國立臺灣大學文學院外國語文學系

碩士論文

Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures
College of Liberal Arts
National Taiwan University

Master's Thesis

萬物交匯：塞巴爾特《眩暈》中的非感官相似性與意合

Juncture of All Things: Nonsensuous Similarities and Parataxis in W. G. Sebald's *Vertigo*

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中華民國 113 年 6 月

June 2024

doi:10.6342/NTU202401671

國立臺灣大學碩士學位論文
口試委員會審定書

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本論文係劉承翰君（R09122004）在國立臺灣大學外國語文學系完成之碩士學位論文，於民國 113 年 6 月 12 日承下列考試委員審查通過及口試及格，特此證明

口試委員：

（指導教授）

Acknowledgments

The whole thesis writing process was not easy at all. Sebald is a playful writer, and *Vertigo* is truly vertiginous. Like the narrator in *Vertigo*, I got lost countless times when structuring my thesis. Luckily, I have an incredibly intelligent advisor, Professor Chun-yen Chen, who can always guide me in the right direction. Her classes, "Special Topics in the 21st Century Novels" and "Digitality, Imagination, and Experience," inspired me to start this project. Her extensive knowledge of contemporary literature and theories provided a solid foundation for my research. Beyond her academic expertise, Professor Chen was instrumental in helping me refine my ideas and structure my arguments coherently. Her patience and willingness to engage with my work on a deeper level encouraged me to think more critically and creatively. She spent countless hours reviewing my drafts, offering constructive criticism, and pushing me to delve deeper into the text. Without her guidance, I would not have been able to finish this thesis, and I want to express my greatest gratitude to her.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Professor Duncan Chesney and Professor Pingta Ku. Professor Duncan Chesney's classes provided a strong foundation for my research, and his feedback was invaluable in refining my arguments. I am also deeply grateful to Professor Pingta Ku for accepting my invitation to be on the committee and for his time spent reading and providing thoughtful comments on my work.

Last but not least, my friends and family. Without their emotional support, I would not have been able to hold myself together through this challenging process. Their encouragement and understanding have been essential to my success.

doi:10.6342/NTU202401671

Abstract

This thesis broaches W. G. Sebald's unique narrative style and the ethico-political implications of this style. His novels can be confusing because of their dubious insertion of images and their winding narration. On the surface, his prose fiction appears to be digression after digression without a central subject; on the other hand, scholars tend to single out the Jewish experience as the guiding motif in his works. This study seeks to examine the narrative strategies employed by Sebald in his first prose fictional work, *Vertigo*, through the lens of Walter Benjamin's conception of nonsensuous similarity and Jacques Rancière's proposition of parataxis and sentence-image. This study will focus on Sebald's use of parataxis and see how such a particular mode of juxtaposition prompts the reader to discern nonsensuous similitudes or hidden connections. These connections constitute not only the thematic concern of the novel but also its structural composition, allowing seemingly disparate episodes to converge and form a cohesive sentence-image, that is, articulation of the "message" of the work materialized in its mode of expression. Through specific narrative techniques, Sebald navigates the intersections between human and nonhuman elements, personal and impersonal experiences, past and present, and ultimately unveils the cyclical patterns of the history of destruction. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of Sebald's narrative strategies, which, I hope to show, help to reinforce the thematic richness of *Vertigo* as poignant meditations on memory, trauma, and the relentless passage of time.

Keyword: W. G. Sebald, *Vertigo*, Walter Benjamin, nonsensuous similarity, Jacques Rancière, parataxis, sentence-image, history of destruction

doi:10.6342/NTU202401671

摘要

本文探討了塞巴爾特獨特的敘事風格及其倫理政治意涵。由於其模糊的圖像插入和曲折的敘述方式，他的小說常常令人感到困惑。表面上看，他的散文小說似乎是一段段沒有中心主題的離題敘述，而學者們也往往將猶太人的經歷視為其作品的指導性主題。本研究旨在通過華特・班雅明的非感官相似性概念和賈克・洪席耶的並列法及句子圖像理論，來審視塞巴爾特在其首部散文小說《眩暈》中採用的敘事策略，以揭露除了猶太人經歷外，塞巴爾特還欲透過《眩暈》傳遞出什麼樣的訊息。本研究將重點分析塞巴爾特對意合的運用，探討這種特殊的並置方式如何促使讀者識別出非感官相似性或隱藏的聯繫。這些聯繫不僅構成了小說的主題關注點，也影響了其結構的組成，使看似不相關的情節匯聚，並形成一個連貫的影像構句，而作品中所隱含的「訊息」也是透過這樣的表達方式才能被實現、看見。通過其特定的敘事技巧，塞巴爾特探索了人與非人元素、個人與非個人經歷、過去與現在之間的交叉點，最終揭示了歷史破壞的循環模式。本研究有助於更深入地理解塞巴爾特的敘事策略，並展示這些策略如何強化《眩暈》的主題豐富性，使其成為對記憶、創傷和無情時光流逝的深刻省思。

