



**ERASMUS MUNDUS MASTER
“CROSSWAYS IN CULTURAL NARRATIVES”**

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**THE RHETORIC OF IMAGES IN W. G. SEBALD'S
NARRATIVES: *THE EMIGRANTS, THE RINGS OF
SATURN AND VERTIGO***

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Declaration

I, Gianmarco Bocchi, hereby certify that this dissertation, which is 18.900 words in length, has been written by me, that it is a record of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree. All sentences or passages quoted in this dissertation from other people's work (with or without trivial changes) have been placed within quotation marks, and specifically acknowledged by reference to author, work and page. I understand that plagiarism – the unacknowledged use of such passages – will be considered grounds for failure in this dissertation and, if serious, in the degree programme as a whole. I also affirm that, with the exception of the specific acknowledgements, these answers are entirely my own work.

Gianmarco Bocchi

Contents

Description	<i>page number</i>
Declaration	
Synopsis.....	1
Contents	
1. Introduction.....	2
2. Photographs and Text in Sebald's narratives	5
3. <i>The Emigrants</i>	11
4. <i>The Rings of Saturn</i>	16
5. <i>Vertigo</i>	22
6. A comparative approach: <i>The Emigrants</i> , <i>The Rings of Saturn</i> and <i>Vertigo</i>	27
7. Conclusion.....	32
Works cited and consulted.....	36
<i>Appendix</i>	
<i>Diagrams</i>	

Synopsis

Sebald's writing would be greatly impoverished without his use of images. Beginning with this statement as my starting point, this dissertation will investigate the complicated relationship between photographs and text in three of W. G. Sebald's narratives: *The Emigrants*, *The Rings of Saturn* and *Vertigo*. The introductory chapter will establish the research questions and it will provide a preliminary overview of fundamental issues, which one has to take into account when approaching Sebald's works. These include the question of memory, the reasons and implications of using photographs in fiction and the use of black and white images. I will then focus my attention on the "hybrid" and intriguing nature of photography and by relying on Berger, Barthes and Sontag's works in particular,¹ I will be able to enrich the discussion and to provide my critical insight on the role of photographs in Sebald's works. By considering concepts such as manipulation and indexicality, I will determine the reasons behind Sebald's use of this medium. A considerable portion of this work will focus on the analysis of the three books, both separately and combined. Besides specific thematic issues, the core of this dissertation will be based on the identification of stylistic devices within the visual apparatus of Sebald's narratives. By investigating Sebald's visual narratives, I recognized many sequences that generate such stylistic devices. In doing this, I will shed light on the rhetorical aspect of Sebald's visual apparatus, which represents a new critical interpretation. By 'walking' through Sebald's memories and images, I will also establish connections between the three works. By using a series of comparative diagrams, I will contribute to the critical body of work on Sebald's way of organizing both his verbal and visual apparatus. Thanks to the critical positions that I will display throughout the dissertation and thanks to my focus on the rhetoric of images, the conclusion will finalize the discussion by providing answers that will open new direction to Sebald's scholarship.

¹ I decided to follow the position of these three critics regarding photography because Sebald himself has been influenced by their works, as he used to state during some interviews, "I've always liked image-text relationships. In the '70s there were very interesting things written about photography by Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, John Berger. I felt a direct rapport with things said in these essays" (Blackler 139)

1. Introduction

Visual rhetoric, has two meanings in the discipline of rhetoric. It is used to mean both a visual object or artifact and a perspective on the study of visual data. In the first sense, visual rhetoric is a product individuals create as they use visual symbols for the purpose of communicating. In the second, it is a perspective scholars apply that focuses on the symbolic processes by which visual artifacts perform communication. (Foss 304)

I intentionally decided to begin this dissertation with the concept of visual rhetoric, since it poses some preliminary questions relevant to my study on the works of W. G. Sebald. While the term ‘rhetoric’ implies the ways one delivers a message, the adjective ‘visual’ relocates the concept in the area of visual studies: it refers to the ways in which a message can be delivered using visual tools. What is the main purpose of using visual devices to deliver a message? Are there any elements in common between the tools employed by both rhetorical and visual language? To what extent is the author also a demiurge who shapes the malleable message at his will? These are three questions that will be addressed through my work.

The title of my dissertation clearly recalls the expression ‘Rhetoric of Images’ used by W. J. T. Mitchell in his work *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. The expression, as Foss clearly stated in 2007, can be interpreted “in a double sense: first, as a study of ‘what to say about images’ [...]; and second, as a study of ‘what images say’” (Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* 1-2). Using this as my main critical tool, I will apply the study of the rhetoric of images to three literary works by W. G. Sebald: *The Emigrants*, *The Rings of Saturn* and *Vertigo*. I will focus on most of Sebald's photographs of his works in order to shed light on the function of photography, which reveals its deeper nature when applied to literature.

‘Cryptic’ is the first adjective that comes to mind when thinking of W. G. Sebald's works: they contributed to the literary discourse on the Holocaust and forged meaningful connections to themes such as identity, loss and memory (which have surely become Sebaldian *topoi*), but they also opened up a space for prolific inter-disciplinary reflections due to their genre hybridity² and to their unique word-image relationship. Sebald's books are a miscellany of fiction, biography and history and are all grounded in the co-presence of words and images - in particular photographs -, which constitutes the author's hallmark³ and provides a true challenge for critics and readers. Sebald

² The definition of the genre is one of the main problems linked to Sebald's texts. While the characterization of the genre is already complex when considering only the verbal apparatus due to its historic, documentary and fictional components, the integration of photographs makes the investigation more complicated and “subverts the distinction between fiction and nonfiction” (Horstkotte and Pedri 18).

³ From 1988 until 2008, eleven works by Sebald have been published, both in German and in translation. The presence of images is his true signature style. Moreover, there are two texts by Sebald that have been classified as ‘photo text’: *For Years Now* (2001) and *Unrecounted* (2003). The term photo-text, coined in 1987 by Jefferson Hunter, has been used to describe the collective work of writer and photographer. In the case of the above mentioned works by

purposely decided to shape his books with words intertwined with images. By doing this, he created non-conventional works, which require an ‘adjustment’ to the naturally conceived reading process. As Barton states: “(visual devices) can ‘disrupt’ and destabilize the ‘conventional’ presentation of the page and by extension, the reading process” (13).

The images in *Vertigo*, *The Emigrants* and *The Rings of Saturn* correspond to the author’s precise choice; it was not the editor but Sebald himself who intentionally selected the style and position of the pictures on the page. However, Sebald's translations do not reflect the author's choices, but the editors' arrangements. When comparing the German version and the English translation and looking at the position of the photographs, sometimes they do not coincide.⁴ Still, all the photographic documents are the product of long documentary work by Sebald, and the author is fully aware of the potentiality of the *medium* that he is using. If taking into account the visual element to Sebald's books: for example, what is the reason behind Sebald's choice of embedding black and white photographs rather than color ones in his books? He was writing when black and white was not the only option, and so, he deliberately gets rid of colors. The author chose a grey scale with the aim of both charging the pictures with intensity and visually provoking the readers who have to discover the author's intentions. In fact, color is an important instrument that normally guides the spectators (or in this case, the readers) to better perceive the essence of an image; by depriving the photographs of this visual element, Sebald makes the task of understanding the message more complex. Also, by rejecting colors, he places those images in the halfway position between life and death, as Scholtz mentions: “I believe that the black-and-white photograph, or rather the gray zones in the black-and-white photograph, stand for this territory that is located between death and life” (108).

The absence of colors in Sebald can be connected to the concept of the *Sublime* theorized by Edmund Burke in the second half of the eighteenth century, which became a true aesthetic guideline for the Romantics. Burke establishes a distinction between the sensations provoked by Beauty and those by the Sublime:⁵ while the former are measured and quiet, the latter are disturbed and unbalanced. With the Sublime, one is facing delicate aesthetic categories such as those of grief, life and death. Burke's references to the Sublime, for example in a passage where he is commenting on the literary description of *Death* by John Milton where “all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible,

Sebald, the author works with two photographers: Jaray and Tripp.

4 My research will be based on the English translations of the books by W. G. Sebald and its focus will not be on the dimension and position of the photographs. However the position of photographs in Sebald's narration is a fundamental point that has been well investigated by Horstklotte Silke in “Photo-Text Topographies: Photography and the Representation of Space in W. G. Sebald and Monika Maron”, *Poetics Today*, Vol. 29, Issue 1, Spring 2008.

5 The concept of the Sublime as opposed to the one of Beauty is also addressed in a chapter of *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* by W. J. T. Mitchell. In that case, it has been used to highlight the difference in terms of intensity between images (Beauty) and words (Sublime).

and sublime” (77), well remind many of the emotions traceable in the works by Sebald. They are always in between death and life, obscurity and (illusory) clarity, based on a kind of terror that is simultaneously attractive and repulsive.

Like words, images too have their own signifier and signified. Each one of these communication forms uses different tools and channels in order to reach its goals, but this also makes the two equally conceived as languages. The visual language, for Sebald, is complex and eloquent and a strong visual element is also traceable in his fictional narrations. Osborne does not believe in the weight of photographs in Sebald and he actually thinks that these images do not say anything at all: “[...] where the images are made to carry a particularly heavy burden of meaning, they are overwhelmed and effectively erased, showing nothing at all” (109). He also discusses the truthfulness of these photographs as second-order copies, as in the case of Paul Bereyter's story: “Moreover, since the narrator ostensibly copied the plans from drawings made by Bereyter on the blackboard as a schoolboy, they are presented to us at a further remove as second-order copies” (109). However, is it correct to consider these types of documents as being less powerful only because they are drawings (or maps) or is it possible to analyze them by considering the link that they establish with the text? In my opinion, Sebald's photographs should be inspected with great care, and, more importantly, a change of approach it would be relevant in order to enrich the scholarship of Sebald. Despite the emphasis on the genuineness of images, one has also to look at the message they want to deliver because “(visual devices) can also help to elicit an emotional response in ways that a conventionally structured page cannot” (Barton 17). Whether or not a photograph has any link with reality, the main question is: what is the function of photography in Sebald's narratives?

It is evident that in Sebald's writing, images play a fundamental role; they are not merely illustrations of the text, as has been frequently affirmed by critics such as Susan Sontag. Photographs are an essential part of the narrative, as Long wisely claims: “In all four [he includes also Austerlitz in his analysis], photography no longer forms part of the paratextual apparatus, but it is integrated into the fabric of the narrative” (118). Sebald is considered a pivotal figure in modern world literature and this can only partially be understood if one only focuses on the verbal apparatus of his books. Much has been written about the role of images in Sebald's texts,⁶ but not so much has been said about photographs as visual narration. The most common analysis has been the study of a group of images or a single photograph in order to explain concepts raised by the verbal element of his books. Thus, the narrative of Sebald's texts always has to be analyzed as a *unicum*, that is, as an organic structure. Consequently, the visual apparatus has never been considered in its wholeness as

⁶ See in particular Harris (2001), Long (2003) and Brookner (2000). They investigate matters linked to Sebald's narratives, such as the role of photographs and Sebald's mix genre.

a visual discourse. In this dissertation I will focus my attention on the visual apparatus, which I will consider in its unity. By using comparative diagrams, I will display a macro-view of the three books in order to open a comparative discourse and interpret some of the authorial choices. My analysis differs from previous criticism of Sebald's work in its focus on the visual element as a narrative device in itself.

The objective of this essay is to move from this very restricted perspective and to offer a new way of looking at W. G. Sebald's texts: I will dedicate the first part to a necessary explanation of some aspects of Sebald's photographs and their link to the text such as: the manipulation of images, their function and the role of the *index*. In doing this, I will also address the main critical positions in favor and against this osmotic relationship established between the verbal and visual content. I will then focus on three books by W. G. Sebald, *The Emigrants*, *The Rings of Saturn* and *Vertigo*. I will analyze some of the themes that – in my opinion – are relevant in order to fully understand Sebald's narratives. Moreover, I will focus on the rhetorical feature of Sebald's visual apparatus. In order to shed light on this characteristic, I will identify sequences of photographs that might recall stylistic devices.⁷ For each case, I will also provide a critical explanation of their function. Finally, the third and last part of this essay will provide an in-depth analysis of a series of images in *The Emigrants*: by contextualizing their links to the text, I will demonstrate that the author is using literary devices such as metaphors and synecdoche not only in the verbal narration, but also in his use of images. I will therefore demonstrate that the author is applying verbal narration devices to the visual, and I will thus shed light on the incredible proximity between the two languages adopted by Sebald, on their fragile relationship, and the different ways of articulating the author's *message*.

2. Photographs and Text in Sebald's narratives

Originally, paintings were an integral part of the building for which they were designed. Sometimes, when you go into a Renaissance church or chapel, you have the feeling that the images on the wall are records of the building's interior life. Together, they make up the building's memory, so much are they part of the life and individuality of the building. (YouTube. Berger, John)

Not unlike Renaissance buildings where paintings are an integral part of their essence,

⁷ In doing this I will follow Barthes's statements on the nature of images' sequences: "Naturally, several photographs can come together to form a sequence; the signifier of connotation is then no longer to be found at the level of any one of the fragments of the sequence but at that - what the linguists would call the suprasegmental level - of the concatenation" (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* 24).

Sebald's narratives also place photographs at the fore. When approaching Sebald's texts, one has to be both a reader and a spectator (or reader of images).⁸ Moreover, the visual feature of Sebald's work is not only due to the presence of photographs, which are interspersed with the verbal narration, but also words have peculiar pictorial traits. While reading Sebald, one therefore faces a double level of 'dubiousness': on the one hand, the verbal narration which is not neutral as Jan Ceuppens affirms. It contains visual characteristics and whose "[...] metaphoric, figurative, or ornamented (language) deflects attention away from the literal subject of the utterance and toward something else"⁹ (Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* 21), and on the other hand, the photographic apparatus, which further problematizes the fiction. In fact, as Horstkotte and Pedri assert, in addition to acting as proof of the narration, photographs "when taken out of their original contexts and included in a fictional narrative, become fictional themselves" (8).

It is Sebald himself who underlines some of these aspects not only during interviews or lectures, but also notably throughout his narrative. In *The Emigrants*, there is a photograph (*appendix*: fig. 1) referring to a book burning that took place overnight in a square during Hitler's regime, anticipated by its textual explanation. This image, followed by a picture of the painter Tiepolo and a passage on his capacity of illusion, invites the readers to think about the truthfulness of the previous image of the square and about photographs in general and their capacity for being manipulated. In fact, the aforementioned photograph, from the fourth episode of *The Emigrants*, is rather unusual as an image of the Nazi's book-burning pyres. It turns out – in fact – to be a fake.¹⁰ It is therefore evident that this photograph is a pseudo representation of the book burning. It is nothing more than a photographic manipulation, as argued by McCulloh: "The image, allegedly of the Nazi book-burning on the square in front of the Bishop's *Residenz* in Würzburg, is demonstrably a picture from another occasion, to which smoke from yet another picture has been added, as well as a dark night sky" (McCulloh, *Understanding W. G. Sebald* 46). This makes it clear that one cannot completely trust photographs, which do not always depict how reality is. Nevertheless, very few images are manipulated, and this means that the author decides what needs to be modified and what does not; he could have reshaped all the photographs before publishing them, but he decided to make only a few adjustments.

