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Sebald's Still Life Devices against Interpretations: An Explanation of *Austerlitz* through Cortázar's and Antonioni's Cameras

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In order to be "historical," a photograph has to pass through the judgment of a community of interpreters. As it is typical for images, photographs show signs of inner, potential narratives contained inside them. Cortázar's short story "Las babas del diablo" (1959) focuses on this implicit and fluid potential for images to *produce* stories. If the intervention of an interpretative act determines the meaning of a particular picture as Cortázar's protagonist Roberto Michel exemplifies, in the case of the pictures of traumatic events such as the Holocaust their inclusion in the textbooks adopted to teach History at school—for being evaluated as especially representative of the event—depends on the authority of the gaze of the interpreters. Nevertheless, the attribution of authority is a debated point. In fact, a negationist discourse of collective tragedies periodically arises to put into question the veracity of the catastrophe of the Holocaust. In his short story, Cortázar reflects on the multiplicity of meanings that a photo contains. Roberto is able to choose *one* meaning only because he was physically present at the photographed event. In fact, external elements he remembers guide his interpretative gaze. The same happens in the movie *Blow-up* by Michelangelo Antonioni (1966), based on Cortázar's story, even though the question of the attribution of meaning to an image is seen in a different angle. In fact, for Antonioni, even the author of a photograph may have doubts about what really happened at the moment of taking a picture, regardless of the fact he was there. He too is presented as an unreliable authority. W. G. Sebald's posthumous novel *Austerlitz* (2001) is a book on Holocaust presenting numerous photographs on objects and places apparently unrelated to the tragic event. The aim of this article is to explain how

their presence in Sebald's book functions as a response to the problems of images as instruments of knowledge solicited in Cortázar's and Antonioni's works and as a device to control the production of interpretations.

The wanderings of two characters through contemporary Europe, their fortuitous Encounters, and the conversations they share in metropolitan surroundings are at the center of *Austerlitz*. The narrator, who is a middle-aged man without clear biographical background (we know he is a German professor and a researcher at a university), is not particularly interested in giving information about his past. On the contrary, his sketches of impressions on landscapes and people, his ruminative reflections, are at the core of his notes. In one of his visits to the city of Antwerp, he casually gets to know Austerlitz, an erudite academic who—as the readers soon discover—has forgotten the part of his early life that coincides with the Second World War. The acquaintanceship between the two men and their future encounters frame the narrative.

Austerlitz, following the pattern of other works written by Sebald, is a book that challenges the traditional classification of works of literature into genres. A novel *tout court*, a Holocaust historical novel, an essay (in literary form) on the functioning of mnemonic processes, are some of the possible labels we use to categorize this book. At first sight, readers notice that this book, so rich in descriptions of buildings and architectonic structures, is not organized according to a common literary "architecture" (divisions into parts, signaled by chapters and paragraphs). Even the diacritical marks distinguishing the voices of the various speakers of the text are absent. The impression is that of an almost uninterrupted wall of words, broken only in three points by asterisks and, towards the conclusion, by a blank space indicating the different times and locations of the encounters between the two main characters. This absence is significant, in the sense that, as is often the case in this book, what is missing is a continually evocated subject. The sense of "weight" of this text, the impenetrability it seems to suggest, is recalled in one observation made by the narrator, who visits the fortification of Antwerp and reflects that "the construction of fortification [. . .] clearly showed how we feel obliged to keep surrounding ourselves with defenses, built in successive phases as a precaution against any incursions by enemy powers" (Sebald 14). The assumption of the existence of "enemy powers," which could break

into and subvert the discourse, is directly connected to the almost continuous text of *Austerlitz*: a closed, visually impenetrable defensive stain of words, interrupted by numerous photographs inserted into the text. This iconographic choice is meant to explore the theoretic question of the use of images for the representation of a traumatic event, such as the Holocaust. Every piece of information Austerlitz recollects about himself is a result of a quest, his research through Europe, the consultation of documents, conversations with people who met him as a child, and finally, images that serve as illuminating keys for Austerlitz's personal memory.