關鍵字：塞巴爾特、《眩暈》、班雅明、非感官相似性、洪席耶、並列法、意合、影像構句、歷史破壞

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Introduction

The German writer W. G. Sebald published four prose fictional works throughout his career: *Vertigo* (1990; English translation 1999), *The Emigrants* (1992; English translation 1996), *The Rings of Saturn* (1995; English translation 1998), and *Austerlitz* (2001; English translation 2001). Some of the striking features of his fiction include his insertion of photographs and other forms of images, as well as seemingly irrelevant stories without an explicit connection. His narrative is often regarded as fragmented in form and vague in meaning. This narrative style, combined with the placement of photographs, often leads to confusion when the reader tries to understand Sebald's works. Critics have pointed out the puzzling nature of Sebald's writing as it is apparently a blend of different genres without any clear subject matter. Jeanette Baxtor, for example, finds that Sebald's novels are an oscillation "between oppositional poles: illumination *and* darkening; conscious *and* unconscious; sublimation *and* desublimation" (78).[1] Sebald's biographer Carole Angier writes in the preface of *Speak, Silence: In Search of W. G. Sebald* that Sebald's narrative style and subject matter shift from time to time: his fiction sometimes reads

[1] The genre of Sebald's writings is a topic of much debate among scholars. His works blend several genres, making them difficult to categorize. Though "the novel" is a term that Sebald has explicitly disavowed, the occasionally deliberately forged image-text relationships and false information in his writings challenge the factual status of his "prose" works (Sheppard 443). For example, Sebald's biographer Carole Angier points out that Sebald intentionally makes adjustments and tweaks in *Il ritorno in patria* "for literary effect" (Angier 60). Additionally, in an interview with Andrew Koenig, Angier states that although Sebald's works are unlike traditional novels, they can still be considered "novels":

> You know the standard novelist's procedure—they take bits from various people. There often are models for fictional characters—multiple models or single models. So basically, he was just a novelist. Of course, he wasn't a novelist because he didn't write novels, and he was very clear about that, and he was right. His books don't have standard plots, they don't have dialogue, they're very unlike standard novels, which is one reason why people find them initially quite puzzling, and always astounding. But he worked like a novelist in that way. And that's what's so extraordinary: his readers have to go through this sort of paradoxical experience. (Koenig)

Russell J. A. Kilbourn also responds to the question of the genre in Sebald's works. He notes that "Sebald's prose texts represent *both* the novel in its later twentieth-century completion *and* what might be called the twenty-first-century 'post-novel' as a form in a perpetual state of becoming" ("Question of Genre" 249). All these observations show that although Sebald has personally voiced his resistance to the novelistic genre, he *is* writing within the tradition with a view to revamping it. Therefore, this study will refer to *Vertigo* as a novel.

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like a biography of well-known figures and at other times reads like an autobiography of Sebald himself (ix). Eric L. Santner points out the difficulty of categorizing Sebald's works as his "novels" have been identified as "travel writing, memoir, photo essay, documentary fiction, magical realism, postmodern pastiche, and cultural historical fantasy, among others" (xiii-xiv). J. J. Long states that Sebald's works are "[l]ocated at the intersection of biography and autobiography, history and fiction, travel writing and memoir" ("History" 117). David T. Hansen notes that Sebald places the photographs, sketches, maps, and digressive narratives in ambiguous places that sometimes "appear to be unrelated," and that his writing is a fusion of numerous genres including "those of the novelist, archivist, literary critic, diarist, philosopher, journalist, and historian" (127).

On the face of it, Sebald's novels appear to be inconsistent and meander around a range of unrelated themes. Thus, several questions arise: what exactly is Sebald's novelistic agenda? How does he understand the "purpose" or "mission" of the novel today? Why does he insert dubious photographs and narratives into the novels, and how does he manage to assemble all the distinct themes into his novels? In this thesis, using *Vertigo* as an example, I will try to respond to these questions, to understand what novelistic writing might mean to Sebald, and to make sense of the peculiar method Sebald adopts to coalesce all the loosely assembled themes into a cohesive message in his fictional works.