In the collection *Searching for Sebald*, Tim Wright underlines another key aspect of Sebald's

8 In *W. G. Sebald: A Holistic Approach to Borders, Texts and Perspectives*, Arthur Williams talks about Sebald as "Europe's great painterly writer" (99) in his analysis of the author's pictorial features.

9 The idea that sometimes verbal descriptions are more powerful than images themselves has been pointed out by the English critic Joseph Addison, who claimed that: "Words, when well chosen, have so great force in them that a description often gives us more lively ideas than the sight of things themselves" (from *The Spectator*, no. 416, June 27, 1712 ("The Pleasures of the Imagination, VI"), in Elledge, *Eighteenth Century Critical Essays*, 1:60).

10 This is not the only example of manipulation. In *Vertigo*, for example, the setting of one of David's paintings has been changed: "men and horses are dwarfed by majestic alpine scenery" (Blackler 151).

books: they intrigue. He suggests this by using the word 'phoney', a term which conveys both the elements that I am developing here. Meaning both fake and fascinating, it fully reflects the Sebaldian fiction made by phoney but simultaneously captivating¹¹ documents. The distinctiveness of Sebald's images stems from their duality, they are both illustrative but, at the same time, completely random;¹² they both veil meanings and reveal them, thus making them truly problematic. This has been a very important issue for critics, who tried to motivate some of Sebald's choices by analyzing both the verbal and visual narrations. However, while the narration mediated by words follows a coherent and cohesive structure, the visual apparatus is independent and it quite often does not explain the text. Most of the photographs do not recall anything that can be found in the text's descriptions; it seems sometimes as if images had been deprived of any connection with the verbal narration. This does not mean that photographs in Sebald's texts are not referential, but there are cases when they are not. Or rather, the reason for their insertion is not always evident, if considered with regard to their relationship with the text. Long, for instance, shares this position by conveying that "the referents of the photographs remain unclear and their purpose within the narrative can only be a matter of speculation and conjecture" (133). It is easy to find examples of this throughout *The Emigrants*, beginning with the front page of the newspaper at the end of Henry Selwyn's story (*appendix*: fig. 2). On the one hand, this page follows the explanation of the death of the main character in the story, but, on the other hand, it is neither introduced by the verbal narration nor contextualized by it. Another example is the picture of a child writing with a pencil (*appendix*: fig. 3), whose presence in the text seems unjustified and, appears as if it were used to abruptly interrupt the verbal narration (which was referring to something else). Lastly, at the end of *The Emigrants*, one encounters a frame of a twig (*appendix*: fig. 4), which is not prefaced by any sort of explanation in the text, leaving she/he with no tools to decode it. In *History, Narrative, and Photography*, Long defines the link between word and image as indeterminate and indicates as an example the incredible ekphrastic depiction of the Scots pines and the church at the beginning of *The Emigrants*, which has no association with the visual apparatus. While Long also insists on the interpretative features of Sebald's books, Susan Sontag underlines the non-authenticity of the photographs by saying that "it seems likely not all of them are genuine" (47). In the last part of this dissertation, in light of the considerations that my analysis will glean, I will provide a motive and an explanation for some of these photographs.

11 As stated by Tom Gunning in "What's the Point of an Index? Or Faking Photographs" in *Still/Moving: between Cinema and Photography*, the fact of manipulation is intriguing and it detracts the readers' attention from the truthfulness of the photographs: "when I am told a photograph has been digitalized, I may cease to believe its truth claim, but I think I am still intrigued by it" (28).

12 Regarding this point, Daub claims that "Sebald's text is thus quite explicit in how it 'uses' the photographic images that seem to interrupt almost at random into its flow" (310).

One should wonder why the author decided to insert each photograph in such a page and in such a position. Only then she/he can problematize these pictures and their link, or lack of, with the narration. This process takes into consideration the difference between photographs. Rather, I would suggest that they should be examined as heralds of weighty contents (I am thinking here about the picture of the Bergen Belsen's bodies in *The Rings of Saturn* as an example), and not only in terms of their different physical dimensions on the page or their genuineness. When one does not follow this procedure, it is easy to make false assumptions, as sometimes happened, and still happens, to many Sebald experts. Lisa Driedrich, for example, underlines Susan Sontag's viewpoint about how photographs are used differently by Sebald in three of his books. Sontag "notes that in *The Emigrants*, the visual documents are 'talismanic'; in *The Rings of Saturn* are 'merely illustrative' and in *Vertigo* 'they say, It's true, what I've been telling you'" (279). Here, the critic's assumption is not only scarce, but also inaccurate. By addressing the photographs of *The Rings of Saturn* as illustrations or by considering those of *Vertigo* as mere documentary proofs, Sontag is demonstrating a lack of comprehension of Sebald's visual strategies and their role in the narration.

Sebald has been better understood – in my opinion - by critics such as Clive Scott, who identifies a theological perspective connected to the word-image link in his works. In fact, he claims that "[the photograph] is a material object which has broken free of its context, of its taking and has become an indexicality *without* a referent, an indexicality looking for *a new referent*" (210). At this point, it becomes necessary to inspect the concept of *index*, which is strictly linked to the idea of manipulation and is fundamental when talking about the integrity of images. The term was coined by Charles Peirce and is extremely relevant when talking about the truthfulness of photographs: it implies, in fact, that a photograph has a physical proximity to the object that it represents. This concept differs from that of *icon*, which involves a quasi-theoretical verisimilitude to the object and is therefore not physical. The *index* is the main reason why one gives credit to photographs. Hence, Scott determines Sebald's intent: the author offers photographs taken from other contexts and with peculiar meanings. Then, he uses and manipulates them in order to make the readers capable of creating their own meaning. Sebald adopts photographs and their connotations as instruments for the development of layers of meaning and, therefore, of multiple discourses. This shows an important feature of photographs, which Roland Barthes pointed out in a collection of essays titled *Image, Music, Text*. A photograph has three different levels of meaning: the obvious meaning, the obtuse meaning and the signifier. When considering the first two, one can easily notice the ambiguity of photography. While the obvious meaning is instant (Barthes makes the example of a soldier whose details recall immediately Fascism), the obtuse meaning is "a signifier without a signified" (61), is the one whose meaning depends on our individual comprehension. Photographs

are then simultaneously indexical and indetermined. By following Barthes' critical thoughts, one can easily comprehend why photographs in Sebald's texts are not mere illustrations but, instead, as John Sears states "[...] images work insistently to construct a complementary space within the text in which the 'failure' of the literary is repeatedly enacted" (206). Images make the creation of a complementary discourse possible, and are no less influential in terms of narration. 'Visual literacy' is the term that Mitchell uses in James Elkins's collection to speak about this procedure. Due to the similar nature of both words and images, in fact, every visual narration can be seen as a coherent discourse.

The function of the readers is the main point of most of the discussion on photographs: their active role is a necessary condition for reading Sebald's visual and non-visual narratives. While, on the one hand, photographs in Sebald are not revealing, as Powers states, "these photographs are remarkable less for what they reveal than for their silence in the identities and histories of the people they depict [...]" (465-466). On the other hand, they establish a reciprocal relationship with the readers who become "part" of them, as pronounced by the narrative voice in *The Emigrants*: "looking at the pictures in it, it truly seemed to me, and still does, as if the dead were coming back, or as if I were on the point of joining them" (Sebald, *The Emigrants* 46). This established relationship with the readers is linked to the concept of postmemory, which does not suggest any sort of recreation of the past but, instead, involves the influence that traumatic past events exert on the present. It means making an experience of the past, which Marianne Hirsch believes, has to be "evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that cannot be neither understand nor recreated" (22). As much as one writes with the intention of leaving something durable, by the same token, one takes photographs with the aim of making past moments last in time. This is why images in Sebald also have the function of *memento mori*: they both testify the past and, in doing so, recall death. As Carol Jacobs, one of Sebald's most insightful critics, inquires: "What does it mean in *The Emigrants* – on looking at the photographs, on leafing through the pages – that *either* the dead return *or* we are called into their photographic abode?" (24).

It is clear after these considerations of Sebald's word-image narrations that there are many elements that make the narratives more complicated. This difficulty is further intensified by the nature of Sebald's images, which are both an explanatory support and an obstacle to the clear understanding of the narration, as Furst affirms in her essay "Realism, Photography, and Degrees of Uncertainty":

(In some cases) the images are quite readily interpretable without hesitation because, despite the lack of captions, the conjunction between image and text is in one way or another articulated.

Nevertheless, far from simplifying the process of construction, the photographs add a level of complication between text and reader (225).

However, it is also visible that the author is entirely aware of the features and limits of both these media and he decides to use them in order to play with the readers' expectations. When reading his books, one can only wander through ekphrastic descriptions, photographs that look like paintings and *vice versa*: the author determines the pathway of the reader, and the latter is always a step behind, waiting to be led. Carole Angier, in analysing the last part of *The Emigrants*, points out that “The book ends with a description of three young women sitting at a carpet loom in the Lodz ghetto in 1940 [...]. I am convinced that I have seen their photograph on the last page; I remember the loom, their hands, their faces. But it isn't there” (75). Nonetheless, the reader is not completely subject to someone else's power. He is indeed disorientated, but as Blackler states:

the Sebaldian reader is active rather than passive, operating in the spaces that Sebald, like Kluge, has opened up for that imaginative and intellectual response to occur by resisting the linearity of narrative, the causality of plot, the theatrical artifice of characterization and so on, rather than being confined in a prescriptive or proscriptive role created by the directive author/auteur. His text displaces that authority in such a way that the reader, like Kluge's spectator, has an imaginative and collaborative constructing role to play, not one determined by an authoritarian *auteur* or author and shaped rigidly by the form of the text. (2)

While, on the one hand, it is evident that Blackler has developed her ideas by taking into account the post-structuralist precepts of the ‘Death of the Author’¹³ and the active role of the readers (she refers to the reader in Sebald as disobedient), it is also true, in my opinion, that the reader is not entirely free. As previously stated, the reader is also lost in what has been planned for him, even though this does not necessarily mean that his reactions have also been pre-determined. For these reasons, I would define the Sebaldian reader both as disobedient and disorientated and this duality undoubtedly provides an epistemological richness to the narrative.

13 ‘The Death of The Author’ is an essay written by Roland Barthes and published in 1967. It opened up new critical ways of conceiving the authorial voice in narrative texts and it is also considered as a manifest against traditional literary criticism. Barthes suggested depriving the narration of all the details that could recall the author's identity. Blackler uses this idea when she talks about Sebald's narratives by reporting Sebald's own statement about his narrative style: “This is the “game-of-hide-and-see” that he alludes to in his interview with Maya Jaggi in which the author does his best to “hide” his presence in the text from the reader, and the reader does his or her best (as Wayne C. Booth writes, 1961) to “seek” the author's voice” (Blackler 13). In *Reading W. G. Sebald: Adventure and Disobedience*, Blackler claims that Sebald was able to depict the pain of post-war Germany differently from other cases (*Shinderlist*). The author employs a more tactful approach to grief, by giving the reader signals that he has to interpret. In chapter five, I will analyze, for instance, Sebald's use of visual figures of speech and their link with the discourse of human suffering.

3. The Emigrants

The Emigrants is a book by W. G. Sebald published in 1992. While, on the one hand, it represents the author's interest for questions of identity, on the other hand, it has a certain ambiguity in terms of genre, which it shares with *Vertigo* and *The Rings of Saturn*.¹⁴ This is the reason why I look at these three books together in analyzing some aspects of Sebald's work (see part 6: 'A comparative approach'). The book is split into four chapters, each one indirectly telling a story of people who felt somehow out of place because expropriated of their roots. *The Emigrants* has a strong *meta* dimension: at the same level as the characters of the book who had to leave the places where they were born, the narrator also embarks on a journey to the places where these people lived. He talks to the people that these characters were in contact with, and, by doing this, he undertakes a 'journey within a journey'. While the main feature of this book is the partition into four independent narratives, the second characteristic feature is the presence of photographs embedded in the narration; one can find, in fact, seventy-six images distributed unevenly throughout the book. The fourth part, for example, although the longest, is also the one with fewer visual elements; it has, in fact, a twenty-page break marked only by words, as if pictures were not fully decisive in Max Ferber's story and the verbal language were the only instrument that could be used. On the other hand, the number of photographs contained in the third episode of *The Emigrants* based on the story of Ambros Adelwarth, is very noticeable: this character is the narrator's uncle, and this familiar link is probably what motivates the increased use of images in this section. The analogous number of photographs in the three books (seventy is their number on average, considering the seventy-two in *The Rings of Saturn*, the sixty-six in *Vertigo* and the above mentioned seventy-six in *The Emigrants*) together with their disposition throughout the narration, underline Sebald's effort in creating well meditated works that are only apparently fortuitous.

The visual analysis that I conducted on *The Emigrants* leads to some considerations regarding the two languages that Sebald employs: while, on the one hand, I am trying to consider the verbal and the visual discourse independently, on the other hand, it often seems impossible to do so. Most of the time, one needs a combination of the two in order to understand meanings that otherwise would be lost. Thus, their relationship can be defined as osmotic because these two languages are simultaneously independent and mutually linked. As previously stated, most of the photographs in *The Emigrants* (but this can also be seen in *Vertigo* and in *The Rings of Saturn*),

¹⁴ Austerlitz (published in 2001) is also mainly concerned with issues of identity and the Holocaust, but it is Sebald's only full-fledged 'traditional' novel. *The Emigrants*, *Vertigo* and *The Rings of Saturn* are often viewed as a trilogy. The three are episodic narratives and they are all based on travel, which is the common driving force for the narration.

depict objects and the outdoors. The characteristic that these types of documents share is the scarce presence of human beings. By following the diagram, which represents the incidence of people depicted in the photographs, one can easily recognize that the outdoors is empty most of the time (*diagrams* - fig. 3). The depiction of the four characters from *The Emigrants* is only evoked by the presence of objects or places and almost never by their own images. McCulloh in *Understanding W. G. Sebald* points out that “In spite of the many pictures interspersed throughout the book, we have few recognizable images of the main characters in these stories, with the exception of Paul Bereyter” (43-44). This makes one reflect on the role of memory in Sebald's narration: the near absolute absence of the characters' faces points out that while a recovery of the past can be attempted, which is fundamental for Sebald's narrative voices, it can only be done partially. The past cannot be totally re-experienced and even things that are considered enduring, such as landscapes, are bound to change or disappear.

By carefully analyzing Sebald's photographs in sequence, one detects the coherent but cryptic feature of the visual discourse that Sebald decided to intermingle with the verbal one: it is a puzzled network of references that needs to be interpreted. What I realized by working on the visual apparatus of *The Emigrants* is that it seems as if the author (whether consciously or not) had made epistemological use of the photographs contained in the book in the same way one can “play with words” in order to create different effects in writing. In this specific case, I am referring to stylistic devices - including literary devices and figures of speech - such as symbolism, connotation and denotation, prolepsis, digression, hyperbaton and synecdoche, which, in my opinion, can be found in Sebald's visual narration. It is indeed a peculiar interpretation,¹⁵ because it is not easy to identify and apply characteristic features of the verbal code to the visual one. As I will demonstrate, it opens up a new way of thinking about the author.

