strange, foreign, geographically removed," in *The Lazarus Project* this opposition is further problematized. Brik rather than being a "double citizen" seems to be a "double foreigner" trapped in a condition of "ontological homelessness" (Banita 225). As Frank suggests, "the migrant is a weightless and bodiless person detached from any local physical space" (78). Accordingly, not only is Brik perceived in the U.S. as coming from a "remote country (…) a land of obsolescence whose people could arrive at humanity only in the United Stated, and belatedly" but even in Ukraine where he is immediately recognized as American (Hemon *LP* 123). The result is that he "fe[els] like a ghost" in his country (Hemon *LP* 278) and just "an attempt at an American" in the U.S. (163). It therefore appears clear that, Brik's—like Lazarus'—desire of being recognized as a full-fledged citizen of the U.S. while not having to relinquish his "previous, Sarajevo, life" (Hemon *LP* 17) is constantly thwarted by the awareness that he is in fact perceived as a foreigner in both places. This is perfectly expressed in the way he decided to structure his novel. As a matter of fact, what ought not be forgotten is

that, as in *Austerlitz*, Brik is not merely the narrator of *The Lazarus Project* but also a writer presumably working on the very novel we are reading. Thus, the structure that he chose for the novel seems to be precisely meant to give voice to this absence of roots and lack of solid grounding. In fact, as Santner explains, "[i]n the fort/da game it is the *rhythmic manipulation* of signifiers and figures, objects and syllables representing an absence, that serves as the poison that cures" (Santner 21 emphasis mine). "Manipulation" suggests that the rhythm perceived is not something that happened by chance but rather that has been skillfully and consciously devised. Therefore, this would allow us to see the disposition of the pictures in *The Lazarus Project* as a "rhythmic manipulation" consciously operated by the narrator/writer so as to create meaning [2]. As mentioned before, the fact that pictures were arranged as *parerga* to the text is what contributes to endow the novel with a rhythm. From their liminal position, in fact, pictures not only participate in the overall meaning of the text, but they also acquire the structural function of marking a shift in time and place between one chapter and the other. Thus, the very meaning of "fort" ("gone") and "da" ("here") precisely allows us to account for this oscillation perceived when reading *The Lazarus Project*—a constant moving back and forth between "there" (Chicago in the 20th century) and "here" (Chicago/Sarajevo in the 21st century). Indeed, by opting for this kind of structure, Brik appears to have had the intention of communicating how for migrants "departure [often marks] a fatal rupture resulting in a *chronic double exile* that simultaneously alienates them from their culture of origin and their new culture, from their past and their present" (Frank 83). Having "two

[2] This argument would be further strengthened by Santner's words as he sees the fort/da game as deeply connected to creativity, "[t]he capacity to dose out and to represent absence by means of substitutive figures at a remove from what one might call their 'transcendental signified,' is what allows the child to transform his lost omnipotence into a form of empowerment. This empowerment is called creativity" (Santner 20).

citizenships and two lives" (Hemon *LP* 17) is therefore no longer a source of enrichment but binds them in a form of double exile.

The idea of reading the rhythm of *parerga* according to the fort/da game allows us to account for the fact that the structure of the novel is meant to make the reader feel how "for an exile, (…) both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally" (Said qtd. in Frank 80) thus causing migrants to feel in a perpetual form of ontological displacement. In fact, as we will see, by making the readers continually move from Chicago to Sarajevo and vice versa all the while confusing the two narrative threads by means of constant echoes and doppelgängers, the reader is granted access to the mindscape of a migrant for whom past and present, here and there are indistinguishably merged. It is in fact frequent, as Irr explains, for writers of recent immigrant fiction to structure their novels so as to mirror the psychological displacement and decentering experienced by migrants (673) and, being fundamentally dualistic in nature, the Image Novel proves to be fertile ground for the thematization of the migratory aesthetics. The ultimate aim of *The Lazarus Project* seems to be in fact precisely that of giving voice to "the doubleness of weightlessness and compensatory grounding [which] positions the migrant somewhere between Icarus and Odysseus, on the one hand someone who has actually managed to flee and to fly, on the other hand someone who has sensed a human limit and realized the need to feel 'home' again" (Frank 80). This gap, Hemon seems to suggest, is felt as unbridgeable especially when migrants have to go through a "forced acculturation and violent assimilation" (Paul 259). Thus, as we will see in the next section, Hemon wanted to "expose the challenges migrants *in any era* are likely to experience when forced to leave home and relocate in a foreign land" (Aykol 190 emphasis mine). By intertwining two stories set a century apart, Hemon "sharpens an obvious rapport between early twentieth-century ethnic conflicts and the xenophobic

hysteria of a twenty-first-century America" (Ward 188). Therefore, first, we will provide an overview of the difficulties faced by migrants upon arriving in America by reflecting on how these issues are thematized in *The Lazarus Project*, and then we will bring into focus the *kind* of pictures displayed in the novel to show how Hemon, through the use of peculiar visual elements, subscribes to the agenda of many other contemporary immigrant writers who seek to reinvent "America" by giving voice to the displaced and the forgotten. As a matter of fact, it will appear clear that in *The Lazarus Project* the visual dimension, despite in appearance representing a line running parallel to the verbal, enters in dialogue with the verbal and fulfils the function of disclosing deeper nuances of the themes tackled.

3.2.1 "It's all milk and honey here"

> That would be the true land of the free (...) [where] I could be the sole meaning of my life.
>
> —Aleksandar Hemon, *The Lazarus Project*

What would not Americans do for their beloved freedom? "No idea is more quintessentially American than freedom," Foner writes in "Rethinking American History in a Post-9/11 World." Heralded as one of the ideological bedrocks on which the United States rests, freedom has always played a decisive role in shaping the nation's consciousness, values and identity. Accordingly, based on the very premise that everyone can equally benefit from this freedom, the melting pot "[m]ore than any other foundational myths evokes a vision of national unity and cohesion through participation in a harmonious, quasi-organic community that offers prospective members a second chance and a new beginning" (Paul 258). This is perfectly in keeping with the narrative the U.S.

created for themselves, that is, of "a people who naturally strive toward liberty and excellence" (Hemon *LP* 273),

> [I]n the case of the US, which looked upon itself as a nation of immigrants, such a forward-looking narrative needed to address how differences of origin and descent could be transcended, and the melting pot seemed to be the perfect model to describe the particular composition of US society. (Paul 259)

And yet this allegedly unbound freedom, fundamental principle for an equal and peaceful society, is known to have had some restrictions and, for somebody, even thresholds to cross. As Foner pointed out,

