



Edited by

Leonida Kovač, Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, Ilse van Rijn and Ihab Saloul

# W.G. Sebald's Artistic Legacies

Memory, Word, and Image

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# Introduction

*Leonida Kovač*

Most of us, said Austerlitz, know nothing about moths except that they eat holes in carpets and clothes and have to be kept at bay by the use of camphor and naphthalene, although in truth their lineage is among the most ancient and most remarkable in the whole history of nature.

—W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*

In 2019, an international research project titled *Memory, Word and Image: W.G. Sebald's Artistic Legacy* was organized by the Amsterdam School for Heritage, Memory and Material Culture at the University of Amsterdam. No one could have guessed when we began our work that December that only two months later, a single microparticle, neither living nor non-living, would radically change the way of human existence. The migration of this invisible entity has confronted us with, among other things, images from Bergamo and Manaus. I now read these scenes as a kind of prefiguration of the low-resolution photographs reproduced on the pages of W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* which in the author's narrative weaving exemplify what Walter Benjamin called a dialectical image. A week before this project began, we were shocked by the sudden demise of one our key contributors, Professor Thomas Elsaesser, who was Sebald's friend and colleague, and founder of Film and Television Studies at the University of Amsterdam. Both Elsaesser and Sebald began their academic careers in the 1970s at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, where they often lectured together on Weimar cinema. We did not hear Elsaesser's talk in which he would reflect on Sebald's work to coincide with the anniversary of the writer's death on December 14, 2001. Instead, the recently deceased media archeologist was commemorated by a screening of his own captivating essay-film *The Sun Island* (2017) which exudes a Sebaldian impression.

Writing this syntagm, I recall the lecture given by Jacques Derrida in 1994 at the conference *Memory: The Question of Archives*, whose texts were

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later published under the title *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*.<sup>1</sup> In this text, Derrida explicitly identifies archive fever with the death drive, which Freud elaborated in the study *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, published in 1920. He emphasizes that Freud used three different names for this drive: the death drive, the aggression drive, and the destruction drive, concluding that this drive is mute, “it never leaves any archives of its own” but destroys it in advance; the death drive is “anarchivic” and “archiviolithic.” Derrida further claims that the archive takes place at the site of the originary and structural breakdown of memory, so its structure is spectral. He also writes that there is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory. Addressing the question of “the truth of the truth,” Derrida recalls that Freud wanted to indicate this “vertiginous difference” between “material truth” and “historical truth.”

It can be argued that W.G. Sebald, one of the most distinctive writers whose works appeared at the turn of the twenty-first century, was preoccupied with this “vertiginous difference.” After all, Sebald’s work has also been considered in the context of the notion of “spectral materialism.”<sup>2</sup> His writing, which resists all determinants while emerging from the interspace of poetry, novel, essay, (auto)biography and travelogue, contains numerous meticulous reflections on non-human entities and natural phenomena in its narrative trajectories. With rare virtuosity, Sebald establishes striking relationships between the world of words and the world of images not only in ekphrastic descriptions, but also through a completely non-descriptive practice of incorporating visual material into the fabric of the text.

In one of his last public appearances, Sebald said that older photographs, especially those black and white pictures that came from long-forgotten boxes, often had a secret appeal, and demanded that one should address the lost lives represented in them. Writing, he said, must be an attempt at the saving of souls—of course, in a non-religious sense. According to him, these pictures “hold up the flow of the discourse and, as one knows as a reader, one tends to go down this negative gradient with the book that one reads towards the end, so books have almost by definition an apocalyptic structure, and it is as well therefore to put weirs in here and there to hold up the inevitable calamity.”<sup>3</sup> And Eric Santer has recalled Sebald’s statement

1 Derrida, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” 9–63.

2 Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*.