If we consider the programmatic, systematic effort to dehumanize the prisoners at all levels and to completely erase the chance of transmission of information about what was actually taking place in the camps, the Holocaust can be seen as an *unicum* in the history of humanity. Based on this premise, the question that arises focuses on the possibility for the traditional narrative forms (novel, short story, biography, etc.) to transmit the singularity of the event. As Berel Lang affirms:

> [. . .] if there is a characteristically significant relation between the subject or occasion of representation [. . .] and the forms by which it is expressed, then it would follow that the identifying features of the Holocaust—what makes it distinctive historically and morally—would, and should also make a difference in the mode of representation. (5)

Contrary to the idea that the Holocaust is a subject that cannot be represented[1] but agreeing in what refers to the limits of traditional literary forms, Sebald chooses not only to write a composite book on this subject, but also to disseminate photographs in the text. The first image that appears (not surprisingly) in the *incipit* of *Austerlitz* is that of the eyes of the animals of the Antwerp Nocturama, a zoo visited by the narrator. Their gaze resembles those of inquiring men:

> [. . .] all I remember of the denizens of the Nocturama is that several of them had strikingly large eyes, and the fixed, inquiring gaze found in certain painters and philosophers who seek to penetrate the darkness which surrounds us purely by means of looking and thinking. (Sebald 4–5)

The photographs of animal and human eyes reclaim the attention of the reader in fixed, direct glances from the pages, which anticipate the centrality of the act of seeing and function as a memorandum. The following photographs in the book are neither ornamental nor ancillary but constitute the crucial point of the reflection.

The premise of my analysis is shaped by Hayden White's consideration of the historical text and its characteristics, comparable to those of the fictional narrative. Historical events, claims White in his essay "The Historical Text as a Literary Artifact,"

> [. . .] are *made* into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like—in short, all the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play. (1715)

Tropes such as metaphor, metonym, synecdoche and irony are at work in both fictional and historical verbal artifacts. Nevertheless, White seems to underestimate the narrative potential of the images, the split between what people see in them and their original source, as he compares the history with other ways to capture the reality:

> [. . .] it is generally maintained—as Frye said—that a history is a verbal model of a set of events external to the mind of the historian. But it is wrong to think of a history as a model similar to a scale model of an airplane or ship, a map, or a photograph. (1718)

White seems to oversimplify the relationship between reality and photograph, as if the latter was an objective, pure copy of what is seen, ignoring the particular selective gaze of the photographer in the moment of taking it. Also, he does not take into consideration photographs documenting past events that we cannot reach "by going and looking at the original" (White 1718). Contrary to White's argument, photographs are always the result of a selection of elements to assemble in a delimited frame. In addition to that, photographs deal with ephemeral, the instantaneous, and the volatile, which is

consequently not verifiable in an empirical way. To affirm that pictures are transparent is to ignore both the photographer's working gaze and the individual readings made by any person who looks at them. All these conditions open doors to a variety of possibilities in the act of producing, seeing and interpreting images. As seen in Cortázar's story "Las babas del diablo," the picture is the product of a choice but this choice is not under the complete control of the photographer. In fact, he is not alone in his act of taking photographs. The camera itself is a subject that influences the gaze of the photographer because it forces him to look for singularity and meanings in the landscape. The protagonist of the story, Roberto Michelet, a translator and photographer who lives in Paris, notices that "[. . .] cuando se anda con la cámara hay como el deber de estar atento [. . .] pensar fotográficamente las escenas" and adds that "el fotógrafo opera siempre como una permutación de su manera personal de ver el mundo por otra que la cámara le impone insidiosa" (Cortázar 81). In other terms, the photographer needs to find exceptional conditions in order to justify the shot and Roberto's imagination works to satisfy that need. When he is casually the spectator of the encounter between a boy and a more mature woman in the streets of the Quai d'Anjou, he immediately starts constructing biographies and plots around them:

> Lo que había tomado por una pareja se parecía más a un chico con su madre, aunque al mismo tiempo me daba cuenta de que no era un chico con su madre, de que era una pareja en el sentido que damos siempre a las parejas cuando las vemos apoyadas en los parapetos o abrazadas en los bancos de las plazas. (Cortázar 82)