The presence of literary devices in Sebald's visual apparatus has been pointed out in some of the critical writings about his works, although always involuntarily and never with the systematic approach that I am following in this dissertation. James Wood in *Understanding W. G. Sebald* talks for example about Sebald's style as hyperbolic, an adjective that is usually used in a semiotic context to underline features of verbal texts. However, what critics often mention is the pictorial feature of Sebald's verbal language. They do so by using terms of the visual in order to talk about verbal characteristics: “He [Sebald] creates an impressionistic, sometimes surreal verbal canvas of contrasts: the mundane and the bizarre, the placidly familiar and the vividly grotesque, the farcical

15 While my approach regarding the presence of stylistic devices in Sebald is surely new, similar work has been done considering other kinds of word-image productions, such as graphic novels. The same link, in fact, has been established by Dallacqua in her essay studying literature and graphic novels, that, in her opinion, contain “literary devices like point of view, allusion, themes and morals, tone and mood, symbolism, and flashback and foreshadowing” (Dallacqua 367).

and the tragic, the lyric and the insane, the criminal and the kind, the constant and the transient” (Wood 18-19). Also, in the case of Wood, by labelling Sebald's writing as a 'verbal canvas', he recognizes a certain level of proximity between the two languages. When identifying stylistic devices in the visual apparatus, a partition is required. There are those devices which need the text to be explained because their meaning cannot be understood if disconnected from the verbal narration and those which do not need any previous reference to be interpreted: symbolism, connotation, denotation and prolepsis belong to the former; digression, hyperbaton and synecdoche to the latter.

The link between literary devices such as symbolism, connotation and denotation and the visual apparatus is quite intuitive. In fact, as it happens with words which are made by both signs and symbols (in linguistics), images can also be read by following their first level of meaning (denotation) and their second one (connotation). While the first is universally accepted, the second is totally arbitrary because its perception can be different depending on who reads it and how. Blackler explained this by saying that most of Sebald's photographs are not mimetic and so they require an interpretation to be understood, very much as it happens in writing where one has to interpret words and their signs:

These photographs are themselves not truly representational, not truly mimetic. Simulacra, they are images which require our imagination to convert them into greens and ochres. This is precisely what we do when we read the inked symbols of words, converting their conceptual symbolism by mysterious contemplative and imaginative acts into our own images. (150)

One can easily understand this concept when looking at the images of the tree in *The Emigrants* (appendix: fig. 5) both independently and in their binary link. When one examines the opening image, she/he notices that it can be seen as a metaphor of the entire book. The protagonist of three episodes of *The Emigrants* of the four, kills himself; the graveyards of the first page therefore represent an anticipation of death, one of the main *topoi* of the book, which can only be discovered by reading it. Moreover, when one links this photograph with the one located in the second half of the text (on page 180) depicting a painting by Courbet (*The Oak of Vercingetorix*), she/he can grasp such different meanings, beside the primary ones. This indeed represents a cornerstone of the question. For instance, the absence of graveyards in the second tree (Courbet's painting) makes the image of the tree in *The Emigrants* quite obscure. In fact, besides its established denotation, it offers plenty of possibilities for interpretation; it is linked to the idea of death and to the one of falsification that I have already pointed out in the first part of this dissertation. J. J. Long mentioned this multiplicity of meanings when referring to the image of the tree stating that “the image of a tree is iconic

because it *looks like* a tree. [...] The symbolic interpretation of the photographic sign, on the other hand, would draw on cultural conventions and see the graveyard as a symbol of death, but also possibly of peace and rest [...]" (120).

Prolepsis is another literary device that can be found in Sebald's visual discourse and which can be understood only if linked to the text. In literature, it is the foreshadowing of later events in a narrative. An example of the application of this device can be found in the first two episodes of *The Emigrants*. The first photograph of the book is a depiction of a cemetery. Although the text does not mention anything about the death of the character, an event that will be discovered only at the end of the episode, the author is applying the literary device of anticipation in his visual apparatus. Through this type of image, in fact, the reader is visually entering into a dimension of grief and pain. One can understand the meaning of the first image of the text only by reading the verbal apparatus because the visual contribution alone is not sufficient, as McCulloh claims: "[...] the section on Dr. Henry Selwyn began with an ending too, though the reader may not have realised it fully at the time. It is a visual, not a verbal ending, however, a photograph of a great tree rising above headstones in a cemetery" (McCulloh, *Understanding W. G. Sebald* 32). The second story too begins with a visual anticipation; the depiction of the railtracks suggests the way in which the main character of the story will die: he will throw himself under a train. Here again, the reader is not able to grasp the essence of the image from the beginning; he needs some verbal instruments to better understand the sense of the photograph placed there by the author.

In other instances, the literary devices employed by the author in the visual apparatus of *The Emigrants* do not need any further explanation. Their analysis can be carried out regardless of whether or not these images are linked to the text. For example, it is possible to find visual digressions throughout the book. This type of literary device is mentioned by Charles Simic as one of the main traits of Sebald's texts: "Another oddity of Sebald's prose, which either delights or exasperates his readers, is his digressions. He never hesitates to interject some interesting anecdote or bit of factual information arrived at by some not-always apparent process of association" (146). In the second episode of *The Emigrants*, the narrator temporarily suspends the narration by visually and verbally mentioning another character involved in the life of the protagonist. The reader finds a couple of pages full of photographs of Mrs. Helen Hollaender (appendix: fig. 6) and is by now convinced that she will be a pivotal figure in the narration, but after a while she disappears completely, and will never come back either in the verbal or in the visual discourse. This could be interpreted as one of the cases in which the literary device of digression is applied both to the verbal and the visual narration.

The Emigrants presents also other more subtle types of visual figures of speech: they are

synecdoche, hyperbaton and climax. The literary device of synecdoche can be identified in three photographs located at the end of the book: the images taken into consideration (*appendix: fig. 7*) have been included in the section 'uncategorized' in the diagram related to *The Emigrants*. Apart from their difficult categorization, it is their position that visually recreates the literary device of synecdoche. This was pointed out by Feiereisen and Pope who are clearly referring to a visual rhetorical feature of the book: “The twig seems at first to function as a kind of synecdoche of the immense, overwhelming salt-frame complex” (182). The two critics are pointing out the rhetorical feature of the photograph that Sebald inserts at page 230 of *The Emigrants*. The narrator is sitting on a bench and he is spending the afternoon in “ruminations about the long-term and impenetrable process” (230) of the incrementation of the salt in the water. This is the verbal anticipation that introduces the photograph of the twig. When the reader comes across that image, which is described as “[...] the very strangest of petrified or crystallized form(s)” (Sebald, *The Emigrants* 130), she/he feels confused. This happens not only because of the strangeness of the image, which is presented as de-contextualized, but also the reader is left with the impression to have seen something similar in the previous pages. This twig can be considered indeed a portion of one of the others previously placed, those “that were bunched in layers as high as the roof” (Sebald, *The Emigrants* 128).

The other two literary devices that I could detect in my analysis of the visual apparatus of *The Emigrants* are climax and hyperbaton. The four photographs of the cemetery (*appendix: fig. 8*) constitute a climactic sequence of death images, which begins with the cemetery's gate, continues with a progressive zoom pointed towards the graveyard, and culminates inside it. It is conceived as a violent progression of images related to death and pain. The function of this device is quite intuitive when considering the effect that it recreates in literature. The author is visually bombarding the readers with photographs related to death in order not only to shed light on one fundamental topic of the book, but also, due to the photographs' position within the visual apparatus (almost at the end), with the intention of creating a coherent and thematic ending. He achieves his objective with the organization of a series, which stands out thanks to its intensity. The last device I would like to point out is hyperbaton, a figure of speech that, both in poetry and prose, not only reshapes the order of the sentence, but also divides words that normally should be associated. Hyperbaton might be observed in the sequence of photographs in the Ambros Adelwarth's story (*appendix: fig. 9*): in this case, the reader, (and spectator) is expecting to see a progression of photographs related to the diary with which the sequence begins. While the first image is the front page of Ambrose's diary, and the second a zoom of two pages of the agenda, the third one completely breaks the visual narration by inserting a picture of a boy dressed in white. The addition of this photograph is quite enigmatic. On the one hand, it temporarily diverts attention from the main visual concept of the

diary by inserting a captivating image characterized by the brightness of the boy's dress; on the other hand, the verbal narration does not provide any clue. The narrator only outlines a few aspects of the boy who has been depicted as silent and inscrutable: "The boy, who was extraordinary beautiful, was wearing a high brimless camel-hair toque on his head. I spoke to him in Turkish, but he only looked at us without a word. [...] On the 26th of October, Ambros writes: "Collected the photographs of the white boy from the studio today" (Sebald, *The Emigrants* 135). The fourth image comes back to the diary and ends the visual sequence. I interpreted this sequence as a visual hyperbaton because, as one can observe with hyperbaton in literature, in this case the visual discourse has been interrupted by an element that is non-sequential; and, because of it, its order is modified. It is a kind of mini-digression within the bigger digression of the diary and it shows Sebald's ability to use a high level of creativity not only in the verbal but also in the visual discourse. The diary is not only an enigmatic¹⁶ object that the author decided to include in the story, but it can also be contemplated as a metaphor for the text itself. The narrator illustrates four stories as if they were included in a daybook, or as if they were memories that one could easily find in a diary: the photograph of the boy is hence a visual metaphor for the entire book and, I would say, for the experience of reading. The hyperbaton can be interpreted as a metaphor of Sebald's whole creative process, which digresses, wandering around towards seemingly 'dead ends' only to retrace its steps towards enigmatic closures.

4. The Rings of Saturn

The walker must be most caring and observant when he walks, treating every thing, even the smallest, as if it were a child, a dog, a midge, a butterfly, a sparrow, a worm, a flower, a man, a house, a tree, a hedgerow, a snail, a mouse, a cloud, a mountain, a leaf, or just a poor discarded scrap of paper on which a good, dear schoolchild has written his or her first awkward letters. Every thing must be studied and observed on its own terms. The highest and the lowliest, the most earnest and the most amusing things are equally dear and lovely and precious to the walker. (McCulloh, *The Stylistics of Stasis* 40)

The narrator of *The Rings of Saturn* is exactly this: a walker. From a state of both mental and physical paralysis (at the beginning of the narration, he mentions that one year has passed since he entered the hospital room where he is at that moment), the narrator undertakes a journey, which has all the characteristics of a pilgrimage, along the coast of Suffolk and his memories. *The Rings of Saturn*, of which the English version was published in 1998, is often paired with *The Emigrants* and

¹⁶ This is one of the cases where manipulation occurred. In fact, there is a certain incongruity between what the verbal narration addresses and what the visual one shows.

Vertigo.¹⁷ Besides its mixed genre, this book by Sebald is a true example of travel writing and it differentiates itself from his other works because of the lack of plot. *The Rings of Saturn* is not based on an organic narration: its chapters are developed, indeed, on a series of fragments, mostly borne out of the narrator's memory, and not easy to interlink. The book is a collection of experiences, visions and memories that rather than telling a story, refer back to events of the past, always mixed with a certain level of imagination: "Sebald does not so much tell a story, but rather collects and retells other stories, juxtaposing 'quotations and commentary, facts and fictions, images and multiple languages... without great distinction'" (Kraenzle 127). This does not mean that the ten chapters (only numbered but not titled) have to be interpreted in their individuality. On the contrary, as Gray asserts, "the aesthetic achievement rests [...] on the artistry that builds them into a conglomerate narrative in which the ruptures between seemingly disintegrative elements are interlinked and conjoined in meaningful ways" (44). The structure of the book, marked by verbal and photographic fragments, motivates the title given to it. In the same way that the rings of Saturn are linked by gravitational forces, the fragments of *The Rings of Saturn*, which sometimes seem to have nothing in common, also have to be kept together. Moreover, the narrator's wandering is not only used as a starting point for individual reflections, but it also represents a true historical journey. It is the depiction of some of the historical steps that humanity had to pass through: the history of the Chinese Empire or the Irish Revolution, for example, form part of an itinerary, which is a kind of "temporal pilgrimage through the modern history of Europe and its colonial conquests from the seventeenth through the twentieth century, with special emphasis placed on the nineteenth century as the age of industrial modernism and advanced colonialism" (Gray 30).

However, despite its focus on travel, the reader detects a striking dichotomy when reading the book. There are two forces that play an important role throughout the narration: on the one hand, the movement, which is the driving force of the travel experience, and on the other hand, a certain perception of stasis. This is pointed out by McCulloh: "[...] it is precisely the *inaction* described by the author that holds the reader's attention" (McCulloh, *The Stylistics of Stasis* 38). While "the movement through landscape is essential to the process of memory enacted in Sebald's writing" (Darby 265), it is stasis that prevails both in the visual and verbal narration. The paralysis can be traced both visually, in the photographs of *The Rings of Saturn*, which are mainly empty outdoors, and verbally, with a narration that is stuck and deprived of any sort of movement, as Persson underlines when he observes that "the narrative does begin with a literal and figurative paralysis that the act of writing alone can begin to address" (206).

These features make the analysis of the main themes of *The Rings of Saturn*, both in terms of

¹⁷ Also, *Austerlitz* (published in 2001) has been paired with *The Rings of Saturn* most of the time. The former is also grounded on a trip, but in that case the narrator is traveling from England to Belgium.

the verbal and the visual apparatus, quite easy to classify. As one can notice from the graphic that shows the thematic incidence in the book (*appendix: diagrams 2 – The Rings of Saturn*), almost half of the photographs are representations of the outdoors. Furthermore, of the three books taken into account in this dissertation, *The Rings of Saturn* has the highest number of photographs depicting the outdoors. The content of the book motivates the massive presence of this type of representations of the outdoors through both verbal descriptions and photographic documents. Besides the increase of these type of photographs in *The Rings of Saturn*, landscapes act as a leitmotif in all of Sebald's narrations. The presence of so many outdoor scenarios communicates three ideas: they are first expressions of the instability and pain that permeate the text. Second, the starting point for the visions that constitute *The Rings of Saturn's* fragments and, third, because of their hybrid nature, they well suit Sebald's mixed narrations with whom they share this kind of ambiguity. Starting from the third point, in Sebald's fictions, which deal with both reality and its representation, the concept of landscape is characterized by a certain duality. As Weston claims:

‘Landscape’ functions in the same way: it signifies both the material place and its pictorial representation. Sebald’s landscapes are founded as much on the latter as they are on the former, and they constantly draw attention to this element of their construction. The landscapes that his texts depict are not filled with the immediacy of presence but, rather, are characterized in the attachment of meaning and value accorded in a history of the artistic, literary and cultural representations of them upon which Sebald draws heavily. (175)

The idea of landscape is a *Ianus Bifrons*. It implies, in general, both presence and absence: one can indeed be part of the landscape but, at the same time, can be an observer, and by doing this, can accomplish nothing more than an imaginative act. This is exactly what happens in Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*, where the narrator recreates his own landscapes after both having, or not having, experienced them: “[...] landscape as a tension between something we are *in*, and something we look *at*” (Weston 174). Moreover, while in *The Emigrants* what dominates the visual apparatus are family photographs, which should partially recreate the lost familiar unity, in *The Rings of Saturn*, photographs of the outdoors serve to evoke the narrator's sensations and experiences or to build digressions based on past events. There are many such cases throughout the narration, as the one when “[...] the presence of the railway bridge built in 1875 over the Blyth recalls the historical links between the British and the Chinese empires” (Kraenzle, 135), or when, by passing through Gunhill in Southwold, the narrator remembers why that place was so important:

Everyone who had been out for an evening stroll was gone. I felt as if I were in a deserted theatre, and I should not have been surprised if a curtain had suddenly risen before me and on the proscenium I had beheld, say, the 28th of May 1672 – that memorable day when the Dutch fleet appeared offshore from out of the drifting mists, with the bright morning light behind it, and opened fire on the English ships in Sole Bay (Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn* 76).