3 Sebald, *92Y Readings*, 92Y, New York, October 15, 2001, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccMCGjWllhY&frags=pl%2Cwn>.

about the key role of photographs in his quest to “produce the kind of prose which has a degree of muteness about it.”<sup>4</sup>

The question of unspeakable and unrepresentable catastrophe dwells within the subtext of Sebald’s writing; Benjamin’s preoccupation with *natural history* metamorphosizes in Sebald into a *natural history of destruction*, making it evident that history is lived as a trauma. Since the trauma is mute,<sup>5</sup> Sebald never directly approaches the issue of concentration camps or the carpet-bombing of German cities, which exist in his works as ostinato motifs, but rather does it tangentially, by crystallizing dialectical images. In his narrative procedure, dialectical image is the key discursive figure and a trace leading to the thought of Walter Benjamin, whose life and work experiences multiple prefigurations in Sebald’s prose. Insisting on the notion of historical time as an antithesis of the idea of a time continuum, Benjamin defines the dialectical image as “the involuntary memory of redeemed humanity.”<sup>6</sup> Introducing the distinction between historicism and historical materialism, he concludes that historicism considers history to be something that can be told,<sup>7</sup> and therefore historical materialism should first attack the idea of universal history, while “the historical materialist can take only a highly critical view of the inventory of spoils displayed by the victors before the vanquished. This inventory is called culture.”<sup>8</sup>

Heritage, memory, and material culture are the concepts contained in the name of the institution of higher education that has chosen to contextualize the discussion on the relationship of memory, words, and images precisely through Sebald’s artistic legacy. Ihab Saloul, founder of the Amsterdam School of Heritage, Memory and Material Culture, reminds us that:

memory is a volatile concept. The work of memory in all its forms, from historical essays to personal reminiscences, legal testimonies, and imaginative recreations, is not only slippery but also inherently contradictory. On the one hand, memory posits a past reality that is recalled outside the person’s subjectivity. Yet, on the other hand, memory requires a narrator who is equipped with conventional cultural filters of generational distance, age and gender, class, and political affiliations, on whose

4 Santner, *On Creaturely Life*, 151.

5 On the muteness of the trauma, see Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century*.

6 Benjamin, “Paralipomena to ‘On the Concept of History,’” in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 403.

7 *Ibid.*, 406.

8 *Ibid.*, 406–7.



authority the truth of the past can be revealed. Memories are narrated by someone in the present but nonetheless we still use them as authoritative sources of historical knowledge. Moreover, memories are always mediated, even in the flashes of so-called involuntary memory. They are complex constructions in which our present experience (individual and collective) conjoins with images that are collected by the mind from all manner of sources, including from our inner worlds. Furthermore, we are constantly confronted with images of the past, whether we actively observe them or not. Memory moves from the world of smell, sensations, habits, and images to the outer world via cultural forms such as myths, folktales, and popular narratives in the ways that we talk about traditions, national consciousness, and identities. The work of memory, then, must address itself not only to questions of what happened but also to how we know things, whose voices we hear, and where silences persist.<sup>9</sup>

W.G. Sebald, a professor of European literature and the founder of the British Centre for Literary Translation, same as his colleague Thomas Elsaesser, exemplified the impossibility of separating academic from artistic discourse. As a narrator par excellence, Sebald internalized Benjamin's statement about the everyday experience teaching us that "the art of storytelling is coming to an end, because we have lost an ability that seemed inalienable to us—the ability to exchange experiences." Benjamin sees the cause of this phenomenon in the fact that "experience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it is continuing to fall into bottomlessness [...] Our picture, not only of the external world but of the moral world as well, overnight has undergone changes which were never thought possible."<sup>10</sup> These words, written in 1936, have lost none of their relevance to this day.

In 2013, Rosi Braidotti published her book *The Posthuman*, asking the following questions in the introduction:

[F]irstly what is the posthuman? More specifically, what are the intellectual and historical itineraries that may lead us to the posthuman? Secondly: where does the posthuman condition leave humanity? More specifically, what new forms of subjectivity are supported by the posthuman? Thirdly: how does the posthuman engender its own forms of inhumanity? More specifically, how might we resist the inhuman(e) aspects of our era? And last, how does the posthuman affect the practice

9 Saloul, *Catastrophe and Exile in the Modern Palestinian Imagination: Telling Memories*, 4–6.

10 Benjamin, "The Storyteller", in *Illuminations*, 83–84.



of the Humanities today? More specifically, what is the function of theory in posthuman times?<sup>11</sup>