> If the meaning of freedom has been a battleground throughout our history, so too has been the definition of those entitled to enjoy its blessings. Founded on the premise that liberty is an entitlement of all mankind, the United States, from the outset, blatantly deprived many of its own people of freedom. ("The Contested History" 14)

What makes one American and thus entitled to enjoy the corresponding bounty, "American freedom"? Already in 1916, Bourne was denouncing "the failure of the 'melting-pot'" thus urging his readers "to an investigation of what Americanism may rightly mean." Foner, in particular, identified two crucial periods in the history of the U.S. when the issue of the boundaries of freedom was brought to the fore in public discourse,

> [The] debate about the boundaries of American freedom took place in the early twentieth century, as immigrants from southern and eastern Europe flooded into the country. Immigration heightened awareness of ethnic and racial differences and spurred among many native-born Americans demands for "Americanization" ("Freedom" 10)
>
> In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the language of freedom once again took center stage in American public discourse as an all-purpose explanation for both the attack and the ensuing war against "terrorism." "Freedom itself is under

> attack," President George W. Bush announced in his speech to Congress on September 20. Our antagonists, he went on, "hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other." ("The Contested History" 30)

The nearness of these two historical periods is clearly stated in *The Lazarus Project* as Brik says, "[t]he war against anarchism was much like the current war on terror—funny how habits never die" (Hemon *LP* 42). It is therefore not by chance that the two narrative threads that intertwine in Hemon's novel are respectively set in 1908—when migrants escaping pogroms in Eastern Europe sought refuge in "the land of the free"—and in the post-9/11 years—when the collapse of the Twin Towers spurred a new wave of xenophobia, of fear of the Other. Therefore, what this juxtaposition encourages us to question is the actual meaning of freedom. Is the "freedom" Americans were worrying about after 9/11 the same Lazarus was dreaming about in Chernivtsi? By connecting these two historical periods, Hemon seems to suggest that, far from being unambiguous, the concept of freedom is in fact polysemous. Indeed, all the characters of this novel seem to hold a different grasp of the term. If, for Olga, after the death of her brother, freedom just meant being lifted from "her mind, her life, her pain. The abandon of having nothing to lose, the freedom of being divested of all earthly burdens" (Hemon *LP* 167), for Lazarus—as well as for all the other migrants coming to the U.S.—"freedom" is nourished by the illusion of the American Dream, that is, leaving home and family for the possibility of a better future. However, as Herr Taube cynically tells Olga, "freedom is a business much easier to run if authorities have a useful enemy, and anarchists appear to be more than happy to be cast in that role" (146). Accordingly, after Lazarus' death we see Assistant Chief Schuettler tirelessly going through the "*foreigner*'s" belongings as he feels like "the very notion of freedom is at stake" (61). Schuettler's words are indeed emblematic of the Americans' blindness to the hardships immigrant had to endure. Perceived as a

"contaminating presence," the overall impression is that these "foreign elements (…) landed on these welcoming shores with no intention to contribute to the commonwealth but to hate and violate" (272). Therefore, enforcing "law and order" represents for him the best way to protect their beloved American freedom, that same liberty Lazarus was seeking but that not everybody is liable to enjoy. By quoting the words of the *Tribune*, Herr Taube attracts our attention on how "freedom" came to be associated with the linguistic cluster of extermination, "housecleaning," prosecution and deportation (143). Thus, just like Assistant Chief Schuettler "know[s], however, that such men are generally half-crazy individuals of foreign descent and of considerable degeneracy" (Hemon LP 60), Mary's father wishes to see that her daughter's husband has finally "succeeded at being American" and "that the humanizing process had been [in fact] completed" (163). Hemon therefore seems to suggest that, in the twenty-first century, as in the twentieth,

> [T]he melting pot signifies assimilation to the dominant culture (as it commonly does in modern day usage) rather than a form of hybridity: all European immigrants regardless of their ethnic backgrounds become "Johns," i.e., their Americanization amounts to Anglicization. (Paul 289)

Hoping for a symbolic resurrection lifting them from the ashes of their previous life, migrants have to pay a price for their arrival in the U.S., "disremembering" everything—Brik himself wonders "did he [the biblical Lazarus] have to disremember his previous life and start from scratch, like an immigrant?" (Hemon *LP* 127). What the myth of the melting pot obliterated was the fact that "assimilation (…) often is accompanied by trauma and dislocation that goes unnoticed in the dominant rhetoric" (Cutter 9) and it therefore fueled "America's ongoing belief in the mythology of the immigrant's painless adaptation" (Cutter 9). Thus, it is precisely in moments such as these ones, when the Americans' freedom is imperiled, that these myths are revealed for what they really are, deceitful narratives. "You think maybe this here is a different world; but it's all the same: they

live, we die" (Hemon *LP* 173)—Pinya, Isaac Lubel's wife, with this words gives voice to the disillusionment felt by migrants who as soon as they set foot on "the land of liberty and freedom" realize that the life of sufferings they left behind is not much different from what is expecting them here. Hemon, thus, aims at foregrounding precisely these feelings of displacement and deracination felt by immigrants coming to the U.S. holding up to their American Dream but being forced to confront the reality of things. Indeed, Lazarus, once arrived in Chicago, will remember with bittersweet nostalgia the time spent in Czernowitz, "the last place where [he] was able to imagine the exciting details of a better future" (Hemon *LP* 125). "This was America" (264), but what is it really? As Cutter explains, writers of contemporary immigrant fiction engage their readers in "a creative process that leads to the continual modification of the meaning of America. These writers transgress the borders of 'America,' but they also question the meaning of this term" (6). More specifically, they seem to be aware that only "by invoking just what has been forgotten" can "America" be reconfigured (Cutter 9). In fact, in novels such as *The Lazarus Project*—participating is what has been recently named "migratory aesthetics"[3]—"[t]he definition of the 'American' is (...) expanded to incorporate figurations of what has been overlooked in its national mythologizing of an imagined community" (Cutter 9), namely the experience of the migrants. Hemon figures among those writers who "not only acknowledge the losses inherent in immigration, but also expand our definition of trauma and reexamine commonly held notions of American identity" (Sheffer qtd. in Cutter 9). Starting from the very narrative of the American Dream, "the expatriate novel of the 21st century," Irr explains, "refuses the early and mid-twentieth-century American story of the heroic rise. The hero of the twenty-first-century expatriate

[3] Bal explains the meaning of the expression "migratory aesthetics" by specifying that "Migratory, in this sense, does foreground the fact that migrants (as subjects) and migration (as an act to perform as well as a state to be or live in) are part of any society today, and that their presence is an incontestable source of cultural transformation" (23).