To gain a better understanding of how Sebald interweaves photographic images and disruptive narratives together, this thesis will analyze Sebald's use of images in light of Walter Benjamin's and Jacques Rancière's theories. The two theorists have different approaches to the text-image relationship. For Benjamin, both language and images possess the mimetic faculty, enabling them to discern "nonsensuous similarities" among various elements (Benjamin, "On the

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Mimetic Faculty" 721). These similarities serve as portals, granting humans access to the virtual realm beyond immediate sensory perception. As these nonsensuous similarities elude immediate human perception, mediation becomes necessary. Images are, in particular, the medium that Benjamin prefers as he considers them to be the actualization of the dream images that represent the virtual. Through technological apparatuses that expand space and extend movement, human beings discover the "optical unconscious" as well as the nonsensuous similarity (Benjamin, "Work of Art" 126). Photography, cinema, various technological apparatus, and language serve as mediums revealing aspects of the virtual realm that lie beyond human perception. Taken in this light, Sebald's fictional works, by incorporating images, both photographic and literary, is the medium that unveils elements within the virtual realm. Reading Sebald's text-image relationship in light of Benjamin's conception of images blurs the boundary between word and image and the boundary between seemingly different subject matters. With Benjamin's critical framework in mind, the analysis of Sebald's novels reveals the connections between disparate subjects and the nonsensuous similarities that bind them together. At the same time, it allows the reader to enter the virtual realm, where interconnectedness among various elements becomes evident.

As for Jacques Rancière, his particular rendition of the text-image relation may be found in his theory of aesthetics, where he introduces how different subject matters can be associated. In his definition, word is not limited within the realm of language, and image is not limited within the field of visibility alone. In his definition, word is the part that creates the continuity of meaning in the artwork while image is the part that disrupts meaning. Although the two seem to be contradictory, Rancière argues that through the technique of "parataxis" that juxtaposes words and images, "sentence-images" are formed (43). These sentence-images bridge seemingly

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disparate subjects. In the meantime, “silent speech” is addressed, expressing implicit messages to the reader or spectator (13). Rancière illustrates this concept using Gustave Flaubert’s novel *Madame Bovary*, where the sentence-image redirects the reader’s attention to seemingly insignificant details, offering possibilities for multiple interpretations from a single narrative. For example, the descriptive excess in *Madame Bovary* deflects the reader’s attention to impersonal elements such as dust and gives these things a chance for utterance. When analyzing Sebald’s novels through Rancière’s framework of the text-image relationship, the reader must scrutinize seemingly inconsequential details. Sebald allows these often-overlooked elements to become visible, aligning with Rancière’s egalitarian politics of aesthetics, which implies a degree of similarity or commonality among all things.

With Walter Benjamin’s and Jacques Rancière’s perspectives on the text-image relationship in mind, this thesis aims to liberate Sebald’s novels from specific contexts or referencing frameworks. It seeks to reexamine the images as a medium that communicates with the texts independently, moving beyond contextual constraints. Both Benjamin and Rancière acknowledge the potential for text to produce images. Therefore, this study will analyze the coherence in Sebald’s winding narrative, where seemingly unrelated events and narratives are juxtaposed. In essence, the thesis will delve into how Sebald juxtaposes narratives that appear unrelated while maintaining a cohesive meaning. It will explore the nonsensuous similarity he seeks to uncover, the silent speech expressed through sentence-image in his novels. This study will particularly focus on Sebald’s historical and anthropological insight, arguing that his novels aim to explore the junctures of seemingly disparate events or subjects. Taking Sebald’s first published novel, *Vertigo*, as an example, the thesis contends that Sebald does not seek to represent individual events; rather, he unveils a comprehensive historical panorama by revealing

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connections between various historical events and narratives. This approach provides the reader with a holistic perspective, emphasizing the repetitive and inescapable nature of history.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter discusses the signature traits of Sebald's writing, followed by a literature review that sets the foundation for an in-depth analysis of W. G. Sebald's historical perspective within the context of his text-image relationship. The chapter aims to examine varying scholarly discussions on how the text and images in Sebald's novel cohere. The diverse perspectives presented in this chapter pave the way for understanding the possible historical implications behind Sebald's unique narrative style.