Aware of the impasse in which the humanities are today, we have sought with our conference *Memory, World and Image: W.G. Sebald's Artistic Legacy*, from which this book originates, to articulate questions consonant with those posed by Braidotti, and not to offer the answers, but to ask them from divergent positions, through various verbal and visual narratives, to demand the inalienability of exchanging experiences. I will venture here to call Sebald's writing posthuman and to corroborate this claim by using the words of Braidotti, who says that "[f]or posthuman theory, the subject is a transversal entity, fully immersed in and immanent to a network of non-human (animal, vegetable, viral) relations."<sup>12</sup> Listening carefully to the registers of that writing, in conceiving the conference we actually followed what Braidotti calls the golden rules of the new transdisciplinary models of thought required by posthuman critical theory: the importance of combining critique with creative figurations, the principle of non-linearity, and the power of memory and imagination:<sup>13</sup>

Freed from chronological linearity and the logo-centric gravitational force, memory in the posthuman nomadic mode is the active reinvention of a self that is joyfully discontinuous, as opposed to being mournfully consistent. Memories need the imagination to empower the actualization of virtual possibilities in the subject, which becomes redefined as a transversal relational entity inhabited by a vitalist and multidirectional memory.<sup>14</sup>

The issue of memory is a kind of a leitmotif of this book that consists of three parts: "Sebald's Writings, History and Voids," "Memory and Art in and through Sebald," and "Writing with Images: Academic Practices and/as Ethical Commitment." The individual essays are included in them according to some loose, to use Sebald's words, "family resemblances." Each essay is a result of inter- and trans-disciplinary academic and/or artistic research and reflection, not only on Sebald's work, but also on Sebaldian motifs in which countless parallel worlds nevertheless touch at some vanishing points. This book could be structured in many ways for, as Sebald wrote, "everything is

11 Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 3.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 193.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 163.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 167.



connected across space and time.”<sup>15</sup> The present structure aims to emphasize the wide range of mutually intertwined and inseparable issues articulated in Sebald’s works, as well as the specificity of his writing that deliberately blurred the border between academic and artistic discourse, requiring a different kind of knowledge.

In her essay “W.G. Sebald’s Cartographic Images: Mapping the Historical Void,” Anna Seidl deals with the performatives of Sebald’s method of juxtaposing text and cartographic images: maps, tables, ground plans, diagrams, labyrinths, and what in his *Vertigo* is referred to as “physical geography.” The subject of her interest is the state of flux emerging from Sebald’s questioning of the status of truth through the constant change of positions and viewpoints. Seidl uses a series of examples to show how Sebald’s aesthetic form simultaneously positions and undermines subjective experience as well as the authority of text and image. Cartographic images, she argues, function as a poetical or rhetorical tool that represents two modes of reception: emotional-dynamic and discursive-static perspectives, whereby she identifies the alteration of emotional and strategic spaces as the structuring principle of Sebald’s memory project. Detecting a similarity between the ground plan of the torture chamber in Breendok Fort, reproduced in *Austerlitz*, and Améry’s shoulder joint, Seidl concludes that in Sebald’s text “the map, together with Améry’s words, the torture and its failed representation establish a state of flux, authorizing several perspectives by providing a variety of angles of reception.”

Juliet Simpson discusses the process of re-semanticizing Grünewald’s *Isenheim Altarpiece* at the end of the First World War, in “Imaging the Uncanny Memory: War and the *Isenheim Altarpiece*.” It was then that the German army dismantled the altar in Colmar and took it to Munich under the pretext of protecting it from possible destruction. For months, it was exhibited at the Alte Pinakothek and became an object of pilgrimage. The author approaches the reception of Grünewald’s work in the second decade of the twentieth century through a series of literary, philosophical, and political references from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which show the genesis of the term “medieval uncanny” or, in Benjamin’s words, “nocturnal,” that at some point in history could be operationalized within the nationalist agenda. Simpson notes that the *Isenheim Altarpiece* entered the war in 1917, as during its exhibition in Munich, where it was seen by hundreds of thousands of people in “a year of anguish and national crisis,” Grünewald’s work was seen “as a presence not a past, closing the gap

15 Sebald, “Le promeneur solitaire,” in *A Place in the Country*, 149.



between temporally and culturally distant and near.” She argues that in 1918 the *Isenheim Altarpiece* disturbed the relationship between memory and the present, not only because it was identified with the experience of terrible suffering and death, but primarily because it embodied the ability to imagine an almost impossible memory: life on the very brink of death. Paraphrasing Sebald’s appropriation of Browne’s thought according to which “on every living thing there lies the shadow of its ruin,” the author concludes that “every living thing contains the possibility of its own transfiguration,” so “in 1918, Grünewald’s *Isenheim Altarpiece*, by accident or design, offered a homeopathy—a guide—to negotiate the infinitely fine line between ruin and possibility.”