novel typically turns out to be not the self-made man but rather (…) a subject occupying an institutional non-space" (677). Brik himself in *The Lazarus Project* is looked at as somebody who was able to accomplish the typical "narrative trajectory: displacement, travails, redemption, success" (Hemon *LP* 32) and his very desire to fit in the stereotypical idea of "Americanness" makes it hard for him to confess that he actually was not able to live up the expectation—"I couldn't bring myself to tell them that I had lost my teaching job and that I was pretty much supported by Mary" (32). Thus, what Brik soon experiences is a rupture "between us and them" (12). Only during the celebrations for the Independence Day "whatever meager Americanness has been accrued in the past decade or so entirely evaporates for the night; everybody—myself included—is solidly Bosnian" (12) and it is precisely on such occasion that the opportunity for a grant to make field research in Eastern Europe presents itself. The way Hemon in fact proceeds to the redefinition of America is subtle and yet permeates the entire novel, starting from Brik's journey itself. Indeed, if the myth of the American Dream is generally tied to the westward expansion, Brik decides to move the other direction: in his eastward journey to retrace Lazarus' past he becomes ever more aware of the vacuity of the American Dream. Stojanović believes that as Brik's journey progresses "he gets more confused about his own life" (327). While it is true that he feels that he has nowhere to go, by traveling through Ukraine, Moldova, Romania and Serbia, he eventually does arrive "somewhere." Like the American settlers, Brik embarks on a journey through those "nowhere lands," like Czernowitz, where the unknown future still overbrims with possibility and the American Dream has not yet shattered. This time, in fact, the "elsewhere" he is looking for is no longer the uncharted territories of America but the places of his past where everybody run away from. "Nowhere" thus becomes the new European frontier, a space quintessentially occupied by migrants which is in-between the life just left behind and the future

waiting ahead. It is therefore "nowhere" that opposes itself to "home" because, as Brik remarks, "if you can't go home, there is nowhere to go, and nowhere is the biggest place in the world—indeed, nowhere is the world" (Hemon *LP* 182). Lazarus, like many other migrants, precisely found himself dwelling in this "nowhere," with his back turned to his haunting past and with his eyes fixed on his great American future. Yet, one century later, having understood the true nature of the American Dream, it is by venturing back into this European wilderness that Brik will come to realize that "[e]verything [he] had been was now very far away, [he] reached elsewhere. [He] would not remember how long ago [he] had left Chicago and Mary. [He] could not recall (…) what it was that we called our life" (Hemon *LP* 234). This deliberately undermines the typical progressive movement of the frontier whose advancement was usually associated with "society mov[ing] steadily away from European influences, gr[owing] steadily on distinctive American lines" (Hofstadter 434). In particular, with "the West (…) clearly develop[ing] as an antithesis of the East" (Rundbell 18), as the quintessential perpetuator of "Americanism," the East accordingly came to be identified as "the world before America" (Hemon *LP* 162), before progress and before freedom. Thus, George's, Mary's father, inquiries into Brik's origins by means of questions such as "Your country is *west* of what?" (Hemon *LP* 162) perfectly fall into the narrative of the frontier according to which "the westward movement [i]s (…) a manifestation of progress" (Rundbell 22). As Rundbell explains, "the frontier (…) was an ever-moving line which divided the thrusts of civilization and the savage forces striving to break off those thrusts" (15). One century apart, both Assistant Chief Schuettler and George become spokespeople of this very notion of America which implies a vision of the "foreigner" as a "savage presence" that needs to be "civilized" and "humanized." Indeed, if George considered Brik—and more broadly all migrants—a "half-ghost," Assistant Chief Schuettler in harsher terms defines them as "*half-crazy individuals of foreign*

descent and of considerable degeneracy" (Hemon *LP* 60 italics in the text). As Brik admits, he often finds himself "hating (…) his [George's] insistence on my gratefulness to American greatness" (162) and, in light of this, it would not be difficult to imagine George himself asking him the very question posed by Assistant Chief Schuettler, "*See they* [the immigrants] *not the greatness of our country?*" (272-273). Thus, both George's and Schuettler's understanding of the world outside America is firmly rooted in the idea of the frontier as the carrier of progress. Indeed, the former sees Bosnia as "this remote, mythical place (…) a remnant of the world from before America" (162) while the latter as "old lands" characterized by "the madness of murder, the persistence of persecution" (273). As a consequence, everybody coming from outside the frontier is for them somebody who needs to go through a "humanizing process" (162). In this sense, the westward advancement of the frontier represented "a gate of escape from the bondage of the past" (Turner qtd. in Hofstadter 434) as, like in George's and Assistant Chief Schuettler's view, coming to America should allegedly represent for the foreigners the possibility of discovering "previously unimaginable freedoms" and to escape from "all the sanguine accomplishments" of their countries (Hemon *LP* 273). If at the beginning, when he first lands in Lviv, Brik does have the impression of "regress[ing] through the city" (Hemon *LP* 67), as his journey eastward continues these lands soon come to represent "a gate of escape" but this time from the bondage of an American future and therefore a way to reconnect with his past. Far from being confused about his life, he realized that he "never wanted to go back to America" (Hemon *LP* 287) because his "somewhere," his home, is in that "elsewhere" where he left his heart (283). Thus, if "the frontier was the 'line of most rapid and effective Americanization'" (Turner qtd. in Rundbell 15), Brik's journey against the grain is precisely meant to reverse the effects of Americanization.

As Hemon once famously said, "[t]o write in and of America we must be ready to lose everything, to recognize we never had any of that in the first place, to abandon hope and embrace struggle, to fight in the streets and in our sentences" ("Writing the Unimaginable") and this is what Brik experiences. By moving away from Chicago, he has to forgo everything he has come to believe in during these years spent in the U.S. and it is precisely this distance that "complicates Brik's own ideas about assimilation and exclusion" in America (Ward 187). By framing his novel in two historical periods marked by heightened paranoia, Hemon precisely wants to draw our attention to those moments in which the foundational American myths are at their weakest.