Different versions arise but all of them are curious enough to deserve a picture. The reaction of the woman who has noticed Roberto's shot is aggressive. She asks for the roll of the camera because he did not have the right to take that photograph. Another man getting out of a car seems nervous. He joins the woman and reclaims the roll, while the boy runs away. Roberto decides to keep the picture he made and, some days later, he finally develops the photograph. The image, enlarged and fixed on a wall, starts making sense only through the reminiscence of the day of the encounter. The exaggerated reactions of the two adults explain it. Roberto now "sees" a woman trying to

seduce a boy in order to bring him to the man in the car. To have been physically present is decisive for the understanding of what *really* happened (according to Roberto's interpretative decision). The photograph would not be able to speak alone. The picture of the story is not a mute simulacrum of reality, because it potentially *could* produce many stories. Nevertheless, it is a too small window to perceive the real motifs, the profound level of causality that explains the encounter between the boy and the woman. Still, a question remains: does Roberto have a privileged understanding of the facts only because he was *there*? Is firsthand witnessing a sufficient condition to legitimate Roberto's vision?

Inspired by Cortázar's short story, Michelangelo Antonioni directs *Blow-up*, a movie that underlines even more the inherent ambiguity of pictures due to both the limits and creativeness of perception. As the Italian critic Aldo Tassone suggests, the similarities between the short story and the movie are reduced. What they really have in common is more a "clima spirituale" (Tassone 143) than the details of the plot. In this case, the protagonist, Thomas, is a fashion photographer working in the London of the 1960s. In a fundamental scene of the movie—the one that more resembles Cortázar's story—Thomas is wandering in a park with his camera looking for new subjects: he decides to follow a couple of adults, who act like lovers, and takes some shots of them. The pictures contain the entire landscape that surrounds the couple. When the woman realizes what Thomas is doing, she immediately runs to reclaim for the roll while Thomas continues taking other pictures. Needless to say, he refuses to sell his roll, and becomes even more curious about the mystery the photos might contain. Some days later, scanning the particulars of the pictures, he believes to have witnessed the murder of a man. Hidden behind plants, a killer points a gun towards the couple. Another image, taken before the discussion with the woman, shows a little stain behind a bush: the corpse of the man, according to Thomas's view. All seems to confirm that something exceptional actually took place. In fact, unknown people start following Thomas in the city and, surprisingly, the woman of the park finds his place in order to ask him one more time for the roll. One night, the photographer returns to the park, sees and touches the corpse—which significantly has its eyes wide-open. The centrality of the act of seeing is affirmed again, but the morning after there are no more traces of it, not even marks of its presence on the ground. All of a sudden, a

group of clowns arrives: they enter the tennis court and perfectly simulate a game without the use of rackets and balls. Spectator to all this, Thomas starts to "hear" the typical sounds of a tennis game, as if it is really taking place. The final scene implicitly questions the reliability of the senses, susceptible to be guided by a will or confounded by illusions in the act of reading the signs of the world.

The comparison between Cortázar's short story and *Blow-up* reveals some significant difference. The comparison between photography and literary translation in "Las babas del diablo" is replaced in Antonioni's movie by the similarities between photography and the art of painting. One of the characters of the movie is an abstract expressionist painter who explains to Thomas his creative process. What he sees in his work in progress canvas is a "mess," a confusion of colors and segments. Then, progressively, his gaze isolates an element that becomes the "clue" for the understanding of the image, similarly to the reconstruction of a crime in a detective novel. When Thomas shows one of the photographs he took in the park to the painter's wife, she comments: "it looks like one of those paintings," but she cannot distinguish anything in the black and white "mess" of the image. Another difference between the short story and the movie regards the question on the capacity of the photos to explain what the main character witnesses. Cortázar's story shows that the reactions of the woman and the man in the car are fundamental to interpreting the scene captured in the photo, while in the movie all the essential elements are included in the image itself. The continuous interaction Thomas has with the protagonists of his photos and other unknown presences (only punctual in the short story, totally concentrated in Roberto's impressions and solipsistic elaboration a posteriori) confirms his belief in the importance of what the pictures show. The pictures *contain* the story in its entirety; cause and effect are *included* inside them. The examples from Cortázar and Antonioni develop a reflection on gnoseology through the materiality of a fixed image, each questioning different but interrelated aspects of the act of seeing and understanding: the physical presence as a fundamental factor in interpreting an image (Cortázar), and the relative purity and independence of the gaze from the impressions generated by external solicitations or by the imagination of the photographer (Antonioni).