The theme of fluidity permeates Jelena Todorović’s essay “The Worlds of Eternal Present—The Quest for the Hidden Patterns of Baroque Thought in Sebald’s Literature.” She recalls that Baroque, like Sebald’s literary work, is impossible to define because they both map a volatile, fluid, and ever-changing world, and the notions of fragment and fragmentary implicitly shaped the outlines of the Baroque world. Hybridity, as a major legacy of the Baroque era, is what characterizes Sebald’s work as well, so she approaches it through the concepts of Baroque aesthetics, especially time and space, emphasizing the influence of the seventeenth-century physician and philosopher Sir Thomas Browne. Todorović points out that both Sebald’s and Browne’s notions of the *eternal present* include the experience of time as a complex and multifocal vision of the world. She has compared Sebald’s liminal space to the *Mirror Palace* or the *Catoptic Box* of Athanasius Kircher, and to Borromini’s architecture, arguing that “like the beholder in Borromini’s church, the reader of Sebald’s novels is never certain of the space and age he is in. The landscapes become townscapes of the past or the stages of a-temporal events. [...] Nothing is what it seems, and everything is what is not.” Todorović has paid special attention to an analysis of *The Paston Treasure* (1663) painted by an unknown artist, and kept in the Norwich Museum, noting that William Paston was a friend of Browne and collaborated with him in scientific experiments.

Veronica Rudorfer points to the still unresolved issue of plundering Jewish property that in National Socialist Germany went by the name of aryanizations. In her text “Seeing the Void? Visual Representations of ‘Arisierungen’ in works by Arno Gisinger, Anna Artaker and Maria Eichhorn,” she has focused on artistic researches that make visible the void that still exists in the cultural landscape of today due to aryanizations. She recalls that the restitution process is practically impossible due to the fact that the bureaucratically precise aryanizations successfully destroyed the traces of

provenance of the stolen property. Since for many “aryanized” works of art, family libraries, cult items and everyday objects it is impossible to determine to whom they belonged before the implementation of racial laws, and so they remain in the collections of German museums and galleries. Rudorfer has considered the consequences of the crime of aryianization in the context of a current topic in contemporary art, which is the issue of the institutional critique. Her text analyses three complex artistic research projects realized in the form of site-specific installations. These are *Invent arisiert*, a work performed by Arno Gisinger at the invitation of the Imperial Furniture Museum in Vienna; an installation by Anne Artaker titled *Rekonstruktion der Rothschild'schen Gemäldesammlung*, set up on the site of the no longer existing Rothschild Palace in Vienna; and the interdisciplinary research done by Maria Eichhorn titled *Restitutionspolitik / Politics of Restitution*, presented in an exhibition format in 2004 at the Kunstbau in Munich.

With his “Monument and Memory Paper,” Mark Edwards has written a kind of genealogy of his work *Shelter*, which he conceived and performed as an invited artist for the *Monument* exhibition set up in 2014 at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Art in Norwich, and then at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Calais. The artists were asked to contextualize the theme of the monument as related to the First or Second World War. The Sebaldian coincidence underlying Edwards's reflection on the notion of the monument arises from the fact that both the writer and the photographer lived near the airfields from which Allied bombers departed toward German cities and industrial plants during the Second World War, and that both were fascinated by the east Anglian landscapes with their imprinted traces of former military bases. By choosing to photograph woodpiles constructed to store wood at the Hethel site, where a RAF military base once stood, and to display the black and white photographs in a large light-box format, Edwards has created a counter-monument that, he says, “serves memory with more fidelity.” A sort of memory that includes 131 German cities showered by incendiary bombs, 3.5 million homes destroyed, 7.5 million homeless persons, 12,000 downed bombers and 100,000 Allied soldiers among the countless civilian victims.