The decision of setting the journey in the Suffolk coast is not fortuitous: “Sebald perhaps selects the particular landscape for his journey due to the instability of the Suffolk coast and the marshy areas of this low-lying county” (Weston 173). Indeed, this natural precariousness also affects the visual apparatus, since eight photographs linked to death and grief constitute part of it. The number of images with this kind of content is what differentiates *The Rings of Saturn* from both *The Emigrants* and *Vertigo*. While categorizing the photographs of this book, I realized that *The Rings of Saturn* has the highest number of photographs linked to these themes. They come from different contexts and periods of time; from Rembrandt's painting *The Anatomy Lesson* to the image of dead bodies in Bergen Belsen, they are all examples of the destructive power of men, and they also contextualize the narrator's journey through the ruins of our history.¹⁸

After having pointed out some of the main thematic aspects of *The Rings of Saturn*, I would like to proceed with an analysis of the presence of stylistic devices in Sebald's visual apparatus, which represents my original contribution to Sebald's scholarship. Having identified some themes of *The Rings of Saturn*, I will now focus on four stylistic devices such as parallelism, synecdoche, anticlimax and chiasmus, and I will motivate their identification within the visual narration. Parallelism is the first device I would like to shed light on. This figure can be noticed in the visual link between the above-mentioned photograph of Bergen Belsen concentration camp and an image depicting herrings (*appendix*: fig. 10). The herrings can be traced to a verbal digression based on this species that the narrator begins by walking “from the footpath that runs along the grassy dunes and low cliffs” (Sebald, *Vertigo* 51). Even though these two photographs do not seem to have any relationship to each other, they do possess a “common denominator” (Blumenthal-Barby 548). While the figure of parallelism in literature implies the adoption of elements with similar functions in the sentence, the two photographs taken into consideration share certain thematical and visual elements that link them together. In terms of their structure, what they have in common is the position of both the human corpses and the herrings: they are both laying on the ground (even though in one photographs, they are human bodies and in the other, animals'). Moreover, an interesting thematic link can be established when considering the meaning of the photograph of the

18 In particular, the above-mentioned concentration camp photograph (*appendix*: fig. 10) opens up – in my opinion – an interesting debate on the effects of painful images. On the one hand, Roland Barthes affirms that these kind of images are less interesting in terms of connotation because they do not add anything else other than what one can immediately perceive. On the other hand, thanks to his own concept of *punctum*, one can easily figure out why these photographs' response is indeed more complex. The *punctum* is “that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 27). That is what hurts us, and what makes us raise questions. The spectator does not have to study the image; he has the image in front of his eyes, and he just perceives that something is wrong, or unusual. In order to explain this, Barthes used the metaphor of an arrow that pierces you and this gives a perfect idea of how this concept works in the photographs' complex language and why it can be applied not only to the Bergen Belsen concentration camp but, more in general, to the distressing photographs contained in W. G. Sebald's narratives.

herrings, which is introduced by a verbal digression of a couple of pages. The narrator describes their group as being enormous – there are a billion of them all over the world – and he also mentions their habits and their death process, which is caused by men who poison them. “(H)erring fishing regarded as a supreme example of mankind's struggle with the power of Nature” (Sebald 54), says the narrator of *The Rings of Saturn*, and this is exactly why the reader dwells on the Bergen Belsen concentration camp's photograph, which appears soon. The image of the herrings comes to the reader's mind. One can see the case of the herrings as an extension of the concentration camp photograph, the very first image that directly refers to the Holocaust. The herrings' bodies lay on the ground in the same way as the corpses from Bergen Belsen. Both groups' demise is in the hands of human beings. Moreover, as much as “we do not know what the herring feels” (Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn* 75), neither can we know the Jewish people's most intimate feelings. The two photographs create a visual parallelism, with the function of insisting on a painful theme, which represents one of the book's crucial motifs and that is not often directly addressed. Returning to the photograph of the herrings, I found the image that immediately follows (*appendix: fig. 11*) quite interesting because it focuses on one of the animals taken into account in the visual and verbal digression. While the first image of the herrings shows the totality of the group, the second only portrays one specimen by “zooming” on it. The two images together are an example of visual synecdoche, which is a figure of speech that represents the part for the whole in the verbal language, or vice versa: the whole for the part. The same happens here in *The Rings of Saturn*, where the image of the herring has been employed to recall also the plurality of the group. This visual synecdoche can be seen as a reminder of the individuality of the group that otherwise would get lost. It can also epitomize the feature of being defenceless that is associated with the herrings. That of the herrings is indeed a metaphorical image and having chosen a fish, which cannot talk, instead of a person motivates my interpretation.

The third stylistic device that I would like to bring up is anticlimax. In order to explain where it can be found in the visual apparatus, it is necessary to focus our attention on the image of the window, which is both the first photograph of the text and the element that embodies the device I am talking about. Conventionally, some ideas are connected to the element of the window: it is the limit between the indoors and outdoors, but also between a familiar reality and a foreign one. It also permits one to see oneself through its reflected surface. *The Rings of Saturn* contains all these components: on the one hand, it acts as a divide between the hospital room and the outdoors, therefore between the idealized world of the hospital room and the unrecognizable one that is changing outside. On the other hand, it allows the protagonist to see his lineaments without recognizing them, as it happens in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. As Jacobs states, “Whatever window we

have on Sebald's writing, we are told, it goes by way of involuntary thought and brings us to the question of metamorphosis”(43). The similarity of the scene is indeed quite substantial; the narrator acknowledges it by saying: “I could not help thinking of the scene in which poor Gregor Samsa, his little legs trembling, climbs the armchair and looks out of his room, no longer remembering the sense of liberation that gazing out of the window had formerly given him” (Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn* 5). Moreover, the shape of the photograph of the window on the first page (*appendix*: fig. 12) is quite bizarre, “[...] (the window) for some strange reason, was draped with black netting” (Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn* 4) and it can allude both to the quincunx’s structure and to “[...] a link between mapping, surveying, and the photographic images” (Kraenzle 138). The quincunx is a five-pointed figure (*appendix*: fig. 13) created by men whose pattern forms all things of the universe. The narrator explains that this form “[...] is composed by using the corners of a regular quadrilateral and the point at which its diagonals intersect” (Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn* 20), but he does not spend a lot of time clarifying its meaning or source; he only uses Rembrandt's painting in order to introduce it. Among other surgeons, in this painting (*appendix*: fig. 14), Rembrandt depicts Thomas Browne who apparently dedicated many of his studies to the explanation of the quincunx’s structure: “Browne identifies this structure everywhere, in animate and inanimate matter: in certain crystalline forms, in starfish and sea urchins, in the vertebra of mammals and the backbones of birds and fish...” (Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn* 20). However, the reader knows no more than that. What is evident is that the quincunx is a recurring theme of *The Rings of Saturn* where one can easily find it in different shapes (in the photograph of the window, for instance). Other two photographs (*appendix*: fig. 15) of *The Rings of Saturn* share the same characteristics and the sequence of these three images, generates the stylistic device of anticlimax. Anticlimax is a rhetorical device that makes the order of some statements in a sentence create the sensation of gradually descending intensity. The same effect is produced in the case of the window sequence in Sebald: while the first image is a full depiction of the window, in the second the zoom is moving away from it, and in the third, the window is only sketched. Instead of opening up the window of the first page of the book, the author decides to move the reader's eyes from it. By doing this, he creates such a reverse effect because he disappoints the expectations of the readers who were foreseeing a focus in the direction of the outdoors, and not towards the indoors. Therefore, the function of the device of the anticlimax is that of trapping both the readers' and the narrator's expectations.

A chiasm is a figure of speech where two ideas are repeated in reverse order: the first element A is linked to the fourth element, which I will call A¹; while the second and third elements, which I will call B and B¹, are linked together in close sequence. The name of this device comes from the Greek letter χ because its shape recalls the elements' succession. The first four photographs

of *The Rings of Saturn* form this figure exactly (*appendix*: fig. 16) because the first (A) and the fourth (A¹) are linked together, and so are the second (B) and third (B¹). As I mentioned above, the shape of the window in the photograph that opens the visual narration is the quincunx and this photograph establishes a strong association with the fourth image, which perfectly represents the pattern recognized in the window. One can determine a similar connection in terms of theme between the second and third photographs (B and B¹), the former depicts Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson*, the latter only a section of the painting. The painting illustrates the dissection of the body of Adrian Kindt, known as a thief who was hanged in 1632 and whose autopsy is the centre of the painting by Rembrandt. The first thing that one can notice is the gaze of the characters of the artwork; not only Doctor Tulp “fails to see the victim” (Jacobs 48-49) but also the colleagues' gazes are not directly focused on the dead body but instead on the anatomical atlas. The doctors' misleading gazes epitomize not only the history of injustice, but also, due to the misrepresentation of the dissection, they “thematize the act of looking” (Kraenzle 128). What immediately follows is a photographic zoom on the previous painting representing only a portion of the canvas such as the dead body and some of the doctors' gazes. The two photographs are inextricably connected as much as the others, which I addressed before, thus forming the device of chiasmus. Because of its structure, one of the main functions of the chiasmus is that of headlining the second element of each pair in a sentence. Therefore, Sebald might have used this device in the visual apparatus of *The Rings of Saturn* in order to obtain this specific effect. The second elements of Sebald's chiasmus are respectively the pattern of the quincunx (A¹) and the section of Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson* (B¹). The former points out a geometric structure that can often be found throughout the visual narration, the latter, by focussing on that particular painting by Rembrandt, hints at the idea of death: both therefore refer to two of the recurring themes of Sebald's verbal narrative.

5. Vertigo

Vertigo is the third and last book I will take into account in this dissertation. It is the first work, of the three, which Sebald published in German in 1990. The English translation only came out in 1999, ten years after its first publication. Similarly to *The Emigrants*, the book is divided into four parts, entitled “Beyle, or Love is a Madness Most Discreet”, “All'estero”, “Dr. K. Takes the Waters at Riva” and “Il ritorno in patria”. The chronological lapse covers one hundred years of history, the events depicted in *Vertigo* begin in 1813, the year of the last battles of Napoleon, and

run until 1913, immediately before the beginning of the First World War. By opening with Napoleon and his last battles, one is immediately conscious that also in this book the narrator will move through distressing and disastrous scenarios. The first visual and verbal image (*appendix: fig. 17*) of *Vertigo* does indeed bring the reader into a grim atmosphere; by referring to animals' dead bodies left behind on the battlefield, the narrator is leading the readers into pages of destruction: “[...] he was so affected by the large number of dead horses lying by the wayside and the other detritus of war the army left [...]”(5). However, the content of the book is quite varied and every chapter portrays four characters coming from different cultural and historical backgrounds. The first part tells Henry Beyle's life, whose name is the one given to the young Stendhal, the second focuses on Casanova and the third addresses Kafka, even though the narrator only uses the epithet ‘Doctor K’ to refer to him. The fourth part moves away from illustrious men's lives and focuses instead on the narrator. This last part is based on the narrator's journey to his hometown, a Bavarian village where he was raised (the core of this chapter is probably based on some of Sebald's autobiographical details). This chapter, together with the third “All'estero”, represents a cornerstone for the questions of history and memory in Sebald's narratives and it also justifies the title of the book.

In the fourth chapter the narrator collapses “into truly vertiginous depths” (Sebald, *Vertigo* 262) by coming back home after many years to the village in southwest Germany where he lived as a child and a young man. This is the moment when the sensation of dizziness reaches its highest level, but it is not the only one. The narrator perceives “a vertiginous sense of confusion such as he had never previously experienced” (Sebald, *Vertigo* 17) and also at the beginning of *Vertigo*, when thinking of the battle of Marengo. Both cases make unsteadiness one of the major characteristics of the book and they could also have inspired the title. Facing the past provokes vertiginous visions; the narrator feels lost in a place that he does not recognize anymore. Even though he grew up there, his return causes a sense of alienation, which provokes a feeling of gloominess. Therefore, in McCulloh's words, “one of the lessons of “Il Ritorno in Patria” is, predictably, that one simply cannot go home again. It is not the same home; everything has changed” (McCulloh, *Understanding W. G. Sebald* 107). It is indeed clear that the concept of memory contains a fundamental duality: on the one hand, things, people and landscapes are destined to mutate and to become unrecognizable such as “the view from Burg Greifensteinf, (that) is no longer the same. A dam has been built below the castle. The course of the river was straightened, and the sad sight of it now will soon extinguish the memory of what it once was” (Sebald, *Vertigo* 42). On the other hand, their memory represents a key point in all of Sebald's narratives. The act of remembering is necessary, in fact, because it is the only procedure that keeps the past alive. One has to be totally

aware that the past cannot be recreated, but at the same time it is necessary to face it and not run away from it. Moreover, the remembrance of the past can reveal things that have not yet been contemplated, as McCulloh states in *Understanding Sebald*: “the point Sebald is making is that revisiting the past can yield epiphanies, clear up misconceptions, and draw connections previously unnoticed” (102). Of all of Sebald's themes, that of memory is still such a complicated one, but it is probably in *Vertigo* where it has been the most developed. In the chapter “All'estero”, the dichotomy of remembrance is again the main point of the story. The fourth chapter shares the same narrative process as *The Emigrants*: *Vertigo* is a journey following in Doctor K's footsteps, *The Emigrants* is the narrator's journey through four emigrants' lives. The narrator undertakes a journey eighty years after Doctor K's, where he intentionally visits and stays in the same places as Doctor K and by doing this he tries to follow Doctor K' traces. Also, a duality arises: even though the narrator begins his journey because he feels that it was necessary, in doing so, he perceives that the past cannot be relived. By going back to it (and in this particular case to the places that Doctor K visited eight years before) one can only be trapped, as happens with a maze, “In *Vertigo* there is an explicit image of a maze, and indeed, the entire chapter “All'estero” reads as if the narrator is trapped in a maze that encompasses Vienna, Venice, Verona, and Milan” (McCulloh, *The Stylistic of Stasis* 42). Just like in *The Emigrants* and *The Rings of Saturn*, in *Vertigo* the narrator is wandering ceaselessly to find something that seems to be ever fleeting and almost pointless (even looking for a restaurant in Verona in *Vertigo* (76) results in a never-ending wandering through the city). In *Vertigo*, there are many instances that support this interpretation, such as at the beginning of the second chapter where the journey from the United Kingdom to Wien feels like it is unending or when the narrator does not find any reason for wandering in the city: “My traversing of the city, often continuing for hours, thus had very clear bounds, and yet at no point did my *incomprehensible* behaviour become apparent to me” (Sebald, *Vertigo* 34).¹⁹

It is possible to highlight many other “visual” themes in *Vertigo* thanks to the diagram I could create by extrapolating all the photographs of the book and by splitting them into thematic entries (*appendix*: diagrams 2 – *Vertigo*), they are immediately visible. First of all, the majority of the photographs are documents, in particular, receipts, pages of books and paintings. Even though the large quantity of this type of images could suggest Sebald's intention of charging the book with veracity, their presence makes the reception of the photographs more complicated. As Eder claims

¹⁹ This specific feature of *Vertigo*, but I would say of Sebald's narratives in general, is accompanied by an elliptic style of the verbal narration, which intensifies the sense of wandering without really knowing the purpose of it. As Steinberg states “Sebald writes elliptically, refusing to explain the intersection of seemingly irrelevant events: the narrator [...] is unable to resolve the purpose of his aimless quest”(62). In *Vertigo*, for instance, the narrator feels many times disoriented while travelling. In Verona he gets to a church after a previous visit to the Pellegrini Chapel, and he assumes to be exactly in the Chapel recently visited: “[...] he feels for a moment as if the selfsame church were replicated before him, its entrance fitting directly with that of the church he had just left, a mirroring effect [...]” (149).