3.2.2 Undoing America the Sarajevo Way

The reconfiguration of "America" takes many different shapes in *The Lazarus Project*. Not only does the eastward journey undermine the narrative of the frontier but even the very way in which Brik decides to recount Lazarus' story suggests a process of deconstruction of the notion of Americanness which is ultimately aimed at a redefinition of "the borders of America" itself (Cutter 9). What many critics have pointed out is that, far from writing a strictly historical account of what happened to Lazarus Averbuch, in Hemon's novel "the narrator of the story fill[s] in the gap with imagined parts, as he admits himself" (Stojanović 324). As a matter of fact, *The Lazarus Projects* opens with the narrator saying, "[t]he time and place are the only things I am certain of: March 2, 1908, Chicago" (Hemon *LP* 2). Stojanović believes that "by distancing himself from the factuality and accuracy of the book, [the narrator] instill[s] doubt in the readers about the truthfulness of the account" (323). This, for him, bespeaks a sort of failure of Brik's archival research, "[h]e [Brik] wishes to discover the answers to the previous questions and give meaning to Lazarus's death. There were[, however,] a lot of gaps in the story of Lazarus Averbuch, information which was not

readily available in archives and even information which to that day remained a complete mystery" (323). This would be perfectly in keeping with Vietta's claim that a "sense of epistemological and linguistic crisis" (qtd. in Long 9) permeates contemporary literature. This is also what enables Long to argue that in Sebald's novel "[t]he epistemological promise of the archive is never fulfilled, which is why it leaves the end of this particular text open and the subjectivity of Austerlitz in a permanent state of incompletion" (20). This is not far from what happens in *The Lazarus Project* as "Brik leaves the narrative distraught and unable to finish his letter to his wife, explaining that he has decided to stay in Sarajevo" (Ward 192). Apart from the fact that Hemon's novel as well does not really have a closure, the very research carried out by Brik into Lazarus' life seems to be doomed to remain incomplete. Interestingly, we might argue that Brik's decision to leave for Eastern Europe seems to have been inspired precisely by what Derrida calls *mal d'archive*,

> We are *en mal d'archive*: in need of archives (...) It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there's too much of it, right where something in it anarchives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia to return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement. (*Archive Fever* 91)

Even though Brik has already read everything he could find about Lazarus Averbuch as he admits having "pretty much completed [his] research" (Hemon *LP* 157) he still feels compelled to visit the places of "absolute commencement" where Lazarus lived and yet he is forced to realize the fundamental lack of testimonial presence. As Chaim at the Jewish Center in Chernivtsi tells Brik, of all the descendants of the refugees "nobody stayed (...) [a]nd if they stayed they were quick to forget what happened in Kishinev (...) they remember nothing. Why would they want to bring in more death, from before they were born?" (Hemon *LP* 156). The generational gap is made

particularly dire as either nobody wants to remember or many of the witnesses are now dying—"not many people are left, and they are dying, too" (Hemon *LP* 157). Thus, unable to find any witnesses, Brik—driven by his *mal d'archive*—decides to visit the Jewish Community Center in Chisinau. Tracing the origins of the word "archive," Derrida explains that the term has always denoted an institutional place where public memories are stored. Therefore museums, as the quintessentially modern archives, in Brik's eyes brim over with epistemological promises,

> [I]t is at their [the archons'] home, in that place which is their house (…) that official documents are filed. The archons are first of all the documents' guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives (...) It is thus, in this domiciliation (…) that archives take place. The dwelling, this place where that dwell permanently, makes this institutional passage from private to the public (*Archive Fever* 2)

Yet, Brik's efforts prove to be in vain. In fact, not even museums, chief protectors of collective memories, can help Brik make up for these aporias. In the Jewish Community Center in Chisinau, Brik cannot help but notice the staleness of the museum reinforced by the impression that the speech Iuliana was delivering, despite being rich in historical facts, had in fact been rehearsed so many times that it sounded fundamentally hollow of meaning. Brik therefore seems to become progressively more aware of the fact that "[t]he cultures of the past are (...) migrating into books and museums, where they are archived but no longer live" (Belting 46). What is therefore "problematize[d is] the nature and exploration of the archives [as well as] the artificiality and insufficiency of archiving, [which] refers to the lacunae of history, their manipulations" (Luca 203). Thus, as one ventures into archives and museums, the question that naturally rises is, "does one base one's thinking of the future on an archived event?" (Derrida *Archive Fever* 80). In *The*

Lazarus Project, two possible answers to this question are proposed: the American and the Bosnian. If in America the answer would be affirmative as corroborated facts are considered the only possible means to achieve truth, in Sarajevo imagination plays a crucial role in the search for truth.

In an interview, Hemon once said that "[f]or American literature to survive it might have to undo its Americanness" ("Writing the Unimaginable"). What does it mean that American literature has to "undo its Americanness"? In *The Lazarus Project*, Brik repeatedly hints at the fact that Americans and Sarajevans tell stories *differently*,

> Out of my recently acquired habit of American reasonability I challenged him [Rora], suggesting that he might be brazenly embellishing, but he calmly proposed that I go there right now and see for myself. I demurred, naturally, and *chose to believe*. (Hemon *LP* 31)
>
> In Chicago, I had found myself longing for the Sarajevo way of doing it—Sarajevans told stories ever aware that the listeners' attention might flag, so they exaggerated and embellished and sometimes downright lied to keep it up. You listened, rapt, ready to laugh, indifferent to doubt or implausibility. (...) Disbelief was permanently suspended, for nobody expected truth or information, just the pleasure of being in the story and, maybe, passing it off as their own. It was different in America: the incessant perpetuation of collective fantasies makes people crave the truth and nothing but the truth—reality is the fastest American commodity. (Hemon *LP* 102-3)

One might argue that his decision to go to the places where Lazarus lived was dictated precisely by the American need for objective facts. However, as he ventured into Eastern Europe accompanied by Rora, he found himself longing for "the Sarajevo way" of narrating. In fact, having realized that there were mysteries in Lazarus' story that not even archival research would have allowed him to solve he realized that he "needed to reimagine what [he] could not retrieve"

(Hemon *LP* 46). He thus decides to abandon American reasonability to opt for Bosnian creativity. As Stojanović explains,

> In order to answer questions that were left open, the narrator has to rely on his imagination and narrative skill. [An] example is that it is not likely that the narrator knew what Lazarus said to the owner of the lozenge store, nor what he read on the bulletin board in the shop. Such details represent the author's creative freedom and gap-filling (...) [as t]here is no historical account of Lazarus buying the lozenges. The postmodern author wishes to move away from totalizing patterns and move towards establishing new perspectives without imposed endings. (324).