“In the Labyrinth: Sebald's (Postwar) French Connections,” Catherine Anabel detects the influences of the protagonists of the French new wave and new novel on Sebald's work, specifically of Alain Resnais and Michel Butor. The frequency of labyrinth motifs in art immediately after the Second World War is explained by the fact that the war turned familiar landscapes into uncanny places of danger, while the experience of exile and displacement became common to millions of people. Sebald's writing, in whose field of reference the horrors of the Second World War undoubtedly reside, abounds



with labyrinths, which has led the author to search for a possible common origin of this theme in his, Resnais's and Butor's work. Noting that Butor and Resnais belong to a generation of French artists that was confronted with a peculiar denial of the Vichy past immediately after the liberation, Annabel also sees this denial as the context of the new novel and the new wave. The theme of French silence rhizomatically leads to Sebald's great theme of German silence. The author pays particular attention to an analysis of Butor's novel *L'emploi du temps*, in which "the capital of France hides behind the mask of Bleston," although Bleston has usually been identified as Manchester, where Butor, like Sebald, was employed at the university for some time. In doing so, she meticulously reads Butor's themes transfigured in Sebald's work.

Sandra Križić Roban's essay "Leaning Images: Reading Nasta Rojc and Ana Mušćet" is also permeated by the theme of "seeing the void." The void can here be understood in terms of the unrecorded history of struggle for women's rights and for liberation from gender stereotypes in southeastern Europe, which is epitomized by the personality and work of the Croatian painter Nasta Rojc. Križić Roban has deliberately assumed the Sebaldian figure of a ghostwriter to narratively intertwine her own experiences of traveling across Scotland with reading the photographs that she has found in Rojc's photo albums, the images taken in Scotland in 1925, as well as the painter's autobiographical notes and a series of unfixed collages in which the contemporary artist Ana Mušćet has used fragments of photographs from Rojc's legacy. In doing so, Križić Roban goes beyond the rigid standards of academic writing, relying on the multiplicity of procedures that Sebald applied in his research, whereby she modifies her points of view during research in relation to the available material and what she encounters. Aware of the fact that ekphrasis generates fundamental change in the way knowledge is acquired and created, opening the possibility of developing new tools for dealing with various aspects of history, Križić Roban has introduced the "personal practice of collecting evidence" in her essay, while her translation of images into text indicates that "there are many different ways to record something."

Francesca Verga in "Working with Images: Documentary Photography of Mike Kelley and W.G. Sebald" links the visual artist and writer by finding that both problematize the crisis of representation and explore repression in their work. For Verga, this lasting preoccupation with the repressed may stem from the fact that both Sebald and Kelly come from Catholic families. Out of their interest in hidden, inhibited, and uncanny elements that photographs cannot reveal, and memory cannot retrieve, Sebald and



Kelly create parallel scenarios in which it becomes possible to uncover different projections and phantasms. Verga relates Sebald's way of using photographs to Kelly's monumental work *Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction (A Domestic Scene)*. She argues that in Sebald's *Emigrants*, *Vertigo* and *Austerlitz*, which he did not call novels but "prose books of indeterminate kind," photographs are used to create a fictional product from reality. As such, they simultaneously reveal the fictional property of memory and the memory inherent in fiction. Verga has identified a similar approach in Kelly's work, where documenting photography intones only the beginning of a story that exists beyond the real.

In "Ghostwriting and Artists' Texts: Raqs Media Collective's 'We Are Here, But Is It Now?'" Ilse van Rijn reads in parallel the "character of a traveling narrator" in the chapter on "Max Ferber" from Sebald's *Emigrants* and the concept of travel in a project that Raqs Media Collective realized in 2017 in the form of their three-part booklet *We Are Here, But Is It Now? (the Submarine Horizons of Contemporaneity)*. Working at the intersection of contemporary art, historical research, theory and philosophical reflection, Raqs Media Collective exemplifies, like Sebald, a resistance to categorization and challenges what Derrida calls the "law of genre." The author finds a connection between Sebald's writing and the artistic discourse of Raqs Media Collective in the polyvocality inherent in both projects. Starting from the claim that in Sebald's discourse ghostwriting enables one to deal with a present tense and a future already imbued with a violent and mythical past that cannot be escaped, Van Rijn concludes that ghostwriting "gives an aesthetic direction to the amalgam of voices buried in a complex historical period. Ghostwriting allows the assembly of different and differentiated historical voices, resulting in a dis-location of time and a stretching of space." Understanding it as a process of mediating uncanny history, she explores various ways to use ghostwriting with the goal of structuring, confronting, and understanding what it means to be human in today's hegemonic capitalist regime. Aware of the fact that the stories of marginalized persons remain untold, she raises the question of how to express what cannot, yet must, be said, and whether ghostwriting can give a voice to such speech.