“(these kind of) photographs are used to document the uncertainty” (1). A clear example of this can be noticed in the photograph of the passport on page 114 (*appendix*: fig. 18). The passport contains Sebald's picture and signature, and so, the reader is encouraged to think that what she/he is reading in the chapter is Sebald's autobiographical story. However, after a while the narrator is asked to sign a document and at that point his signature shows another name: Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer, a dead historian. This proves that it is not possible to identify the narrator with the author (Pearson) and it also sheds light on the complicated nature of photographic documents that in Sebald's narratives have the function of complicating rather than disclosing the reader's doubts. For instance, in the third chapter of *Vertigo*, after having devoted pages to recounting how and where Dr K. was spending his time, together with plenty of images of receipts and photographic proofs, he remarks that “how Dr K. passed his few days in Venice in reality, we do know now” (148).

A considerable part of visual and textual documents is also based on works of art. This is an important feature of *Vertigo*, where photographs of paintings and literary references permeate the entire book, which is an exaltation of art in its broader sense. With *Vertigo*, Sebald shows himself to be a true expert on literature and fine arts. The first part of the book is soaked in literary references from Dante and Petrarch when he narrates a non-corresponded love between the writer and his beloved, which seems to fully embody the Italian literary examples. Métilde Viscontini and Ghita are the Sebaldian equivalents of Beatrice and Laura; they are evasive and quasi-celestial as much as Dante's and Petrarch's untouchable women. The writer in *Vertigo* demonstrates a wide knowledge of European art history by inserting art into verbal descriptions and photographs of paintings. It is possible to trace such instances in *Vertigo*, like when in the verbal narration he recalls one of Tiepolo's paintings (51) by looking at the landscape outside the window of a train, or, when he reports in detail Pisanello's work alongside its visual representation (74-76). While on the one hand, all these artistic references want to be an exaltation of European art and literature, on the other hand, they appear to be used to highlight the “lack” of Sebald's narrator who “cannot develop a Romantic situation of writing peculiar to himself, he can only walk/write in the footsteps of Dante, Kafka and Grillparzer” (Zilkosky 105-106). Most of the time, the narrator disappears behind many of his characters, as in the case of Dr K. where the narrator plays the role of Kafka's doppelganger. As Kilbourn suggests “(Sebald's narrator) becomes Kafka's uncanny double, reduplicating an imaginary version of the latter's Italian journey in 1913” (Kilbourn 64).

Another aspect I would like to point out is the fact that the outdoors in *Vertigo* is mostly empty, as in *The Emigrants* and *The Rings of Saturn*. Landscapes are not only hostile but are scenarios of death and destruction; therefore the traveller is not only alienated because of the sentiment of unbelonging, but he is literally walking through silent ruins. “(Landscapes) are

monotonous and unwelcoming, and the people who experience them primarily in the act of travelling through them are like lost souls in one of the circles of hell” (Bond 36). Landscapes are desolately silent and empty – “a heavy silence lay upon the place, broken only by the bellowing of some nameless animals waiting in a siding to be transported onwards” (Sebald, *Vertigo* 81) – a depressing misery that looms before the narrator.

Having provided an overview of *Vertigo's* main themes, I would like to focus my attention on the identification of stylistic devices in the visual narration. Following Blackler, who affirms that in *Vertigo* “the narcissistic repetition (of the photographs) is rhetorical” (151), I will provide three examples of stylistic devices that I identified by analyzing series of photographs in the book. They are allusion, epanalepsis and hyperbaton. An example of allusion can be found in the visual apparatus of the third chapter of *Vertigo* entitled “Dr. K. Takes the Waters at Riva” and in particular when “Dr. K. spends three weeks in Riva at Dr von Hartungen's hydropathic establishment” (154-155). The narrator devotes a couple of pages to the explanation of Dr. K's daily routine, characterized by cold douches and electrical treatments, which have been prescribed to him. While following the verbal description, the reader is presented with a quite distressing photograph (*appendix*: fig. 19), it seems as if a man were lying dead in the bath tub, but, the body's position clearly recalls a painting by Jacques Louis David called *The Death of Marat*. David's painting is an oil depicting Jean-Paul Marat, one of the protagonists of the French Revolution, in the moments immediately following his death caused by Charlotte Corday, a French revolutionary woman; Sebald's photograph unequivocally alludes to the canvas. The author establishes such a pointed reference, which the common reader might not be able to grasp immediately; but still, it fits with Sebald's intent of creating a work based on literary and artistic references. The function of the device of allusion can also be more complex than this. By inserting that photograph, the author is probably aware that one can establish that reference, therefore he deliberately wants to create a link between the hydropathic establishment and death; in Bond's words, “works of art are described in detail, but many lead to the same conclusion: they are allegorical records of great suffering and pain”(37).

The second visual stylistic device I could trace in a sequence of *Vertigo's* images is epanalepsis, which is “a figure of speech defined by the repetition of the initial word (or words) of a clause or sentence at the end of that same clause or sentence” (Smyth 673). In the particular case of the visual sequence in Sebald (*appendix*: fig. 20), the elements that open and end the series are thematically linked together. They are both part of the human body; while the opening one represents a hand, the closing one is the depiction of a torso. Embedded in these two themes, one can find three other photographs that come from a totally different context: they are some of the

young Stendhal's drawings. The function of this device is that of emphasising the first and the last photograph of the sequence in order to reveal another feature of the book: *Vertigo* is a text on the dissolution of identity. There are also many other photographs dispersed throughout the book that recall parts of the human body (*appendix*: fig. 21). They are fragments of body pieces such as eyes, hands, torsos and legs; which epitomize the dissolution of identity, and in particular the narrator's, who is moving through time and space, visiting countries and floating through his memories. The presence of so many fragments reveals how difficult the quest for identity is for the narrator, who is struggling to keep all those pieces in order.

The third and last device I will identify is hyperbaton, which I underlined in the analysis of *The Emigrants*. Hyperbaton is a figure of speech which, besides its function of altering the order of a sentence, also divides words that are usually associated. The same thing happens in the chapter "All'estero" in *Vertigo*. A succession of photographs joined together is interrupted by one image, which has no connection to the others (*appendix*: fig. 22). Among photographs of bills, train receipts and previews to plays, the reader encounters an image portraying a section of a painting from the Cappella Scrovegni in Padova. It shows three angels in lamenting poses. The verbal description of the painting confirms that impression: "their lament resounded in the very silence of the chapel and their eyebrows were drawn so far together in their grief that one might have supposed them blindfolded" (Sebald, *Vertigo* 84). Following Barthes' theory of *punctum* (see footnote 18), this photograph can be also be considered the *punctum* of the series because of its total extraneousness when attempting to link it to the others. The addition of this type of photograph in the succession again makes clear the author's intention of establishing a link between art and death, as happens with the previous device of epanalepsis. These visual figures of speech seem to recall the same function. Sebald employs them in his visual apparatus with the purpose of emphasising the particular themes that already permeate the verbal narration. In particular, these sequences refer to both to human dissolution and desolation, which are two of *Vertigo*'s main topics. By using these types of visual devices, the author wants to design a narration where human suffering is a pivotal element both in the visual and verbal apparatus.

6. A comparative approach: *Vertigo*, *The Emigrants*, *The Rings of Saturn*

After the accurate analysis of *The Emigrants*, *The Rings of Saturn* and *Vertigo*, from which arose important questions regarding the rhetorical nature of Sebald's visual apparatus, I would like to expand the discussion with an additional approach based on a comparison between the three

books. Because of their enigmatic nature, Sebald's fictions have to be examined closely in order to not leave any detail unattended; nothing, indeed, is left on the page by chance; everything has a *raison d'être* in that precise point of the narration, as McCulloh observes: "It is also typical of Sebald that the reference is understated, almost hidden away. But if examined more closely, it provides keys to understanding Sebald's perspective as narrator as well as the intentionally enigmatic impressionism of his style" (McCulloh, *Understanding W. G. Sebald* 29). By analyzing Sebald's verbal apparatus, Pearson, for example, claims that there are many intertextual references in Sebald's narratives, and she also argues that "Sebald's intertextuality is neither misappropriation nor literary exhibition but a fertile engagement with earlier texts that contributes to the historical layering of his narratives" (262). The same kind of intertextuality can be traced by analyzing the succession of photographs in Sebald's narratives and this will be the main focus of this chapter.

In order to identify intertextual links and to obtain a comprehensive view of the use of images in the three books, I isolated all the photographs in *The Emigrants*, *The Rings of Saturn* and *Vertigo*. After this, I started looking at them individually, in their reciprocal relationship, in their link to the verbal narration, and in their potential connection with photographs from other Sebald's books such as *Austerlitz*, *On The Natural History of Destruction* and *Camposanto*. I did this in order to see if it was possible to find any interpretative key for Sebald's choices. What I have noticed is the intense level of intratextuality in Sebald's books: his texts are a complex network of *intra* and *extra*-textual connections. The author, in fact, has the habit of reusing ideas, themes, and historic events not only throughout the same book but also from one book to another, which he does through both the verbal and visual medium. There are, indeed, multiple levels of intertextuality in Sebald, as asserted by Zwart (she considers only *The Emigrants*, but I will prove that this discourse can be applied to *Vertigo* and *The Rings of Saturn* as well): "In *The Emigrants*, Sebald wields three distinct types of intratextuality. Interior cross-references or allusions take place within the register of language, within the register of the pictorial, or through the cross-reference of language and picture" (250). Intratextuality exists in both text and photographs separately and as a partnership, and I would also add that a kind of intratextuality occurs between Sebald's visual apparatus and art in general, as I will henceforth explain.

I will herein focus particularly on the visual intertextuality, since it will open up avenues of inquiry into some of the images that I have already examined in the previous analysis of the books. Considering the text by itself, there are many intertextual links, some more evident than others. Also, there is a certain level of intratextuality based on objects or themes that recur throughout the text, such as the car in *The Emigrants* (appendix: fig. 23), which can be seen as a sign of human presence. Another example is the mass of references to vessels and to the seaward horizon in *The*

Rings of Saturn (appendix: fig. 24), which could be seen as metaphors of travelling and discovering. Also, as I mentioned in chapter four, the geometric shape of the quincunx by Browne regularly appears traced in the structure of the windows of some photographs in *The Rings of Saturn*. It indicates the limit between inside and outside, and embodies a symbolic structure “through which to read Sebald because it provides an organization for inquiry that suggests all history is fundamentally a burial” (Diedrich 258). A strong type of intertextuality within *The Emigrants*, which has been studied quite a lot by critics, is based on Nabokov’s character that is a recurring theme throughout the chapters of the book. He is a figure in fact who features in all four stories: he appears as a photograph in the first chapter, not referential at all to the subject matter of the text, but he is somehow linked to the main character of the section, Henry Selwyn, due to the common love of nature. He shows up in a book that Mrs Lucy Landau was reading in the second story, so only used as a link in the chain, for the necessary continuity of that reference. In the third section Nabokov is depicted as ‘the butterfly man’ that the character was observing through the window of his hospital’s room; this is the most interesting and obscure moment of the four representations. In this case, Nabokov is curiously connected to a psychiatric world and to the discourse of dementia, it is an unusual choice made by Sebald who introduces a new subject such as psychiatry, which has not been mentioned before in the text. In the fourth part he is a man “[...] carrying a large white gauze butterfly net” (Sebald *The Emigrants* 174); it is the moment of the engagement of the character's mother and he acts as a sort of messenger of joy. At the beginning of the same section he appears and helps Max Ferber to overcome his block and to paint again. In that situation he plays the role of *deus ex machina*. Nabokov’s presence in *The Emigrants* tests critics and still represents a very enigmatic point in Sebald.

It is also possible to establish intratextual links by considering the visual narration in the three books. There are, in fact, several associations among the texts: one rests on the image of the tree both in *The Emigrants* and *The Rings of Saturn* (appendix: fig. 25) and its link with the author. By inserting photographs with the tree, the author is always taking part in his books; in person through his own depiction close to the tree in *The Emigrants*, and secondly, by choosing a similar tree in *The Rings of Saturn*. Lastly, by not putting any tree in *Vertigo*, the absence rather implies its presence. A reader who only reads *Vertigo*, for example, would not be able to notice the absence that I underlined. This is because an intertextuality of this type can only be comprehended if Sebald's books are read together. This does not mean that one should read the three books as one work, as a sort of epic. Certainly, though, it implies that the knowledge of all its parts allows one to make sense of this visual intertextuality. Moreover, alternative links can be found between photographs from *Vertigo* and the other two books: such as the image of the labyrinth (appendix: fig. 26), which

binds together *Vertigo* and *The Rings of Saturn*; the white detail of the fog (*appendix*: fig. 27) that connects a photograph in *Vertigo* to the image of the square in *The Emigrants*, which has already been analysed at the beginning of this dissertation. Moreover, by studying the fog as an intertextual element, Sheehan notices that it is not merely referring to a meteorological condition, but rather it has a psychological connotation:

His narrators are sensitive to weather, as we have seen, but especially so to dust clouds and heat haze, to steam, fog, and mist of every variety. This is not just meteorological but also psychological, even oneiric – the ‘fog’ of sleep and dream, or the postoperative anaesthesia that Sebald’s narrator wakes from in *The Rings of Saturn*. (738)

These links I established between photographs might appear tenuous, but they surely bring to the surface an important feature of Sebald's books: their complex but extremely well organized structure, not only made by biunivocal, and – often – multiple connections between words, images and texts.

In addition to these examples that corroborate what Zwart stated, it is possible to extend the discussion by referring to a new kind of intratextual connection, this time between photographs in Sebald and a work of art. In particular, in the analysis of *Vertigo*, I noticed a certain similarity between one image included in a sequence of illustrations in the visual apparatus of the book and the painting *Marat's Death* by Jacques Louis David. They relate to each other in term of the position and pathos of the scene. This artistic intertextual connection shows Sebald's nostalgia²⁰ for the past, in particular regarding cultural memory: “for Sebald, good works of fine art are expressions of a resistance to the modern world as well as the melancholy carrier of cultural memory” (Fuchs 183).

When comparing the books, I had to deal with the large number of photographs incorporated in Sebald's narratives. For this reason, I found it necessary to isolate the pictures from the verbal narration in order to look through them and to organize an exhaustive discourse constructed by the images²¹. I was thus able to gain an overview of Sebald's visual apparatus, which allowed me to create a comparative diagram that helps to better understand Sebald's narratives by establishing a

²⁰ Moreover, I ought to talk about *melancholy* in Sebald. It is a central matter in the author's narratives. The characters are always wandering in an endless quest for their identities. They try to keep all the fragments of memory together, but they sadly notice that the past cannot be relived. In the analysis of *The Rings of Saturn* Daub confirms that “the question of melancholia is of course central to *The Rings of Saturn*. The title not only refers to the planet associated with melancholia, but also invokes its possible objects” (310).