Stojanović interprets this process of "gap-filling" as a postmodern technique and, more specifically, as an example of historiographic metafiction precisely because it features the protagonist doing research presumably for the very novel we are reading but also because "Aleksandar Hemon presents us with a historical event that is enriched by his imaginative storytelling" (Stojanović 319). Linda Hutcheon coined this expression to refer to those novels "whose metafictional self-reflexivity (and intertextuality) renders their implicit claims to historical veracity somewhat problematic, to say the least" (3). It is in fact true that "an investigation of the language and politics of archive (...) and historiography" underpins Hemon's novel (Ward 188). and that *The Lazarus Project* "works to situate itself within historical discourse without surrendering its autonomy as fiction" (Hutcheon 4). However, rather than being approached as a postmodern narrative this novel might also be simply read as a "Sarajevan tale" that wants to defy the American canon. In a certain sense it might therefore be argued that in Hemon's novel the failure of the archive is deeply tied to the issue of Americanness. This blurring the line between history and historical fiction perfectly fits the narrative of undoing America from within. In other words, having realized that archival research "does not necessarily grant access to history" (Coccia 53) and that "[a]rchival documents never allow us to see an 'absolute'" (Didi-Huberman *Images*

in Spite 82), Brik decided to relinquish the (American) claim to the whole truth and to tell Lazarus' story "by "exaggerat[ing] and embellish[ing]" it (Hemon *LP* 31). This kind of reading would thus be in keeping with the agenda of broadening the meaning of "America" because what Hemon is doing is writing an American novel "the Sarajevo way." In that same interview, Hemon mentioned that,

> [t]he literature that does not strive to break through to the unimaginable or to dive into the unknowable but opts instead for confirmation of that which always is, thereby forgoing its transformative potential, is always bound to fail ethically and aesthetically. For American literature to survive it might have to undo its Americanness. ("Writing the Unimaginable")

In order to save American literature, what is needed is unchaining it from the need for truth thus opening a breach into the unimaginable. What Hemon calls for is a literature that carries out a "disintegration of the known world" because what in fact this deconstruction "provides [is] a lot of pieces to play with and use in constructing alternatives while being aware that the simple modes of representation are tranquilizers at best, coercion at worst" ("Writing the Unimaginable"). This is exactly what Hemon does in *The Lazarus Project*, where he subverts the American literary canons and the very meaning of "Americanness," he then reassembles the pieces resulting from this disintegration as Bosnians would do—by imagining. What the narrator therefore achieves is a Bosnian American narrative style that finds its bedrock in the archival search but at the same time acknowledges its limits and therefore opens itself up to the unimaginable. Hemon thus oversteps the limits of "America" and attempts a reconciliation between the two storytelling traditions. In other words, by writing an "American novel" in the "Sarajevo way," he succeeds in broadening the meaning of "America." What Hemon wishes to accomplish by means of this reconfiguration is for American literature to start embracing and accounting for what is usually overlooked and forgotten, that is, the migrants' experience and the related trauma of displacement. The fact that

The Lazarus Project is structured following the logic of *parerga* in itself contributes to represent the uprooting felt by migrants. However, this is also further reinforced by the kind of photographs used. In the next section, it will in fact become evident that the role of pictures is twofold: not only do they mirror the narrator's Bosnian American style, but they also give voice to the feeling of "in-betweenness" and "non-belonging" usually associated with the migrants' experience.

3.2.3 Left in a Wood of Images: Archival and Contemporary Pictures

This same Bosnian American narrative style is achieved not only at the level of Lazarus' story but also at a structural one as it is in fact reflected in the very choice of the pictures. If the photographs introducing Lazarus' story seem to provide the narration with historical grounding as they are all archival pictures; on the other hand, the images opening the chapters following Brik's journey seem to account for that "breach into the unimaginable" that characterizes the Sarajevo way of telling stories. The two sets of pictures require in fact a specific reasoning aimed at pointing out their respective specificities even though it will eventually be necessary to consider them in dialogue.

The picture that opens the first chapter inaugurates a series of eleven photographs that Hemon retrieved from the archive of the Chicago Historical Society. In fact, all the pictures belonging in the chapters recounting Lazarus' story are historical evidence of what happened at Chief Shippy's house on March 2, 1908. What deserves special attention is, in particular, the fact that these pictures featured in a newspaper, the Chicago Daily News, and that we are provided with actual snippets (always in italics in the novel) from the original articles in which they appeared. As a consequence, to better understand the implications of inserting this type of photographs in a novel it might be useful to reflect on the theory surrounding news images. In her

study *About to Die: How News Images Move the Public*, Zelizer invites her reader to ponder a number of questions, namely "What kind of information does one need to understand an image[4] and how much information is necessary? Who fosters an image's understanding?" (1). Considering that the place in which these photographs originally appeared was a newspaper, it might be useful to try and answer these questions taking into consideration the historical context of the time. As Zelizer explains,

> Because many images reflect unsettled public events—the difficult and often contested planned violence, torture, terrorism, natural disaster, war, famine, crime, epidemic, and political assassinations at the core of today's geopolitical environment—their consideration can help clarify how the public forms sentiments about the larger world. It can also elucidate under which conditions images promote broader political agendas. (1)

What the archival images bespeak of is precisely: contested planned violence as the newspaper of the time reads "*the terrible deed of yesterday morning* (…) *was planned and carried out by a dreamlike Jewish boy*" (58), the tortures inflicted on Isaac Lubel by the Fitzes who "interrogat[ed] him *vigorously*, throwing him to the floor" (54), terrorism threatening American freedom ("*With animal passion in her eyes, she promised long years of general terror, decades of anarchy that would destroy our freedom and everything we hold dear*" (139) and averted political assassination against Chief Shippy. This is the kind of information that the newspapers of the time wanted to convey, that is, that "[t]he detectives (…) with the passion of soldiers fighting a just war" (Hemon *LP* 55) were courageously defending the nation from the threat of anarchism. Thus, if as Zelizer explains news images "coaxes the viewer to suspend disbelief, draw conclusions and invoke the 'intended sentiment' of the depiction" (2), what were the "intended sentiments" at the time? In

[4] Whenever Zelizer uses the term "image" she is in fact always referring to "news images."

1908, readers of the *Chicago Daily News* and the *Chicago Tribune* were not expected to sympathize with the "foreigner," on the contrary, the photographs worked as pieces of evidence that the "process of housecleaning" was in fact being implemented and that Americans ought not to fear for their freedom. As Busch explains, before the Haymarket riot "for months a group of openly-professed anarchists had harangued and preached anarchy to the crowds (…). All (…) foreign born; none (…) naturalized" (249). If already before Haymarket the connection between anarchism, violence and foreigners had been drawn, it then started to be felt as certainty on May 4, 1886, when a bomb was thrown at the police in Chicago's Haymarket square. This means that, in 1908, the year *The Lazarus Project* is set, America was just beginning to recover from the trauma of the Haymarket affair and was experiencing a wave of xenophobia which led to the arrest of many "foreigners" only loosely or allegedly connected to anarchism. At the time of the riot and in its aftermath, "the duty of almost every American seemed clear. Our way of life was endangered by foreign radicals; these men might not have been directly guilty, but their political philosophy called for the use of force" (Carter 271). It therefore becomes evident how, especially in times of social upheaval, news images can precisely function as "[c]ommunity building, recovering from trauma and grief, arousing empathy and indignation, concretizing complex events" (Zelizer 11). We can thus infer that showing the picture of dead Lazarus in the newspaper precisely falls into the narrative of "community building" as it at once satisfies the readers' biases (Carter 278) and fosters unity by means of creating a common enemy—in this case, "the foreigner." Even the very fact that it is a photograph serves this very purpose as photography itself is considered the privileged visual mean for factual and impartial knowledge. However, as Zelizer explains, it is also true that, far from being downright objective in themselves, even "[p]hotographs have been thought to work by twinning denotation and connotation, matching the ability to depict the world