The second chapter will present a comprehensive exploration of the theories of Walter Benjamin and Jacques Rancière, which will serve as the analytical frameworks for this study. The chapter will start with an introduction of Benjamin's conception of the image, elucidating how he views images as having the capacity to reveal nonsensuous similarities and provide spectators with insights into the virtual realm. The discussion will also encompass how language, according to Benjamin, serves as a resource for images, achieving a similar effect. Subsequently, the chapter will analyze Benjamin's work, *One-Way Street*, with his theory, illustrating how his concepts of image, mimetic faculty, and nonsensuous similarity manifest in literary writing. Following this, the chapter will delve into Rancière's theory of parataxis, a framework that redefines the roles of word and image and explains how their juxtaposition can create meaning in both aesthetically and politically emancipatory ways.

The third chapter will then analyze *Vertigo* with Walter Benjamin's theory of nonsensuous similarity. Firstly, the chapter will explore the instances of nonsensuous similarities

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in the novel and explain how these similarities suggest the intersection between history and the present. This section will be comprised of two parts. The first part will examine the uncanny experiences in Sebald's narrator's trip, and the second part will examine the significance of two of Sebald's literary precursors, Stendhal and Franz Kafka, in *Vertigo*. This exploration will explain how their presence in the novel can be read as instances of nonsensuous similarities, elucidating their symbolic significance in *Vertigo*.

The last chapter of this thesis will investigate the sentence-images Sebald creates through the technique of parataxis, where he juxtaposes seemingly unrelated literary images, explaining how these sentence-images assist the reader in uncovering the nonsensuous similarities while trying to resolve the obscure linkage between different images. Through the lenses of Benjamin's and Rancière's theories, the thesis contends that beyond merely representing a particular historical event, his novels are in effect attempts to demonstrate to the reader the juncture between past and present, human and nonhuman elements, personal and impersonal experiences, as well as the inevitable recurring pattern of calamitous events.

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Chapter One: Unraveling Sebald's Narrative Complexity

Various themes and topics are observed in Sebald's works. For instance, "exile and displacement, memory and forgetting, war and violence, solitude and connection, and history, both human and natural, considered as a process of destruction and fragmentation" (Wylie 174). Among all the themes in his novels, history is one of the most discussed. As David T. Hansen puts it, Sebald explores the "profound inquiry into the possibility of a formative human relation with difficult legacies from the past" (125). However, critics nowadays hold different opinions on Sebald's historical view and the subjects he seeks to represent. The differing interpretations of various critics arise from their distinct approaches to Sebald's text-image relationship and intricate narratives. As history is a highly debated subject in Sebald's novels, this thesis aims to unravel Sebald's historical perspective as expressed through his unique narrative style.

A group of critics, based on Sebald's use of photographs, argues that Sebald's photographs reflect the memories of history, classifying his novels as "postmemory literature." According to Marianne Hirsch, who coined the term, postmemory "describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they 'remember' only using the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (106). Without direct contact or experience with the trauma, the second generation or, as Hirsch terms it, "postgeneration," relies on photography, visual art, and familial narratives for the transmission of traumatic memories. Sebald's photographs in his novels are thus said to summon the memory of a specific traumatic event. Hirsch takes Sebald's novel *Austerlitz* as an example, claiming that the photographs in the novel function as evidence to reclaim the memory of the narrator's mother and the memory of

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the Second World War. Hirsch proceeds to explain that "[t]he images already imprinted on our brains, the tropes and structures we bring from the present to the past, hoping to find them there and to have our questions answered" (120). Postmemory is already present in the second generation's mind, and the photographs bring these traumatic memories to light. In summary, scholars who view Sebald's novels as "postmemory literature" argue that the photographs in the novels serve as mediums that recall traumatic memories.

Similarly to those who read Sebald as postmemory literature, some critics also claim that the photographs evoke the traumatic memories of a specific event, primarily the Holocaust. Maya Barzilai, for instance, finds that "photographs . . . function as conduits that prompt the retrieval of memory or verify certain recollections" (206). The photographs retrieve the reader's memory and "allow[] the readers to gain, experientially, a sense of the disruptive effect of the belated return of the past" (207). Memories of the event are preserved and archived as frozen images. Within this point of view, the photographs in Sebald's novels function as a medium that evokes memories, has the capacity for narration, and serves to elucidate the information that the text fails to provide.