²¹ My objective is to use different tools in order to investigate Sebald's texts. I am perfectly aware of Zwart's lines of reasoning for example, but my intention is to take a different approach and look at the images *removed* from the text.

number of recurrent themes and their incidence in his texts (*diagrams* – 1). The chart is structured with the following entries: number of images, photographs referring to death, pictures of interiors and exteriors, pictures of people, documents, maps and uncategorised images. This last item refers to that group of photographs that does not belong to any of the others; some of them are blurred, others cannot find any justification without their verbal referent.

While the number of photographs in the three books under examination is quite similar, the amount of images referring to death or traumatic events grows, from none in *Vertigo* to seven in *The Rings of Saturn*. This may demonstrate that Sebald is not only exploring his characters' pain, but he is also using fictional narratives to englobe the entire human race in his discourse.²² For instance, by inserting verbal and visual references to the Holocaust, cemeteries and ruins, he is lacing together the grief of the characters and of humanity. When one contrasts the thematic incidence in the three books, she/he can definitely notice the thematic predominance of interiors and photographs of documents, which represent more than half of the total in all three cases (*diagrams* – 2). This happens because, even if Sebald's books are based on the characters' stories, it is only through the memory of the objects that these people used or through the places they visited, that the reader can rebuild their paths. The stories of Sebald's characters, in fact, are never direct, they are always mediated, as Gregory Guilder states in the analysis of one of the characters in *The Emigrants*: “In the absence of a conventional photograph of Selwyn in this half of the chapter, we are invited to read the above series of images as a kind of oblique biographical portrait, a collection of sites/sights whose content, tone, and arrangement bear the stamp of a not-extinguished life” (122).

The near absence of human beings is what marks Sebald's works with a kind of “stasis”, as McCulloh observes in his analysis of both *The Rings of Saturn* and *Vertigo*. It accentuates a sense of non-belonging and unfamiliarity. Most of the time, in fact, Sebald's characters feel out of place especially when outdoors, and they also experience a sense of distance regarding the objects. However, objects are the firmest proof of a person's life and, as shown in the comparative diagrams, the author prefers documents such as newspapers, objects of common use etc., instead of photographs of people because, “[...] Sebald no longer wishes to house identity in the physical body, but precisely in objects” (Scott 214). The only case that represents an exception is *The Emigrants*, where one can find several family photographs that are used as visual referents in the development of the narration, as Long claims: “photographs function as the impulse that generates the narrative”

22 It is true, indeed, that Sebald's narratives have to be read not as a critique of Germany but as a sort of collective experience, as stated by Blackler: “Readers of the English translations tend to find that they voice a profound and wide-ranging understanding of human experience rather than a specifically German expression of cultural and social anxieties and pathologies” (Blackler 10).

(Long 131). Moreover, the purpose of photographs is to restore, if visually, the familiar unity.²³

In the collection *Searching for Sebald*, no stone has been left unturned, and so, at some point, the objects incorporated into Sebald's narrations have also been considered: they have been called *realia* because of their habitual location on well-defined surfaces, which provokes a sensation of real tangibility in the reader. In fact, they are the most concrete proof that can be found in Sebald; as stated by Zwart who worked on the episodes of *The Emigrants*: “[...] the images work even more pointedly toward verification or certification, when they reproduce the pages of Ambros Adelwarth's journal” (Zwart 253). On the one hand, these types of document play the role of proofs, like in the case of the organiser (*appendix*: fig. 28) used to lend truthfulness after a story based on a dream in *The Emigrants*. On the other hand, the reader has to be aware that these objects can be potentially false and not directly connected to the verbal explanation. The author, in most cases, in fact, only wants the reader to believe that all these documents are true and this can be explained by the fact that, in the end, we are analysing fictional works.

7. Conclusion

The arguments that I have discussed in this dissertation, which begins with the more general issues related to photography and ends by focussing on three particular narratives by W.G. Sebald, both independently and comparatively, lead me to conclude with three final remarks. First, thanks to the analysis of many sequences of *The Emigrants*, *The Rings of Saturn* and *Vertigo*, the rhetorical traits of Sebald's visual apparatus can be noted. Secondly, the duality and ambiguity that characterize photography have to be considered as the factor that motivates Sebald's peculiar employment of this medium in his narratives. Thirdly, following the previous point, by using photographs in fiction, Sebald forces the reader to deal with the features of two different languages, the verbal and the visual, which are surely unique but also in a continuous osmotic and indeed complex relationship.

Everything in Sebald recalls rhetorical features (stylistic and rhetorical devices). The reading process itself is based on the figure of speech of synaesthesia, which is applied when a sense is described by using the terms usually used to describe another sense. In Sebald's reading process, a similar procedure can be observed. In Blackler's words, “The Sebaldian reader is ‘forced to

²³ By using photographs, that sense of alienation can be reduced in favor of a reality that is more familiar. However, it is only through the memento of that reality, thanks to the intervention of *imagination*, that the recovery is made possible.

see””(31). The ekphrastic verbal descriptions together with the employment of images interspersed with words make Sebald's works truly synesthetic: with Sebald, one has to be both a reader of words and a reader of images. Moreover, the position of the photographs in the text is also quite rhetorical as Ribatti claims in his essay ‘The Gaze and The Letter’. Photographs break the continuity of the verbal narration, akin to what happens with the device of tmesis in poetry, which establishes a caesura between two verses by cutting a word. Images in Sebald's narratives evoke this device because of their function within the text, they make the reader pause and reflect when she/he encounters them. While these comments on the rhetorical aspect of Sebald refer to the structure of his works, what I pointed out throughout this dissertation is that the same rhetorical feature can be traced also when considering particular sequences in Sebald's visual apparatus. I can make this kind of statement thanks to Mitchell's point of view on stylistic devices:

Metaphors are redefined as ‘short descriptions’; ‘allusions and similes are descriptions placed in an opposite point of view . . . and hyperbole is often nothing more than a description carried beyond the bounds of probability’. Even abstractions are treated as pictorial, visual objects, projected in the verbal imagery of personification. (Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* 24)

Stylistic devices contain visual features and *vice versa*. The limit between visual and verbal is not as strong as one might believe and nowadays it is getting more and more fragile thanks to the combined presence of both languages in many cultural productions in the contemporary world, as is the case in Sebald's narratives. Following Rancière's statement, which says that “there is visibility that does not amount to an image; [and] there are images which consist wholly in words” (7), I could detect verbal devices within Sebald's visual narrations. In particular, in *The Emigrants* I found symbolism, connotation and denotation, prolepsis, digression, hyperbaton and synecdoche; I identified parallelism, synecdoche, anti-climax and chiasmus in *The Rings of Saturn* and finally in *Vertigo*, allusion, epanalepsis and hyperbaton. Synecdoche and hyperbaton are the devices that Sebald employs the most in his visual apparatus. Their function epitomizes the two main reasons for Sebald's use of all kinds of devices in the visual. On the one hand, they enrich the verbal narration by emphasising themes that otherwise would not have been so relevant (see the case of the herrings in *The Rings of Saturn*); on the other hand, they sometimes fool the readers (and also the narrator), who get confused and totally lost, such as with the hyperbaton in both *The Emigrants* and *Vertigo*.

The presence of stylistic devices in the visual apparatus proves not only that the word-image link in Sebald is fundamental but also that the writer's choice of inserting photographs within his

fictional works is not coincidental at all. Words can communicate by themselves, therefore Sebald could only have used them alone or he could have chosen any other visual media, such as drawings or paintings, but he decided to use photographs. The reason for Sebald's introduction of photographs lays in the duality of photography. Sebald chose photography because of its ambiguity. This media is not unique²⁴ and that is a characteristic that works well in the fictitious narrations of the author. However, the decisive feature of photography that made Sebald's choice so relevant is – in my opinion – its alterity. Images, and photography in particular, have a double nature. While on the one hand, a photograph refers to reality, due to the indexicality of this medium, on the other hand, it can also refer to something else, as Barthes proved with the concepts of both *connotation* and *punctum*. Therefore, a photograph is not merely analogical, but rather it contains a plurality of impervious meanings as Ranci re also affirms: “‘image’ therefore refers to two different things. There is the simple relationship that produces the likeness of an original: not necessarily its faithful copy, but simply what suffices to stand in for it. And there is the interplay of operations that produces what we call art” (6). The same dichotomy can be identified in Sebald's works, which are poised between history and fiction, reality and imagination;²⁵ and also, as Horstkotte and Pedri describe, this is a common feature in the work of postmodernist writers:

“Novelists writing in the nineteenth century described and sometimes even reproduced photographs in order to add verisimilitude to their writing, but postmodernist writers have come to use photographs as the reverse of representation: as a revelation of the invisible, unseeable, and, indeed, unknowable” (20-21).

“Sebald has not found his form” (YouTube. The Graduate Center, CUNY). Every book has its own and it is exactly this uncertainty of genre, which is simultaneously fiction and history, which makes photographs fit perfectly in Sebald's works. By adding a visual component to his works, Sebald generates prolific encounters between readers and photographs, which raise questions for the readers regarding both the verbal narration and each image that causes this reflection. The verbal apparatus can make one meditate, but with photographs, the process is a far more immediate. However, photographs are not self-explaining, they are normally introduced by captions because “[...] it is not the image which comes to elucidate or ‘realize’ the text, but the latter which comes to sublimate, patheticize or rationalize the image” (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* 25). In Sebald's works,

24 In the third part of the television series “Ways of Seeing”, John Berger lays out the difference between images and Works of Art: the former have multiple meanings, the latter unique ones. He claims that photography is not unique because of the possibility of reproduction. A photograph can be replicated many times.

25 I identified the same duality in the analysis of landscapes in *The Rings of Saturn* (page 18) when I stressed the attention on the double nature of the outdoors (characterized by both reality and imagination). This statement reinforces the idea that photographic duality has found its ‘other’ in Sebald's narratives, which are permeated by the same kind of dichotomy.

there are none. The verbal text plays the role of caption because it is the only element that provides a context for the images. Due to the complex nature of the verbal language, instead of helping, it makes the reception of both the verbal and the visual more complicated (Patt). Nonetheless, as Kochhar-Lindgren states, “a series of interruptions in the flow of the text, raises the question of the relationship between image and text” (Kochhar-Lindgren 371). Photographs are more powerful than one can expect: they are a medium that shapes “our sensibilities without our quite knowing it” (Krauss 30). They both confound the reception of the reader and make him/her problematize their association with the text.

The two languages are indeed different one from one another; it would be untoward to say the opposite, as E. H. Gombrich does, by affirming that there is no difference at all between them. There are many, as Mitchell states: “Language works with arbitrary, conventional signs, images with natural, universal signs. Language unfolds in temporal succession; images reside in a realm of timeless spatiality and simultaneity” (Mitchell, *The Language of Images* 3), but it is when analysed in their dialectical relationship that they reveal both their osmotic and problematic necessity. In Sebald, the difference between the visual and the verbal is never fixed, since all his works are permeated by a strong visibility, due not only to the insertion of photographs within the text, but also to a kind of visibility that is spread throughout the whole verbal narration:

Sebald works in language in a manner analogous to the ways in which painters and photographers work in their respective media. In *The Emigrants*, for example, there is a description of Max Ferber, who like Sebald is a German who has immigrated to England. As a visual artist, he works through excavations of paint on the canvas, deep abrasions, the thickness of impasto, and through superimpositions of images, times, figures. Sebald's writing is much the same: layers within layers, scraping words to the bareness of the bones of the loss effected by time, remolding a flat surface so that it will cast distinct patterns of light and shadow. (Kochhar-Lindgren 371).

It would be impossible to comprehend Sebald's narratives if only referring to the words, so I have herein proposed a new feature in the analysis of Sebald's narratives. Besides the relationship word-image, which undoubtedly represents the author's signature style, I have also pointed out the ‘rhetorical visibility’ that characterizes Sebald's narratives. I have discussed this original feature in depth in this dissertation and, in doing so, I have provided a new critical way of approaching W. G. Sebald's narratives.

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Appendix

fig. 1



fig. 2

PROFANE LES VILLAGE 1900 2 3 JUIL 1936

Trois fois coup sur coup dans les Alpes
 CH/FD/11/015 suspects

Des linceuls s'

Hier, on a identifié le cadavre d'un guide disparu en 1914
 Mais le phénomène des glaces qui rendent leurs victimes e

Septante-deux ans après sa mort, le corps du guide bernais Johannes Nussli a été libéré de son linceul de glace.

PAR **Véronique TISSIÈRES**

Hier, on apprenait au effet que le dé-soufflé découvert jeudi dernier par le glacier Linceul de la Cas. Au fait que ce est nommé ce William (père de Mel-lingem) dont on avait perdu la trace depuis ses jours d'été 1914, où il res-tait à la cabane du CAS. Agé à l'épo-que de 60 ans, il est probable qu'il tenta de traverser la plaine par le gla-cier (il n'y parvint jamais et l'homme se-retrouva enseveli sous la glace).

Coincidence ? Quelques jours avant la découverte de la dépouille du guide bernais, le corps d'un fantassin de l'é-poque quatre-vingt-trois, victime de la Première Guerre mondiale, enseveli au Glacis Linceul (Dolomites). Le but était, enfin, de l'homme disparu res-tait le cadavre d'une de ses victimes.

Trois cas recensés dans le massif alpin au cours des quinze années écoulées de juillet ! C'est beaucoup, d'au-tant plus que c'est exceptionnel, car les conditions de corps par les glaci-ers sont si difficiles à ce que pourraient le ser supposer les exemples ci-dessus. On a pu constater que c'est un service secret en haute montagne de la pol-valaisanne. Il ne faut en effet pas p-dire de voir que ces restrictions se-strictement liées au mouvement et masses de glace. Certaines années, glaciers du massif furent donc vic-times presque coup sur coup, puis pi-riod pendant longtemps.

Ce fut le cas l'an dernier. Le cor-d'une jeune femme, disparue quel-ques années auparavant, fut retrouvé à la en face du glacier de Emey (val Daigne). Plus après, le Thibodeau

L'histo

Film, légendes, la rest
 l'imagination. Mais il

■ C'était en 1937. Fin août, le e son terminée, le gardien de cabane Bertol (au-dessus d'Ar-cen) mit la petite bidasse sur le y les. Il n'y arriva jamais. Des rou-tines furent entreprises, au 1940. On était-il devenu ? Les long-attèrent bon train dans la région. Les, on parla d'une catastrophe. D'autres plus qu'il n'était é-dierent seul, mais avec le cas com-mencant les recherches de la. Pas une grande somme, de y l'histoire recommencer, mais le-ville vie ailleurs.