'as it is' with the ability to couch what is depicted in a symbolic frame consonant with broader understandings of the world" (3). Indeed, she identifies two "forces" that contribute to shape the meaning of news images: denotation and connotation. The former "suggests that images reflect what 'is there.' Associated with 'indexicality,' 'referentiality,' and 'verisimilitude,' denotation (…) shows things 'as they are' and appears to capture life on its own terms" (Zelizer 3); the latter, instead, "suggests that images provide more than what is physically caught by the camera, where, associated with symbolism, generalizability, and universality, the image draws from broad symbolic systems in lending meaning to what is depicted" (Zelizer 3). Words, in this regard, play a fundamental role in guiding the readers' perception of the meaning of a photograph. Hemon seems to be keenly aware of this and in fact in *The Lazarus Project* two different connotative forces overlap: the original words that appeared in the newspapers of the time, and the narrator's words that provide "an alternative point of view" on the matter. Thus, for instance, where the third photo (see fig. 1) seems to simply show the entrance of Chief Shippy's house, "[u]pon closer scrutiny the photograph reveals three white 'X' marks in the vestibule; two on the floor between the open door and the banister; one on the wall behind the staircase. On one level, the 'X' marks presumably indicate elements in a crime scene: gunshots and bloodstains" (Weiner 220). Those 'X' marks for the reader of the time were supposed to be evidence of how close "the foreigner" was to killing Chief Shippy but, with the support of Brik's words, for the contemporary readers, they become pregnant with meaning symbolizing the violence and misconceptions perpetuated in the years following the Haymarket riot. Thus, for instance, if in the newspaper we read that "[*t*]*he vile foreigner shot at Foley, shattering his wrist, and then at Henry, the bullet piercing his lung*" (Hemon 8 *LP*), Brik completely reverses the story revealing that

Fig. 1. Chief Shippy's House (Hemon *LP* 24)

"[w]ithout thinking, Chief Shippy sho[t] at the young man [Lazarus] (…). Startled by Foley, Chief Shippy sho[t] at him too, and then, sensing a body rushing at him, wheel[ed] around like an experienced gunfighter and sho[t] at Henry" (8). Therefore, it becomes evident that those same 'X' marks acquire two utterly different meanings, on the one hand, they become emblem of Chief Shippy's courage in confronting a degenerate anarchist, on the other they become symbol of an avoidable tragedy. A similar reflection might be carried out for the photograph of dead Lazarus. Particular attention must in fact be reserved to this picture because, as Zelizer's study suggests, rarely do newspapers decide to display photographs of actual death as they tend to show what she termed "about-to-die" pictures[5] which are usually "[s]een as a less offensive, less graphic, and more ethical journalistic choice" (Zelizer 29). As Zelizer explains, "[t]he decision to show an about-to-die image reflects a corresponding decision not to show evidence of death. Significantly, the practicalities of showing about-to-die images go beyond the photographer because though images of dead people are often taken by photographers, they are not always shown" (28-29). Therefore, what are the implications of displaying the picture of Lazarus already dead? Showing a photograph such as these ones (see fig. 2 and 3) goes violently against one of the predicaments that has been significantly emphasized in this thesis: spectators want pictures to be alive. Confronted with the irreversible reality of Lazarus' death, viewers have to relinquish any hope of enlivening him. As Weiner noticed, "[w]ritten on the photograph in white

Fig. 2. Front Picture of Lazarus Dead (Hemon *LP* 52)

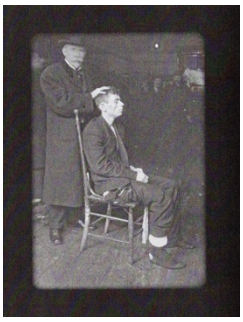

Fig. 3. Side Picture of Lazarus Dead (Hemon *LP* 240)

[5] Zelizer explains that "about-to-die" images "represents a range of ambiguous, difficult, and contested public events, which are shown by depicting individuals facing their impending death. Focusing on intense human anguish, it offers a simplified visualization of death-in-process in events as wide-ranging as natural disaster, crime, accidents, torture, assassination, war, illness, and acts of terrorism" (24). She subsequently divides them into three categories: presumed death, possible death and certain death. Even though those falling under the group of "certain death" are "used to confirm that the person about to die is now dead" (Zelizer 173), they still show the subjects in their last living moments.

letters (not readily deciphered) are the words 'Capt. Evans Police Dept' (next to the standing man) and 'Lazarus Averbuch' (next to the sitting man), confirming the identity of Lazarus" (222) (see fig. 2). From Captain Evans proud pose we can evince that the meaning of showing this picture was, as in the case of Shippy's house, comforting the American crowd that authorities were in fact taking care of the menace. However, it should not be forgotten that "news images, and particularly photographs, function through a qualification of reason—a combination of contingency, the imagination, and the emotions—that settles not at the image's original point of display but over time by different people putting it to multiple uses in new contexts" (Zelizer 11). Thus, what needs to be considered is the different contexts in which these photographs were shown, that is, first the newspapers dating March 2, 1908, and then Hemon's novel. As a matter of fact, by juxtaposing these pictures to a contemporary story (post-9/11), Hemon succeeds in recontextualizing their scope and in making them emblematic of all the "politically excluded" in U.S. society. Thus, if at the beginning (in the context of the newspaper) these photographs were not expected to elicit an emotional response, now (in the context of the novel) they acquire an affective undertone. As Cadava writes,

> It [photography] allows us to speak of our death before our death. The image already announces our absence. We need only know that we are mortal—the photograph tells us we will die, one day we will no longer be here, or rather, we will only be here the way we have always been here, as images. It announces the death of the photographed. This is why what survives in a photograph is also *the survival of the dead*—what departs, desists, and withdraws. (8 emphasis mine)