This view on photography is similar to what Georges Didi-Huberman states in his book *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz.* In this book, he examines four photographs taken from the Nazi concentration camp and argues that images are capable of and tantamount to narration and telling stories just as language is:

> We must do with the image what we already do more easily . . . with language. For in each testimonial production, in each act of memory, language and image are absolutely bound to one another, never ceasing to exchange their reciprocal

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> lacunae. An image often appears where a word seems to fail; a word often appears where the imagination seems to fail. (26)

By recognizing how images can produce narrative, Didi-Huberman proposes that the four photographs can be read as a narrative imprinted on images. The view that photographs can tell stories in their own right is not exclusive to Didi-Huberman. Louise Hornby, in her book *Still Modernism: Photography, Literature, Film,* argues that photographic images, instead of being symptomatic and dead as often prescribed in modernist discourse, are capable of exhibiting motion and narrative even though they look still (20). Although some art critics dismiss the stillness and immobility of photography and prioritize the movement, speed, acceleration, and mobility of film, other critics discern film as the "synthesis of stasis and motion" (27). That means, still images do have the capability to present motion and narrative like films do because films are essentially derived from still images.

According to this line of argument, photographs are able to construct a narrative that text cannot represent, and a degree of historical truth is embedded in the photographs. However, one cannot overlook the impact of texts and read the photographs as an individual narrative when reading Sebald's novels. The photographs must be read with the text. To be more precise, the meaning of photographs is anchored by the text, as the text is said to "pin[] the image's meaning down and anchor[] it to a piece of writing" and "single out the 'literal truth' depicted in a photograph, in order that an aspect of social behavior could be pinpointed, illustrated" (Chaplin 43). In some cases, some critics even suggest that "every photograph is linguistically framed" (Horstkotte 36). That means, the photographs require the facilitation of words to direct the reader's attention to what merits attention in a photograph. This line of argument in Sebald scholarship asserts that the photographs justify or validate the authenticity and legitimacy of the

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textual narrative, assuming the textual narrative to be true and authoritative. In other words, this argument puts Sebald's novel in the category of realism that seeks to represent a specific historical event, and the photographs are used as evidence of the narrative and pinned to a particular context.

However, there are some defects in this line of argument. First, the argument largely deprives of the autonomy of photography in Sebald's novels. Instead of actively engaging with the text, the photographs are reduced to the mere exemplification of the narrative. The photographs are thus put in a subordinate position to the narrative as their meanings are fixated on a particular context created by texts. The second problem with this argument is that photography, contrary to the notion that it represents the absolute truth, can also be manipulative and not necessarily authentic. Lilian R. Furst points out how photography can be viewed as a source that creates uncertainty in the age where the "digital manipulation" of images is so prevalent that overthrows the nineteenth-century concept that photography is presumed to present truth and reality (222). Furst elaborates that the photographs in Sebald's novel "prove to be unsettling and troubling, and increasingly so the more closely they are scrutinized" (225). As Furst observes, instead of giving a visual representation of the narrative, the photographs in Sebald's novels are at times perplexing as they are contradictory or unrelated to the narrative, causing trouble for the reader to understand the rationale behind Sebald's placement of the photographs. Given that photography can be manipulative, Furst rejects the idea that all of the photographic images in Sebald's novels are testimonies of truth or reality. Rather, as Silke Horstkotte maintains, "both verbal and visual media are ambivalent" that "images have the same source value in imaginative discourse as texts" (37). Photographic images can also be fictional. Alternatively, they become the artistic medium that carries out different interpretations and is

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liberated from one fixed meaning or context. Though some photographs in Sebald's novels do correspond to the text, there are discrepancies between the photographs and the texts sometimes. The photographs are proven to be unreliable and do not always align with the textual narrative. Considering the problems in reading Sebald's images as evidence for historical events, Mark M. Anderson remarks on the unreliable and inconsistent nature of Sebald's images:

> Images are one of the great strengths—and question marks—in Sebald's writings. Without captions or attributions, they seem out-of-sync counterpoint, a kind of punctuation that subtly irritates and challenges our notion of what is real, what is fictional. The dialogue between images and text; the alternating rhythm of reading and looking; the fragmentation, splicing, blurring of images; even their occasional insignificance, their scrapbook, antiquarian qualities—all these factors play a role in the very tactile experience of "reading" a Sebald text. But they are no guarantee of truth. (109)

Anderson points out that the exchange of dynamics between Sebald's images and texts must not be overlooked. Sebald purposefully incorporates photographs that are remotely related or faulty to the text, making it impossible to read Sebald's novels as documentary novels that represent specific events. Additionally, in *Vertigo*, there is only a small part that touches upon the Holocaust. Thus, it is unfair to categorize *Vertigo* as a postmemory novel that represents the Holocaust.