In his chapter "Models for Word and Image: Rodenbach to Christian Bök," James Elkins focuses on the term "writing with images" in the context of which it has been common to consider Sebald's work, in fact the very invention of "writing with images" has often been attributed to the writer. It could be said that Elkins's keynote lecture, included here "Models for Word and Image: Rodenbach to Christian Bök" has also been written



with images to focus more clearly on the issue of historical memory, but of a different kind. Using the form of schematic chronology, as he calls it, Elkins draws attention to the practice of writing fictional prose with images long before Sebald, vividly showing the way in which Georges Rodenbach did so in 1892 in his book *Bruges-la-morte*. Elkins points out that there is not just one genealogy of writing with images that would lead from Rodenbach to Sebald. Considering Sebald's work regarding the term "writing with images," he singles out three specific procedures. These are the "Sebald paradox," in which a sudden reference to the deep time in the images stands in contrast against the more continuously woven narrative; the practice of "anchoring" images in the nearby text; and the possibility that photographs might "promote forgetting" while the surrounding narrative "fosters remembrance." The author also addresses the question of Sebald's followers as well as completely different, transmedia literary practices articulated by the dynamics of words and images, such as Christian Bök's *Xenotext* in which the use of scientific images along with improvised graphics illustrates the process of creating the first poem generated by a non-human organism. In the articulation and intonation of his presentation, Elkins focuses primarily on ways of paying academic attention to "writing with images," asking an important question: "Can we avoid writing about photographs as illustrations of ideas in the texts and attend to text and images as equal partners in the construction of books that are not, in the end, amenable to the usual kinds of analysis that take text as the vehicle and arbiter of sense?"

In his text "On Writing: Propositions for Art History as Literary Practice," Tilo Reifenstein challenges the fundamental assumptions of art history as an academic discipline, primarily its methodology. In his demand to abandon the rigid disciplinary matrix, it is possible to recognize the echoes of Norman Bryson's statement made almost forty years ago in the preface to his groundbreaking book *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*, which reads:

What is certain is that while the last three or so decades have witnessed extraordinary and fertile change in the study of literature, of history, of anthropology, in the discipline of art history there has reigned a stagnant peace; a peace in which—certainly—a profession of art history has continued to exist, in which monographs have been written, and more and more catalogues produced: but produced at an increasingly remote margin of the humanities, and almost in the leisure sector of intellectual life. What is equally certain is that little can change without radical



re-examination of the methods art history uses—the tacit assumptions that guide the normal activity of the art historian.<sup>16</sup>

Starting from Sebald's practice of verbo-pictorial writing, Reifenstein supports his demand to abolish the boundary that separates artistic practice from theory, that is, his demand for an art-historical text that, while not being external to its object of interest, must also have the creative charge of a literary text, among other things by Jean-François Lyotard's conclusion that "terror through theory only begins when one also claims to axiomatize discourses that assume or even cultivate inconsistency, incompleteness, or indecidability."

The chapter "Memory, Word, and Image in Sebald and Joyce: Towards a Transhistorical Ethics Communicated Through Minor Interventions in the Form of the Printed Book" by Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes starts by detecting analogies in Joyce's and Sebald's procedures of inscribing visual contents into the fabric of a literary text. Deconstructing the Euclidian diagram reproduced in *Finnegans Wake*, Lerm Hayes emphasizes the agency of the "sigla" as a basis for both Joyce's and Sebald's memory work. Furthermore, she reminds the readers of the peculiar extensions of Joyce's work in the oeuvre of Joseph Beuys. Analyzing the performatives of these distinctive artistic practices, Lerm Hayes has indicated their spaces of resonance in the works of two contemporary visual artists, Tacita Dean and Walid Raad. The paradigmatic nonlinearity and transhistorical narrative trajectory characteristic of both Joyce and Sebald has been read in the context of Aby Warburg's iconology of changing, traveling images, which has been further operationalized through Georges Didi-Huberman's understanding of the political import of Warburg's legacy. The notion of transhistorical ethics highlighted by the title of this text also implies the author's view that radical historical insights arise when the art-historical discourse exceeds the boundary that separates theory from artistic practice. Accordingly, she introduces the concept of ethics of cross-reference, or quotation in a sense of:

letting the voices of the other still be heard through one's own stories, whether that may be the stories of friends, photographers, Homer, characters from history books or newspapers, or especially those absent from spectacular stories: individual holocaust victims, emigrants, or underdogs with an everyday humanity in still-colonial Dublin, or in nearly post-industrial/colonial Manchester.