While it is true, as Barthes emphasizes, that photography "tells me death in the future" (*Camera Lucida* 96), "by attesting that the object has been real, [it also] surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive" (Barthes *Camera Lucida* 79) and it therefore ensures "the survival of the dead." Thus,

metaphorically speaking, Hemon does succeed in making his protagonist—as his biblical homonymous—resuscitate and live again in the collective memory. The recontextualization of news images in the medium of the novel contributes to show how images are in fact "malleable" and Hemon precisely seems to be capitalizing on the fundamental polysemy of images (Barthes "Rhetoric" 38-39). Drawing from Reinhardt, Weiner suggests that "Hemon enacts a rearticulation of the event, subverting its initial and intended meaning, by capitalizing on the '*elasticity of photographic meaning*'" (224 emphasis mine). Thus, if, as Eco would say, "[w]ithout the text, the image lies or gives way to a multitude of interpretations" (qtd. in Wagner 30), once again a reflection on the presence of pictures in a novel necessarily has to involve the "text" as well. Accordingly, Hemon believes that "pictures are there so as to show that they can't quite formulate experience on their own" but, when combined with writing, images acquire testimonial value (qtd. in Boswell & Hemon 262). In *The Lazarus Project*, in particular, we have a layered textual component as the archival pictures from the Chicago Historical Society are accompanied by both the original words written in the newspapers and the narrator's words. A reexamination of the events is therefore enhanced because Brik's words contribute to undermine the truthfulness of the news reports of the time. In Hemon's novel, "[t]he text," as Barthes suggests, "replies" as it "helps to identify purely and simply the elements of the scene and the scene itself" and "helps me to choose the correct level of perception, permits me to focus not simply my gaze but also my understanding" ("Rhetoric" 39). Thus, if in the early 1900s these pictures were to ensure the neutralization of the anarchist menace, in this new novelistic context they are meant to elicit the empathy and sympathy of the readers by making them see that side of history that had been obliterated from public discourse. In this sense, Brik's words not only help the reader focus their gaze on certain details of the photographs but also their understanding by making them *see* what

had been omitted in the archives. The insertion of contemporary pictures precisely serves the purpose of strengthening the connection with readers of the 21st century and to create a bridge across centuries.

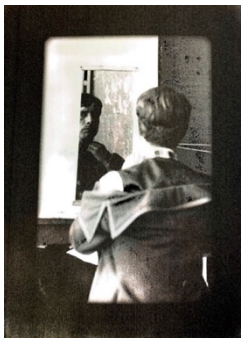

Fig. 4. Man in the Mirror (Hemon LP 0)

In the first chapter we discussed the differences between the terms "image" and "picture" reaching the conclusion that the former accounts for a degree of immateriality that the latter lacks being as it is tied to the very presence of the medium itself. The contemporary photographs in *The Lazarus Project* require a further development of the concept of "image." As a matter of fact, opening Hemon's novel is not the historical photograph portraying the entrance of Chief Shippy's house but a contemporary one representing a man looking at himself in the mirror (see fig. 4). Its strictly paratextual positioning influences and guides the way the following contemporary pictures are to be perceived. In this regard, Lavinia Tache proposes a reading of *The Lazarus Project* in light of Emanuele Coccia's concept of the intrabody. Tache uses it to discuss how, since "[t]he intrabody connotes (…) an inseparability of physicality and memories, (…) in the context of diasporic experiences, the notion exemplifies the double account of displacement[—o]ne can feel home in a foreign place, but also one carry the poignant presence of the native country" (Tache 199). However, what interest us the most in the present context is the role that the mirror plays in Coccia's philosophy. For him, in fact, "in the mirror, we suddenly become *pure image*; we find ourselves transformed into the pure, immaterial, and extensionless Being of the sensible" (18). This is reminiscent of what Eshel says concerning the pictures in Sebald's *Austerlitz*,

> Sebald's photographic images are thus hardly an artful ornament to textual images, hardly a means to enhance aesthetic pleasure, but rather "genuine images" in Walter Benjamin's

> sense, devices that relate the reader to what is and will remain absent—the events and the protagonists of the past. (94)

Indeed, in *Arcades Project*, Benjamin suggests that "[i]t's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation" (462). Similarly, Coccia explains that "one appears and exists within the mirror for a moment even when no longer lives or no longer thinks; to be mirrored means to feel the thrill of existing in multiple places at the same time and in different manners" (31). By opening the novel with the picture of a man in the mirror what is being suggested is precisely that the following photographs, belonging to the contemporary thread, are to be seen as genuine images. It is, in particular, the specific temporality and spatiality implied in the notion of "pure/genuine image" that makes this argument particularly compelling for *The Lazarus Project*. Indeed, what Benjamin and Coccia respectively emphasize is the fact that genuine images account for not only the past "com[ing] together (…) with the now" but also the possibility of "existing in multiple places." This is particularly relevant because this "exercise in relocation and dislocation" together with the permeability of past and present is part and parcel of the migrants' experience. As Mukherjee explains in "Immigrant Writing," "the brain compulsively and continually merges past and present, there and here, mother tongue and learned tongue[; the immigrant writer] sees points of convergence between national history and personal life story" (Mukherjee 682). This is strikingly clear in *The Lazarus Project* where in fact this coalescence of past and present, here and there is further problematized as "[t]he two separate time frames are also conjoined through the superimposition of the various elements of the past onto the twenty-first century. Characters and events from the early twentieth-century continue to haunt the novel's present" (Aykol 188-9). In order to show how "the present is shadowed by the past" (191), Aykol pointed out not only the resemblances between the two protagonists (Lazarus, for instance,

dreamed of becoming a writer just like Brik) but also examples of characters "reincarnated" (190), namely Brik's "namesake [who] briefly appears as Lazarus Averbuch's English teacher" (190). Another instance might be the very title of this section which becomes a refrain in the novel as characters from both narrative threads at moments of loss and disorientation wonder, "Why did you leave me in the woods?" (Hemon *LP* 70, 94, 171, 234). These narrative echoes between one story and the other not only strengthen the feeling of displacement usually experienced by migrants but also make the readers realize that "the words, in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realized at a higher level, that of the story" (Barthes "Rhetoric" 41). This therefore contributes to reinforce the interdependence between words and images but also between the two sets of pictures themselves. Indeed, while "the archival photographs (…) serve as documentary evidence of the violence that occurred in Chicago at the turn of the twentieth century" (Aykol 192), the contemporary ones account for a "range of sensations, emotions, and phenomena" (Coccia 67) and are thus meant to make the readers emphatically respond to the displacement felt by migrants. Hence, just like the "American way" of telling a story seemed incompatible with the "Sarajevo way," in the same way the contemporary images counteract and undermine the apparent objectivity of the archival photographs and, precisely for this reason, succeed in accounting for what is and will remain absent thus bridging the gap created by the coldness of the archival images. As Božović explains, the photographs are "intimately and deeply connected with the book, but they also speak of something beyond its limits" (qtd. in Aykol 194). Deracination, in-betweenness and dislocation are all well-known sentiments to the migrants and the set of contemporary pictures (with their blurry and unclear subjects) precisely aims at giving voice to these feelings that archival images left out and erased. By leaving us wondering "in a wood of images," Hemon seeks to provide his readers with an