The problem of the potentially uncontrolled narrative interpretation of the images, due to the absence of an internal device in them

that delimits the production of significance, is decisive when we approach historical photographs. The adjective "historical," obviously applicable in a larger sense to any human product, refers here to a specific category of photographs, those that depict episodes, minor or crucial events included in the official History. Before appearing in the textbooks used to teach past events at school and at university, every historical picture passes through a process of selection and is connoted with a particular, official meaning. These pictures receive and carry a crystallized significance. Nevertheless, the role of the testimonies made by the authors of the photos or by participants of the event is often crucial in conferring credibility and legitimacy to the images.

Through the character of Roberto Michel, Cortázar demands that the readers consider the same question: if, for even the author of the photographs, there is an interval between the simple observation of an image and the attribution of a meaning, how can we isolate the event, which is actually taking place from other forms of reading, in which the imagination intervenes? With respect to this, Cortázar adds that "Michel es cupable de literatura, de fabricaciones irreales. Nada le gusta más que imaginar excepciones, individuos fuera de la especie" (89). It is at this point that Sebald's work turns to be significant, confronting the implicit polysemy of the images with a proposal that aims to control it. The numerous photographs inserted in the text of *Austerlitz* are not made by the same camera. The paternity of them is not explicitly declared but some may be attributed to the homonymous protagonist, due to the link they establish with Austerlitz's first person narrative. Others are relics from the past: figures in an old village, daguerrotypes of landscapes, objects (a clock, a backpack, shelves of books), interiors (a ladder, a table), a series of fragments of memory, which accompany the progressive reconstruction of Austerlitz's previous life.

The first pages of the book introduce the theme of the Holocaust, although the narrator did not have a direct experience of that event.[2] The principle of an indirect *liaison* between the objects photographed and the past they evoke is never broken. No single page of the book presents a photo that documents the effects of the atrocities committed in the concentration camp. Nevertheless, two images "talk" openly of death: the first shows three skulls, a particular of a large mound of skeletons found below Broad Street Station in London in 1865. The reference to mysterious reasons that guide

Austerlitz toward the place of the burial seems particularly important because the readers are induced to notice that the skulls of the previous inhabitants of London must have a correlation with other skulls—other dead of history—according to the intentions of the book. And in fact, the second direct references to death are images of the cemetery of an Azkenazi Jewish community in London (followed some pages later by photos of the Tower Hamlets cemetery). It has been noticed that "the photograph of cemetery which recur through [. . .] *Austerliz* signify that the lives of the protagonists are constantly shadowed by death and the Holocaust" (Whitehead 127), and that "the lack of boundaries and definitions in this universe of disintegration is repeated in the attempt to abolish the boundaries between the living and the dead—or rather, to make the dead part of the present" (Schlant 232). The pictures of the skeletons and of the cemetery seem particularly helpful to clarify the metonymic value of the collection of images of the book. In fact, a few skulls and a group of headstones are potentially able to recall, functioning as synecdoches, the catastrophe of Holocaust. Nevertheless, alone, they are imprecise in their evocative potentiality. In fact, they can refer to any war, any violence, any dead. To make them speak about the Holocaust, it is necessary to read the text that accompanies them. In other terms, the pictures are not autonomous in *Austerlitz*: they are inextricably linked to the words and to the totality of the other metonymic photographs collected.

Comparing the selection of photographs Sebald decided to insert in *Austerlitz*, it is observable the (apparently) digressive nature of them which reflects the wandering thoughts of Austerlitz.[3] The function of these pictures seems to obey the author's will to postpone the actual theme of the narration. This is true until the middle of the book, where Austerlitz visits the Liverpool Street Station. The digression device—for reasons of completeness in the act of communicating a scene or event—is necessary, because it depicts mnemonic processes based on a "step by step" uncovering of truth. In this sense, we could find in "Las babas del diablo" a comment on what is insisted in the entirety of Sebald's novel: to recount accurately is probably not possible, but the ramblings of thought give at least an idea of the digressive nature of memory itself. Also, how the selection of elements to write about is mimetically problematic and open to variations:

> Vamos a contarlo despacio, ya se irá viendo qué ocurre en medida que lo escribo. Si me sustituyen, si ya no sé qué decir, si se acaban las nubes y empieza alguna otra cosa (porque no puede ser que esto sea estar viendo continuamente nubes que pasan, y unas veces una paloma), si algo de todo eso [. . .] (Cortázar 79)

More than that, memory is *in general* a tricky instrument for knowledge as suggested by Sebald:

> People make up myths about themselves and they stick very closely to those stories that they have once "written" in their own minds. (qtd. in Bigsby 51–52)

If memory is not always a reliable instrument of the accuracy of the facts that happened, it could be attacked and negated as well by revisionist points of views: another irresoluble aspect of the labyrinthine problem of testimony.