Sept ans plus tard, on se repéta, émerger de la masse glaci-ère, une main tenant fermement

LE GLACIER DE LA CAS
 Qui vient de rendre un guide décédé en 1914.

fig. 3



fig. 4



fig. 5

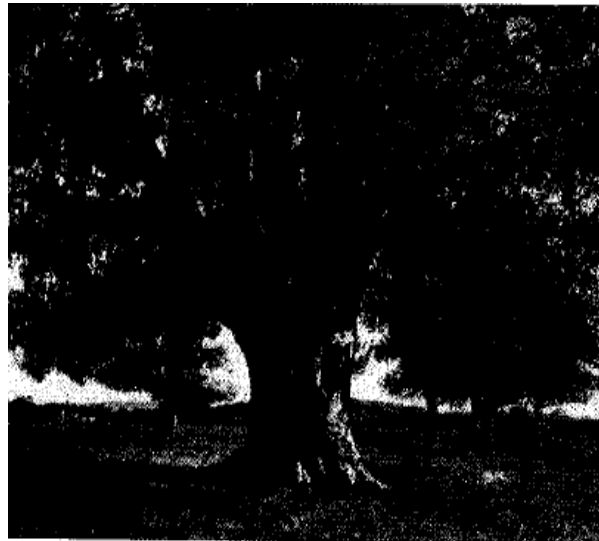


fig. 6

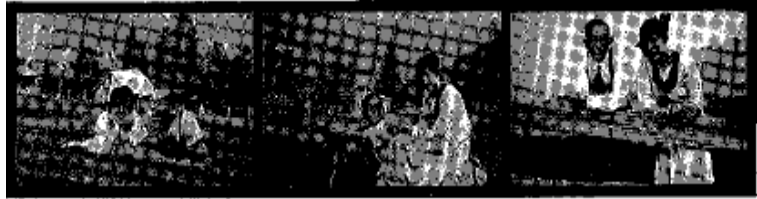


fig. 7

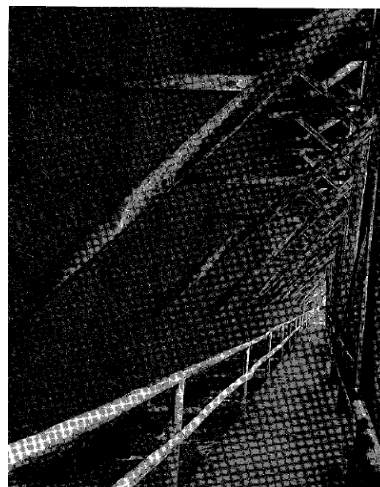
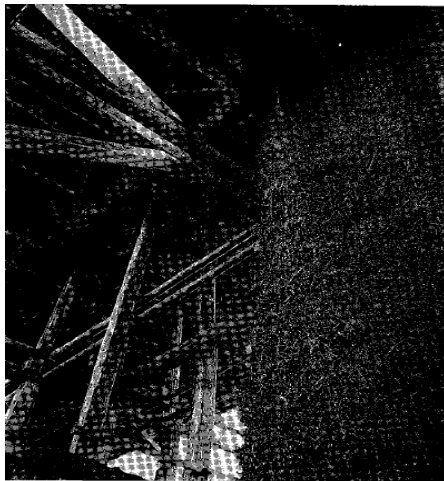


fig. 8

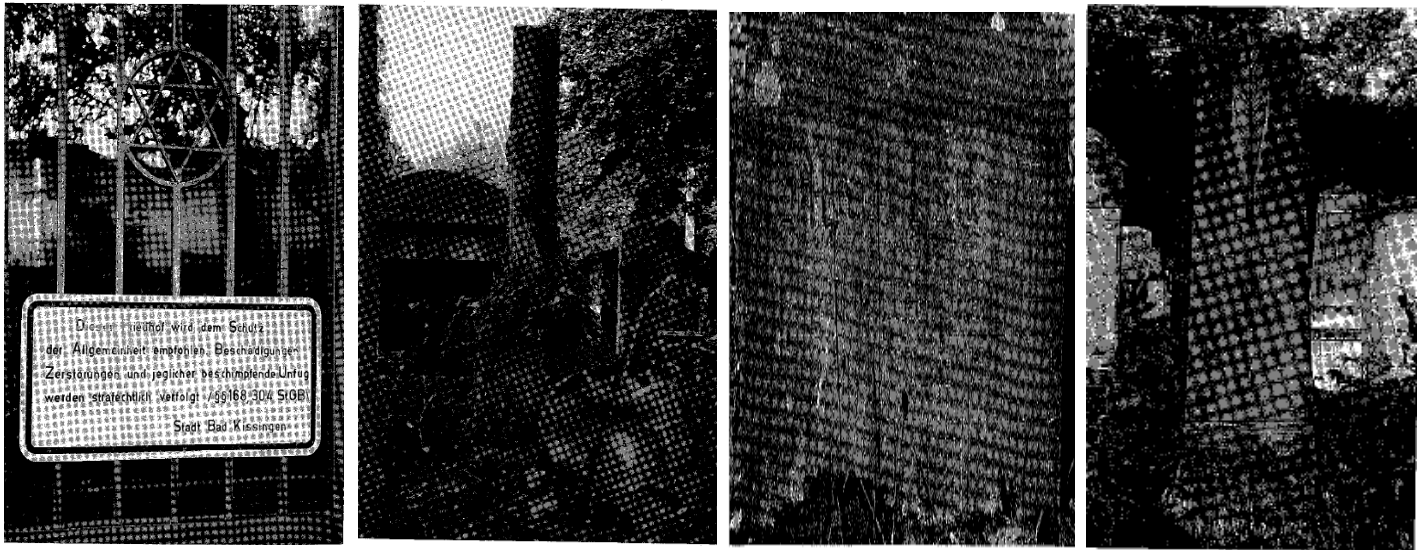


fig. 9

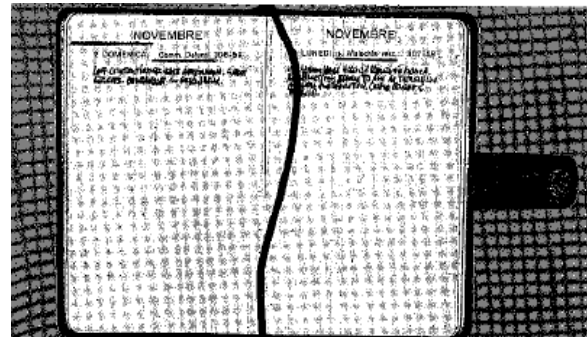
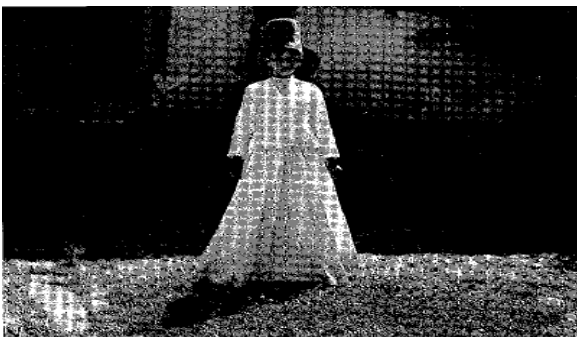
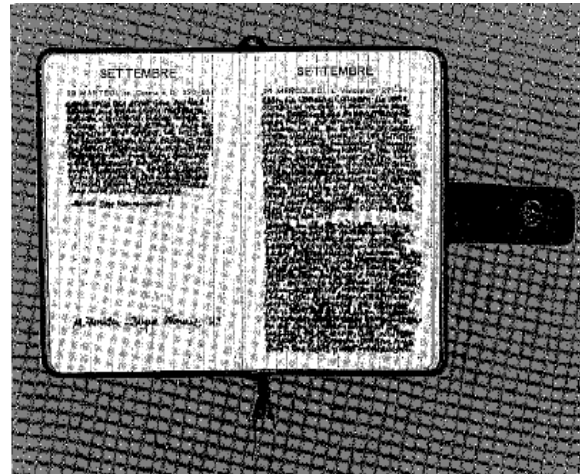
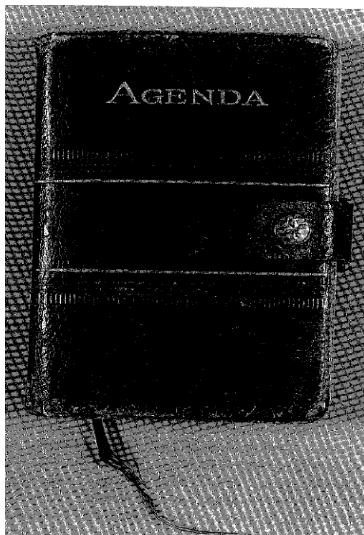


fig. 10



fig. 11

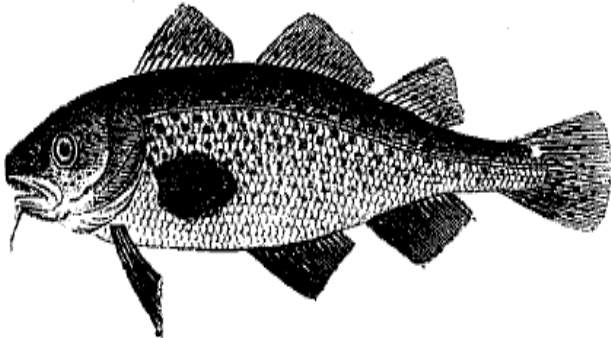


fig. 12

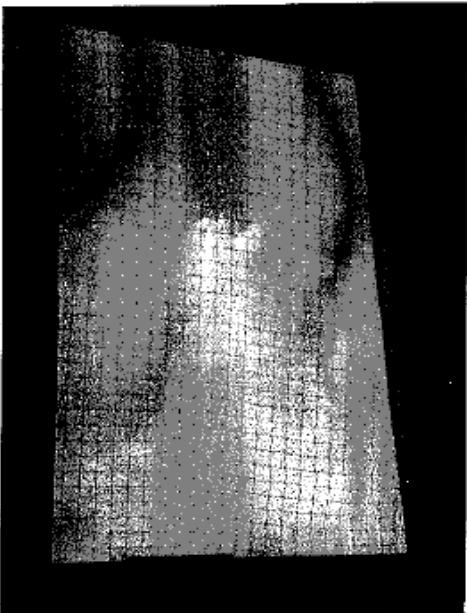
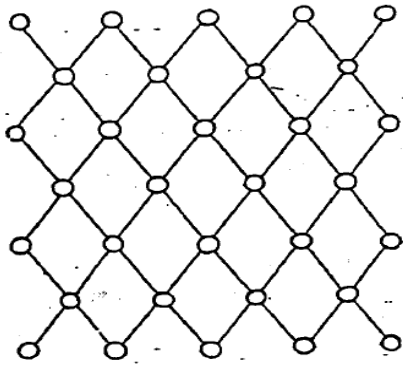


fig. 13



*Quid Quincunce Speciosius, qui, ut
quam cuius partem Spectaueris,
rectus est: Quintilian: 1*

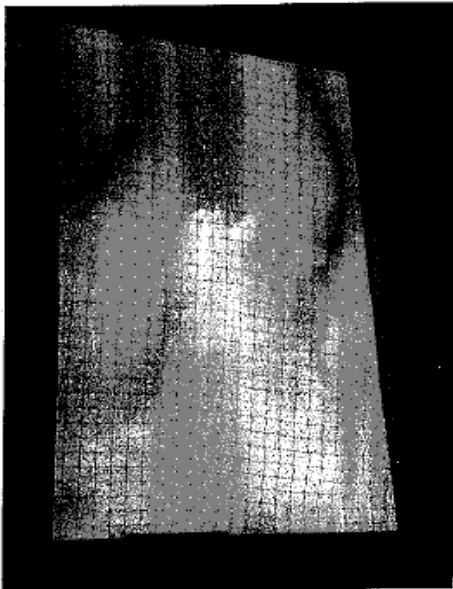
fig. 14



fig. 15



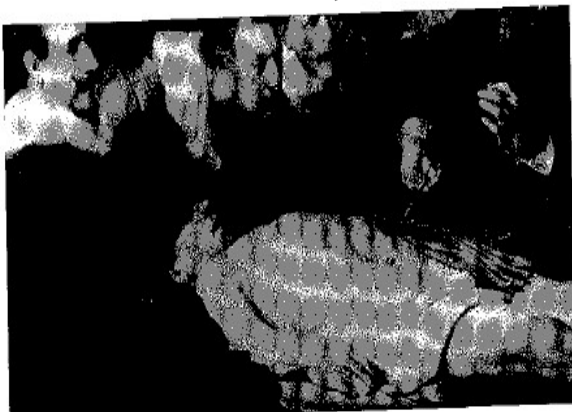
fig. 16



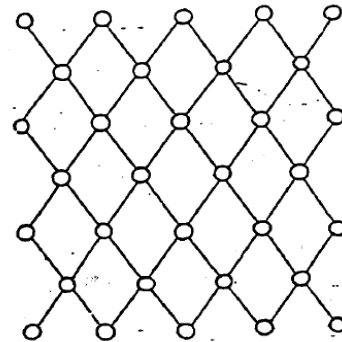
A



B



B¹



*Quid Quincunce speciosius, qui, in
quam cuncta partem spectaueris,
rectus est: Quintilian: 1*

A¹

A clarification is necessary regarding the figure of the chiasm represented above. There is, in fact, another photograph that 'interrupts' the chiasm, which I chose not to address within the text of the dissertation. The image on page 11 of *The Rings of Saturn* depicts a skull. Because of the nature of the chiasm, based only on four elements linked together, I decided to consider the four photographs in fig. 25 and I intentionally avoid any reference to the skull's image. Still, the existence of the chiasm is proved: the skull belongs to the thematic area of death, which Rembrandt's painting and its zoom (B and B¹) are referring to. Therefore, the thematic link between the quincunx (A and A¹) on the one hand, and death (B and B¹) on the other hand, still works, with or without the photograph of the skull.

fig. 17



fig. 18

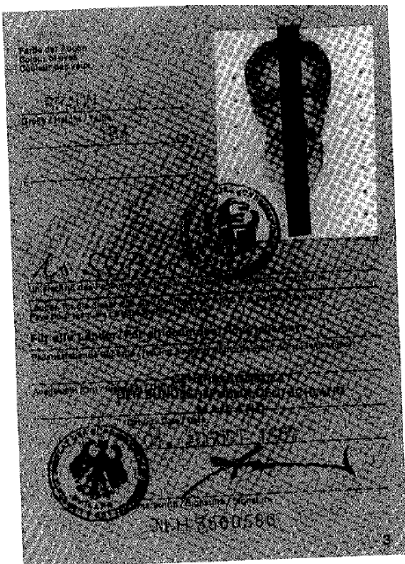


fig. 19

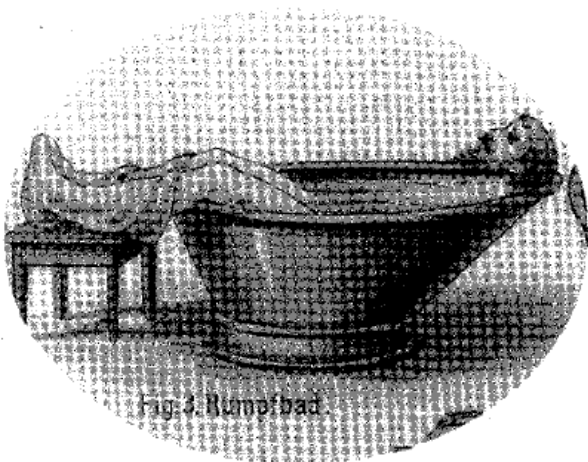
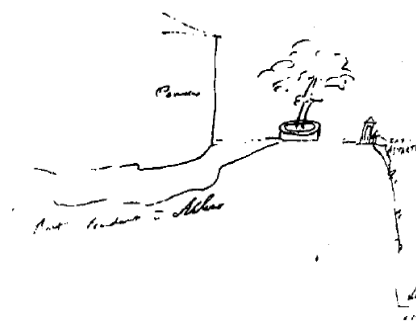
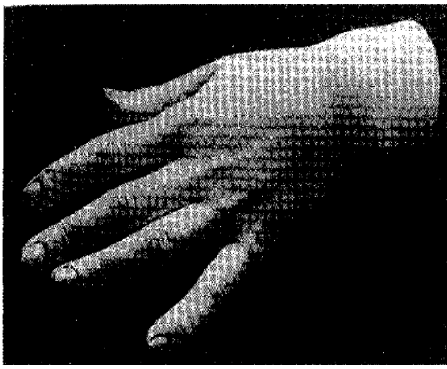


fig. 20



V. A. M. M. A. A. M. C. G. A. ¹ ² ³ ⁴ ⁵ ⁶ ⁷ ⁸ ⁹ ¹⁰ ¹¹ ¹² ¹³ ¹⁴ ¹⁵ ¹⁶ ¹⁷ ¹⁸ ¹⁹ ²⁰ ²¹ ²² ²³ ²⁴ ²⁵ ²⁶ ²⁷ ²⁸ ²⁹ ³⁰ ³¹ ³² ³³ ³⁴ ³⁵ ³⁶ ³⁷ ³⁸ ³⁹ ⁴⁰ ⁴¹ ⁴² ⁴³ ⁴⁴ ⁴⁵ ⁴⁶ ⁴⁷ ⁴⁸ ⁴⁹ ⁵⁰ ⁵¹ ⁵² ⁵³ ⁵⁴ ⁵⁵ ⁵⁶ ⁵⁷ ⁵⁸ ⁵⁹ ⁶⁰ ⁶¹ ⁶² ⁶³ ⁶⁴ ⁶⁵ ⁶⁶ ⁶⁷ ⁶⁸ ⁶⁹ ⁷⁰ ⁷¹ ⁷² ⁷³ ⁷⁴ ⁷⁵ ⁷⁶ ⁷⁷ ⁷⁸ ⁷⁹ ⁸⁰ ⁸¹ ⁸² ⁸³ ⁸⁴ ⁸⁵ ⁸⁶ ⁸⁷ ⁸⁸ ⁸⁹ ⁹⁰ ⁹¹ ⁹² ⁹³ ⁹⁴ ⁹⁵ ⁹⁶ ⁹⁷ ⁹⁸ ⁹⁹ ¹⁰⁰