understanding of what it means to live with a feeling of perpetual in-betweenness. Thus, the instability embedded in the contemporary pictures contributes to shed light on the true history surrounding Lazarus' death by making the readers aware of the "trauma of displacement" (Matthes and Williams 31) resulting from the experience of migration—regardless of the century. In the first chapter, we mentioned that the presence of images in novels and the subsequent emergence of the Image Novel might be seen as the result of the "new ways of thinking about, and being in, the world" (Weiner 232). *The Lazarus Project* is a glaring example of this. Far from having a merely decorative function, its broad visual dimension "celebrates the possibilities introduced by the migratory consciousness" (Weiner 232) and thus succeeds in reconceiving "[t]he external, fragmented, and alienating environment (…) as a realm of opportunities" (232). By giving voice to the torn consciousness of the migrants, the interplay between verbal and visual typical of the Image Novel bespeaks the opening up of contemporary literature to different—and, so far, overlooked—ways of perceiving reality.

Conclusion

Source of disruption and vector of Stimmung, the image brings a whole new temporality within the domain of the novel. Yet, the suspension of the narrative flow produced by the insertion of visual elements, far from undermining its unity, represents an opening up of the novel, as a form, to that which eludes words, affect. Endowing it with deeper nuances of feeling, the presence of images accounts for a new—and quintessentially contemporary—way of thinking about reality. The unity fostered between verbal and visual is indeed the outcome of a perceived inadequacy of both media to give voice to a haunting past subtly infecting our present. The Image Novel rises as the symptom *and* the cure. Emerged from the awareness that neither words nor images alone could have ever granted us access to forgotten shreds of history, its aesthetics of mutual compensation contributed to reclaim and re-establish the validity of both media in the cultural discourse. If the image burns with memories, as Didi-Huberman once said, within the fabric of the novel words seem to blow on their ashes so that their flame might be rekindled. Indeed, even though at the beginning the photographs displayed in Sebald's *Austerlitz* and Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* might appear vague and obscure it is their juxtaposition with words that contributes to illuminate their rather elusive meaning. Thus, having been paired with the chapters set in the 21st century the contemporary images in *The Lazarus Project* become representative of the feeling of uprooting experienced by migrants, whereas in *Austerlitz* the photographs of the fortress, for instance, with the support of the narrator's and the protagonist's words come to symbolize Austerlitz's defense mechanism. The highly metaphorical function taken up by the visual dimension constitutes a breach into what so far was deemed too dreadful to be represented or even just imagined. Despite

never directly showing the violence and atrocities implicit in these humanitarian crises, they make the readers feel the sense of disorientation, displacement and loss experienced by second-generation survivors as well as migrants. Instead of claiming to uncover the whole truth—if ever there was such a thing—of the Holocaust, the Bosnian war and 9/11, *Austerlitz* and *The Lazarus Project* give proof of how the Image Novel aims at providing us with an affective understanding of such tragedies. By making the readers empathize with Austerlitz, Lazarus and Brik, Sebald and Hemon succeeded in creating "a bridging realm that connects subjective experience to larger collectivities" (Rothberg 124). This is possible because both writers use pictures that not only grant us access to the individual's psychology but that might also attest the historical reality of either the place photographed (as in the case of the Breendonk fortress) or the actual event (namely the archival pictures documenting the investigations into Lazarus' death). This is exactly how this iconotextual form contributes to historical knowledge. In this layered, multifaceted and intermedial representation of the past, the reader can grasp the actual complexity of such events and the lasting repercussions they might have. In the Image Novel, words and pictures thence collaborate in the "production of atmospheres" (Gumbrecht 5) that might make the contemporary reader aware of a traumatic past that *needs* to be dealt with.

As the product of a purely contemporary sensibility, the Image Novel is still in the process of evolving. As Dimock reminds us, "[g]enres have solid names, ontologized names. What these names designate, though, is not taxonomic classes of equal solidity but fields at once emerging and ephemeral, defined over and over again by new entries" (1379). In fact, the aim of presenting the term "Image Novel" by using Sebald's *Austerlitz* and Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* was to show that this new label does not wish to impose itself but rather to emphasize the still "emerging and ephemeral" character attached to it. The way in which Sebald and Hemon employ the visual

dimension is utterly different and yet both their works still participate in the aesthetic of the Image Novel. If, on the one hand, in *Austerlitz* photographs are seamlessly intertwined with the prose thus inviting the readers to simply abandon themselves to the perpetual flow of words and images, on the other, in *The Lazarus Project* the liminal space occupied by pictures contributes to endow the novel with a rhythmic cadence. Yet, despite their differences, what makes them Image Novels is not only the actual presence of pictures but also the fact that the meaning of the novel depends on the collaboration of words and images. Exposed to a constant process of confrontation between two media, the reader is asked to take active part in the construction of meaning so as to bring the symbolic project of the Image Novel to utter fulfillment. The response elicited is therefore dualistic in nature but perceived as one seamless whole. It is precisely on this perceived unity that the ultimate significance of an Image Novels depends. It is thus the reader that acts as mediator and catalyst of the image/word dialectic that constitutes the foundation of this form.

One of the aims of this thesis was also that of clarifying the terminological ambiguity surrounding iconotextual forms. Research still needs to be done to better determine the contours of the Image Novel as *Austerlitz* and *The Lazarus Project* are not the only examples of novels hybridized with pictures. Novels like Umberto Eco's *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (2004), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), Javier Marías' *Your Face Tomorrow* (2002) are just examples of novels with pictures that have recently been published but it remains to establish if they might as well be said to participate in the compensatory aesthetics of the Image Novel. In suggesting a name for this novelistic form, the choice fell on "image" rather than "picture" for two reasons: not only it allowed to account for the immateriality inherent in the notions of affect and Stimmung but it was also chosen in the awareness that although the two novels under analysis here feature a prevalence of photographs, this is not always the case. The

term Image Novel holds the hope that other novels with a different (and more diverse) visual apparatus might be subsumed under this label as well. Should that be the case, it would be worth investigating whether it might be actually possible to discuss the emergence of a kind of "pictorial turn" within the domain of the novel as a way for contemporary literature to respond to the devaluation of both words and images. After all, Boehm and Mitchell theorized the iconic/pictorial turn to point out that the image relates "to a different mode of thinking" (Boehm and Mitchell 104). The presence of pictures in the novel *does* account for "a different mode of thinking" as the reconceptualization of reality carried out by the Image Novel is the result of a new way of perceiving it in the first place. As words and images alone did not suffice anymore to represent it, what was needed was their joining of forces.

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