As the narration progressively focuses on Austerlitz's search for documents on his past in Prague (the confirmation of what personal memories suggest), the photographs as well become more personal, more intimately linked to the life of the protagonist: the house where he lived with his parents before his escape to England and his photo as a child. In visiting the city of Terezín nearby Prague, one of the places that appear in the map of the concentration camps, Austerlitz decides to enter the Ghetto Museum. It is fundamental at this point to notice that no photo of the museum is shown. No original document, nothing that might potentially reveal the nude reality of the camp is offered to the gaze of the readers: a long interval of words without images follows. This absence (in this particular moment and place of the story) illuminates the meaning of Sebald's work and the particular role of photographs in *Austerlitz*. If the images contain a variety of presences, figures, interactions between subjects, they are particularly exposed to be read as narrative. This is exactly what happens in Cortázar's "Las babas del diablo," where the presence of a small group of human actors in the pictures implies the possibility of different readings of the images.

Contrary to the examples chosen by Cortázar and Antonioni, Sebald finds a solution to control the production of significance of

the images by inserting photos that are almost impermeable to the construction of stories: isolated human beings, objects, architectures, elements of nature. In other words, the photos tend to be as *narrative-free* as possible.[4] Moreover, as previously noted, they are completely dependent on the text that surrounds them in order to result comprehensible. Sebald is completely conscious of the danger of falsification that a picture of the Holocaust can generate for reasons related both to the problem of authority, i.e. the question of the "purity" of the gaze of the photographer, questioned in *Blow-up*, which can be susceptible to the attacks of Holocaust negationists, and to the exposure of different readings by people who were not there, such an important condition for understanding, according to Roberto Michel in "Las babas del diablo." The declared vulnerability of Sebald's writings is even more accentuated by the fact that this writer cannot in any case exercise the function of an authority because, exactly as his protagonist, he did not go through the experience of the Holocaust. The photos have to be as indirect as his experience was. The black and white color that characterizes them underlines the foggy mental dimension of the narrative:

> In my photographic work I was especially entranced, said Austerlitz, by the moment when the shadows of reality, so to speak, emerge out of nothing on the exposed paper, as memories do in the middle of the night, darkening again if you try to cling on them, just like a photographic print left in the developing bath too long. (Cortázar 77)

According to Giorgio Agamben, this opacity of impressions is discernible in those works of literature that focus on the mnemonic processes and the loss of the experience as their main themes of reflection. His example is centered on Proust, who "sembra [. . .] avere in mente certi stati crepuscolari, come il dormiveglia o la perdita di coscienza: 'je ne savais pas au premier instant qui j'étais' è la sua formula tipica"[5] (39), comparable to Austerlitz's numerous opaque reminiscences and Roberto's wandering thoughts.

"Las babas del diablo," *Blow-up*, and *Austerlitz* reflect on the problem of the transmission of knowledge through images. It may be pointed out that Sebald does not really find a solution to the potentially uncontrolled narratives that originate from a photograph. In

fact, to affirm the neutrality of a photo means to oversimplify the question: any picture, from the expression of a face to the fragment of an object can produce narratives. The effectiveness of Sebald's solution is not defended in this article. What seems relevant is the consciousness that *Austerlitz* shows about the problems of the nature of photographs that Cortázar and Antonioni indicated in their works, particularly the *impasse* that a picture, by nature an open work subjected to different interpretations but intended to testify and to communicate *one* particular meaning, can provoke. The inner mechanism of *Austerlitz* and Sebald's choice of pictures confronts the theme of the Holocaust with a complete awareness of the current debate on the limits of art and a will to expand them through a theoretical, fictional, though essay-like, challenge.