16 Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*, p. xi.





Lerm Hayes's understanding of transhistorical ethics is inseparable from the activities of the Amsterdam School for Heritage, Memory and Material Culture by which the conference *Memory, Word and Image: W.G. Sebald's Artistic Legacy* was organized. By outlining the transversal that connects Beuys's "project of mourning" at his Free International University for Interdisciplinary Research, Louwrien Wijers's series of panel discussions *Art Meets Science and Spirituality in Changing Economy*, Sebald's outstanding response to the introduction of Research Assessment Exercise at UK universities in the late 1980s, and Walid Raad's lecture-performances, Lerm Hayes stresses the necessity of unceasing conversation within loose communities. In her words, "the quality of the connections appears to be what Joyce, Sebald, Beuys, Dean, and Raad focus on. Attending to the connections, as these artists and writers propose, it appears to me implies care and empathy: through attending to the past, work toward a better future."

In the chapter "Sebald's *Toute la mémoire du monde*," Leonida Kovač deals with Sebald's re-semanticization in his novel *Austerlitz* of three films by Resnais, reading it as an internalization of Benjamin's imperative to develop to perfection the "art of citation without citation marks." In doing so, she has focused on the implantation of a transpersonal discourse by which Sebald's work materializes a sort of spectral presence. Using the motif of the Parisian Bibliothèque nationale, which travels between Resnais's film and Sebald's novel from Rue Richelieu to a place near Gare de Austerlitz, where Nazis sorted looted Jewish property during the Second World War, she has followed the micro-narratives through which Walter Benjamin's life and work metamorphize into a paternal figure from Sebald's novel. Furthermore, Émile Zola's book that is visible in a frame of the only film by Resnais that Sebald explicitly mentions in *Austerlitz* and Austerlitz's Parisian address in Rue Émile Zola have led her to identify a series of photographs from Sebald's novel as somewhat modified citations of photographs that the author of *J'accuse* personally took and developed in the late nineteenth century.

Finally, in her essay "As a Dog Finds a Spear," Hilde Van Gelder performs a transgression in which academic discourse exceeds the boundary that separates theory from artistic practice. She is thereby referring to the phrase "objective chance," a coinage of artist Tacita Dean, which Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes has introduced to theoretical discourse relating the work of Joseph Beuys, Tacita Dean and W.G. Sebald. Van Gelder explicitly says that in researching and articulating the book *Ground Sea: Photography and the Right to be Reborn*—the "making of" she exposes in this text—it was Sebald's literary approach that encouraged her to replace the strict protocol of photo-theoretical writing with a more personal image-text





practice. The book in question arose from “a lengthy and slow investigation of the lives of people on the move, as we should identify them, who found themselves stranded near the shore of Calais, in today’s France.” Like Sebald, Van Gelder writes “in the way a dog searches”; her travelogue, or rather a transhistorical textual pilgrimage, begins with a description of her visit to the Thomas Paine Cottage, which has rhizomatically led to her personal exploration of the critical legacy of artist Allan Sekula. She has realized in the process that Sekula’s stilled photographs “magnificently capture the frozen utopia that Paine’s ideals embody in a US democracy presently put to the test by autocratic decline.” The author has tangentially linked the shameful exhumation of the earthly remains of the human rights’ ideator Thomas Paine with the leitmotif of Sebald’s *Rings of Saturn*—the skull of Thomas Browne, and Browne’s sentence “who is to know the fate of his bones” emerges as a chord that masterfully modulates the image of the Bronze-Age spear made of deer antler, fished out by *Colinda*, into a question of the right to rebirth of those deprived of human rights.

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## About the Author

**Leonida Kovač** is an art historian and theorist, curator and full professor at the University of Zagreb, Academy of Fine Arts. Her main fields of interest are contemporary art, critical theories and feminist theories. She has published nine books and numerous academic articles on contemporary art. She has also curated more than forty exhibitions including Ivan Faktor's exhibition at the São Paulo Biennale (2002) and *Patterns of Visibility* for the Croatian Pavilion at the Biennale in Venice (2003). From 2003 to 2006 she was vice president of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA).