16 7 1836
no no ~~1836~~
1836
 $25\sqrt{4} + \sqrt{9}$

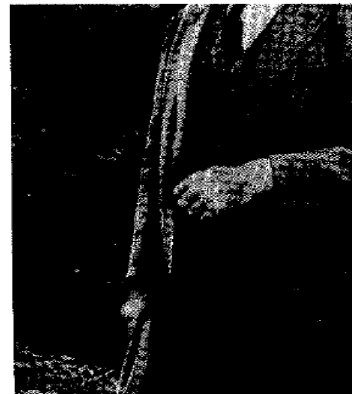


fig. 21

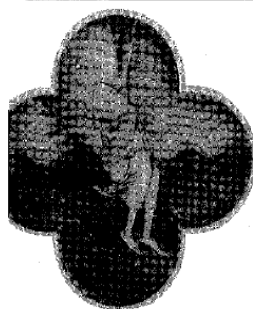
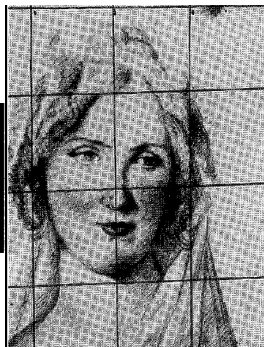
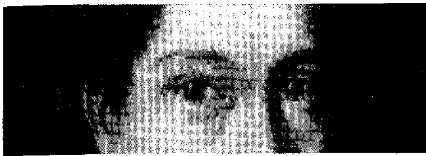


fig. 23

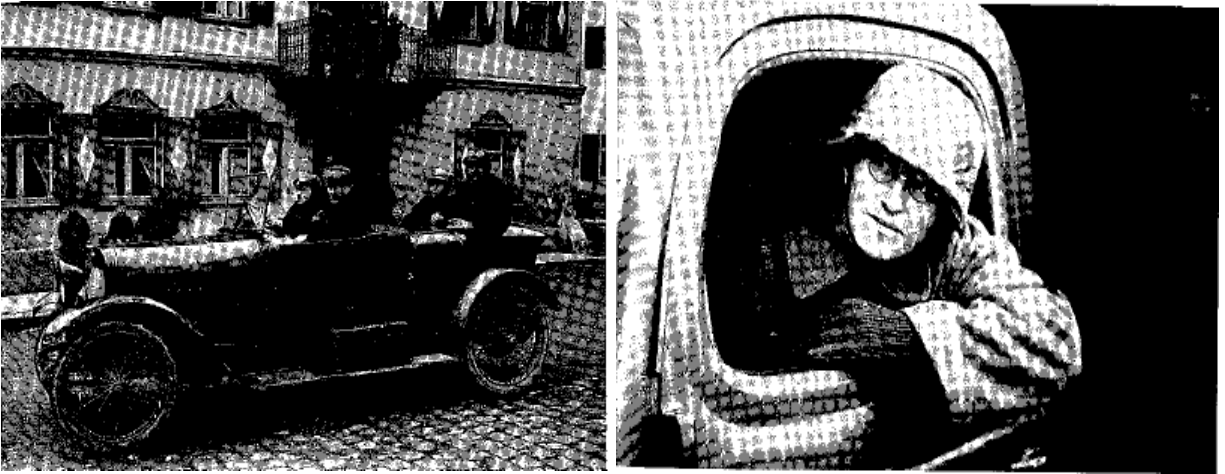


fig. 24

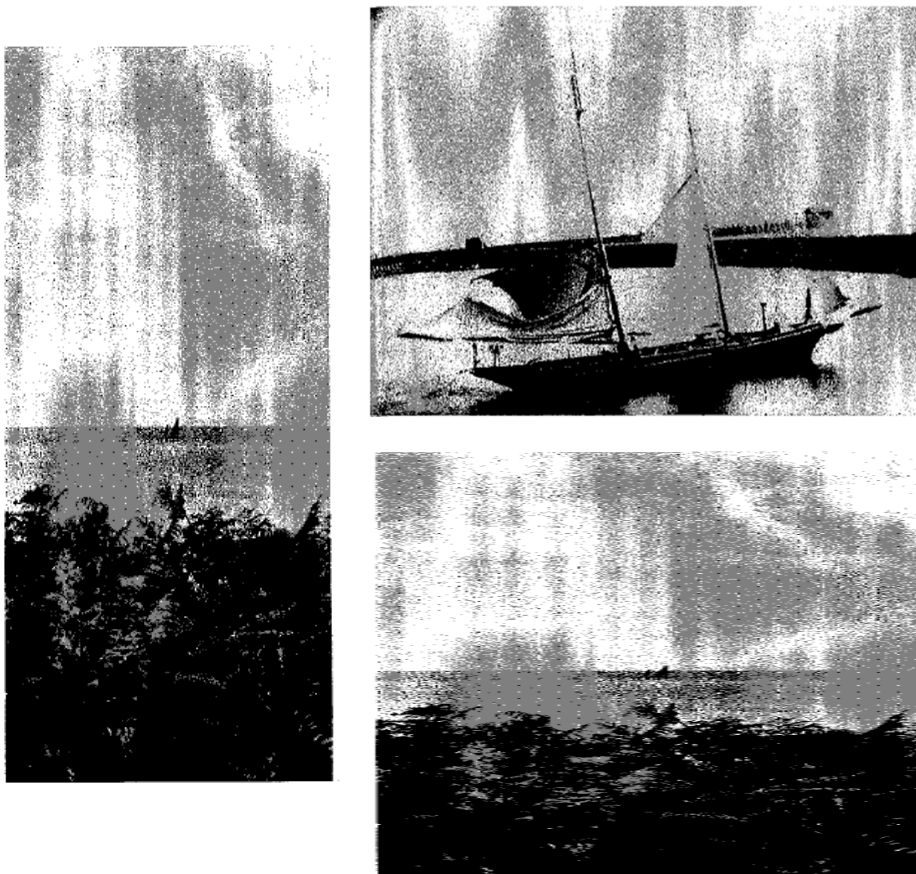


fig. 25

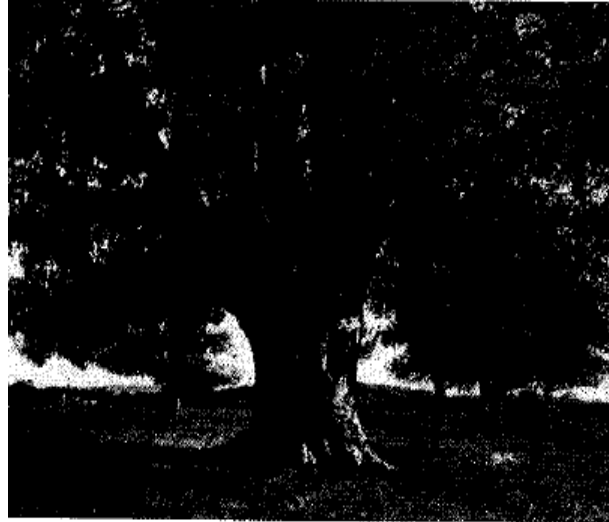


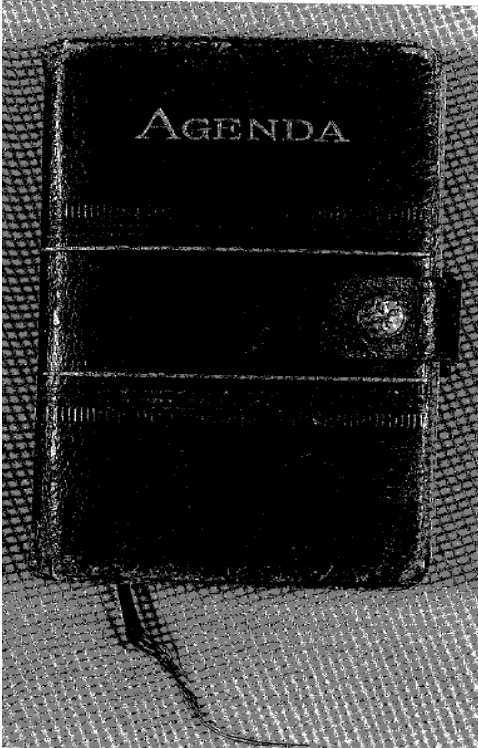
fig. 26



fig. 27

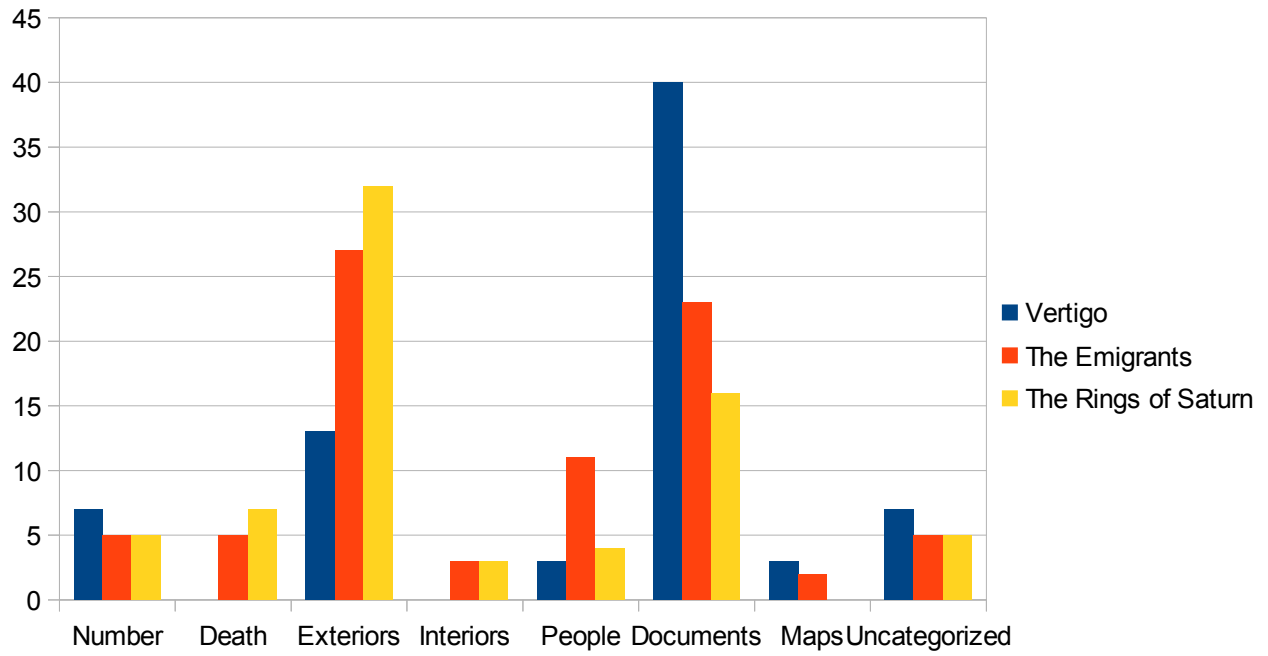


fig. 28



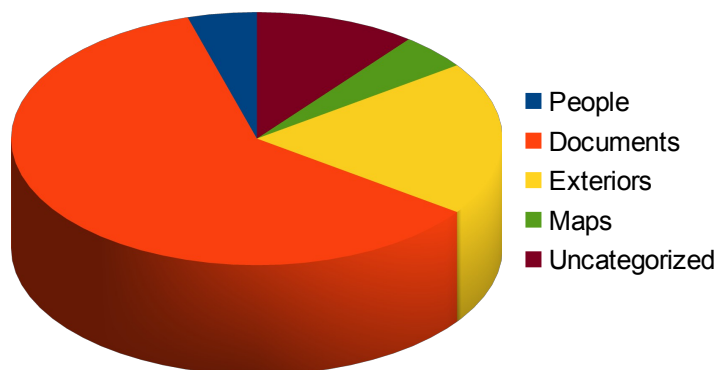
Diagrams

1)

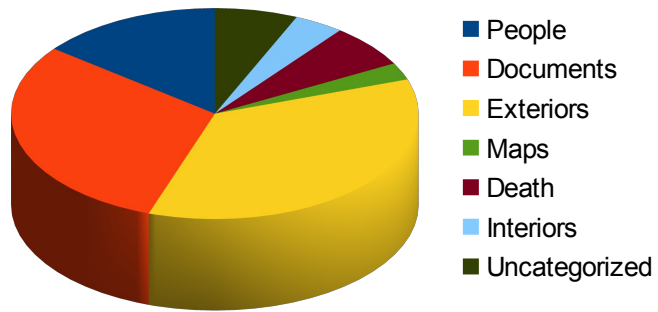


2)

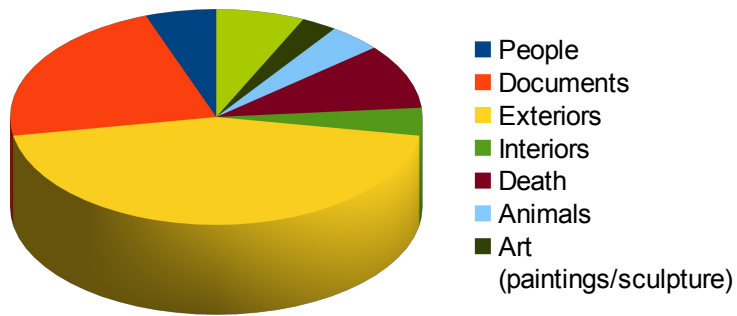
Vertigo



The Emigrants



The Rings of Saturn



3)
Incidence of people in the exteriors