Notes

1. As Berel Lang appoints in his essay *Holocaust Representation*, "it has become almost a matter of course that writings about the Holocaust should allude—often in their titles, but if not there, in the texts—to the 'incomprehensibility,' the 'unspeakability,' or 'ineffability,' and so, even more cumbersomely, the 'unwritability,' of the Holocaust as a subject" (Lang 17). Nevertheless, the author notices, "in these very discourses the 'incomprehensible' is explained (at least the effort is made), the 'unspeakable' and the 'ineffable' are pretty clearly spoken (or spoken about), and the 'unwritable' is written" (17). This matter of fact that Lang describes as a contemporary use of figure of speech of the *praeteritio*, is confirmed by the abundant literary, cinematographic, artistic (*sensu lato*) production that every year presents the Holocaust as a central theme. It seems to me that the controversial point does not especially focus (anymore) on the possibility itself to talk about that historical event. The question of the legitimacy of writers and artists who did not experience directly the Holocaust in order to represent it and the authority of the witnesses who did not obviously go through the entire experience of the others, the so called *Muslims* (the term indicating the people in the concentration camps who had supposedly lost the perception of being human and who already had the appearance of dead), are amply discussed problematic points. However, the forms in which to present the Holocaust and the risks of divulging a too imprecise representation of the tragedy through them are also crucial points of the contemporary critical debate. Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1977), for instance, tells the history of the invasion of Poland by Nazi forces and the struggle of a Jewish family to survive through

the forms of comics. The physical characterization of the protagonists is taken from the animal world: the Jews are represented as mice, the Germans as cats and the Polish people (being collaborators of the Nazis) as pigs. What is precisely hard for the reader is to accept this graphical choice (which, among other aspects, frees the anthropomorphic representation of animals from the restricted entertaining use made by Disney and other cartoonists) where mimicry is partially substituted by a gallery of a not-human figures but preserved in the depiction of the places where the facts of the story occurred. Beyond this challenging format, *Maus* follows the traces of other narratives of the Holocaust (those by Primo Levi, Imre Kértesz, Elie Wiesel, among the others) on underlying the importance of the witness, the survivor, whose voice has not only to be transcribed, but fixed in a tape-recorder as well (in fact all the story of the book is based on the memories of an old man who talks to his son, a cartoonist). The drawings and their potential of transmission of knowledge carry the responsibility of the testimonial speech.

2. In Antwerp, the narrator of *Austerlitz* visits the Breendonk fortress that was made into a German reception and penal camp during World War II and, commenting on the link between objects and history, implicitly suggests a declaration of *ars poetica* for the understanding of the book itself: "Even now [. . .] when I look back at the crab-like plan of Breendonk and read the words of the captions—*Former Office*, *Printing Works*, *Huts*, *Jacques Ochs Hall*, *Solitary Confinement Cell*, *Mortuary*, *Relics Store*, and *Museum*—the darkness does not lift but becomes yet heavier as I think how little we can hold in mind, how everything is constantly lapsing into oblivion with every extinguished life, how the world is, as it were, draining itself, in that the history of countless places and objects which themselves have no power of memory is never heard, never described or passed on. Histories, for instance, like those of the straw mattresses [. . .] and now, in writing this, I do remember that such an idea occurred to me at the time—as if they were the mortal frames of those who lay there in that darkness" (24).

3. In an article appeared in the "Times Literary Supplement" on February 25, 2000, Susan Sontag expressed her admiration for Sebald and reflected on the reasons for the presence of apparently insignificant pictures in his works. She found in them the "imperfections of relics," although she does not particularly clarify the qualities of these "imperfections."

4. The characteristic of neutrality that the photos show could also be read as a result of a search for a total image in the sense expressed in Italo Calvino's short story "The Adventure of a Photographer," where a man tries to immortalize a girl named Bice in her entirety: "There were many possible photographs of Bice and many Bices impossible to photograph, but what he was seeing was the unique photograph that would contain both the former and the latter" (228). The impossible task is not abandoned but, instead of

searching for an impossible exceptional synthesis, he concludes: "Perhaps true, total photography, he thought, is a pile of fragment of private images, against the creased background of massacres and coronations" (235). In Sebald's work, readers find a collection of "private images" supported by a narrative that gives them a meaning they could not show by themselves.

5. Giorgio Agamben: "[. . .] he seems [. . .] to have in mind certain crepuscular states of consciousness, like the drowsiness or the loss of consciousness: 'je ne savais pas au premier instant qui j'étais' is his typical formula" (39). (*my translation from Italian*)

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