With these questions in mind, some critics take on different approaches to examine Sebald's use of images and the subject matters his novels seek to represent. These critics argue that Sebald's installation of photographic images and the digressive narrative in his novel do more than represent a historical event or declare the authenticity of the narrative. For these

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critics, photographic images serve different purposes than validating the authenticity of the historical value of Sebald's novels. Though Sebald's use of photographic images often leads the reader to believe that he tries to represent the historical truth, particularly of the Holocaust, some critics pertain that "Sebald is perhaps less a 'holocaust writer' than a writer of destruction, or, to use some of his own words, a writer of the natural history of destruction who takes the whole passage of European history as his subject matter" (Martin 18). Instead of representing a particular event, Sebald provides the reader with a panoramic view of history. J. J. Long, in his book *W.G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity,* situates Sebald's work within a broader historical and cultural context and emphasizes that photographic images in Sebald's novels can not only reflect memory and history but also the archive of modernity:

> In the context of Sebald's work, photography is most often discussed in relation to the crisis of memory, with particular focus on Sebald's questioning of photography's referentiality and mnemonic capacity. As we will see, however, the function of photography in Sebald's work exceeds by far the question of memory and touches on many of the discourses and practices of modernity. (5)

Long finds that "modernity is a concern that permeates Sebald's writings" (8). In addition to representing historical events, Sebald's use of photographic images simultaneously concerns different aspects and discourses of modernity. By showcasing aspects of history and modernity simultaneously, Sebald sheds a different light on the subject of history.

Similar to Long, Elizabeth Chaplin also believes that the images in Sebald's novels go beyond merely representing certain historical truths. She contends that Sebald's images challenge the boundaries of meaning, confront the determinism of captions, and involve the reader for more interpretations. The lack of captions in Sebald's novels requires the reader to

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seek meaning not only from the surrounding text but also from the reader's observation and speculation of the photograph. The suspension and "ambiguity of meaning" require the reader's involvement in deciphering and making sense of the text-image constellation. The result of Sebald's text-image constellation is that it challenges the "existing boundaries," producing endless possibilities from a single narrative (50).

In the book *Understanding W. G. Sebald*, Mark Richard McCulloh observes that the images and narrative in Sebald's novels find correspondences of different historical events. Sebald's literary writings deal not only with history and memories but also with fiction and allusions. Sebald's novels approach history by investigating the coincidences between modern images and traces of history. The unreliability in Sebald's images and narrative plays an important role in such investigation:

> The "authoritative unreliability" that characterizes many of the images and events in Sebald is perhaps the most important underlying principle of Sebald's literary monism; everything belongs together somehow, everything is interrelated by some secret orderliness, but even the author isn't certain precisely how. (22)

McCulloh points out that though the images and narrative in Sebald's novels appear to be unrelated and disoriented, it is with this placement of images and allusions that these seemingly irrelevant images can be arranged together. Typically, when a writer places different images or narratives together, he/she is trying to explain the causal relationship of an event. Sebald, however, purposefully arranges images and narratives that bear no explicit causal relationship or are unable to be explained with reason to create a sense of unreliability that prompts the reader to explore the fundamental connection between the distinct images and narratives. By juxtaposing

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these images and narratives, Sebald helps the reader to discover the intersection of past and present and the interrelatedness of things.

Drawing on György Lukács's theory, Todd Samuel Presner argues that Sebald's novels are historical novels that "create a specifically modernist reality effect" and employ "the techniques of literary modernism to represent extreme historical events" (345). Sebald's narrative style is his response to modern events and the insufficiencies of traditional realist writing. Instead of representing any specific historical event, Presner situates Sebald's works as "historical novels" that adopt the modernist literary techniques to refigure and reenact the historical events "in which the boundaries between fact and fiction, history and literature, real and imaginary are blurred" (345). Presner writes that Sebald "is not attempting to represent accurately the reality of the past but rather to create a reality effect of the present in all its uncertainty and contingency" (350). Sebald's novels do not represent traumatic historical pasts. Instead, he approaches history by creating a "'synoptic' view of the whole or totality of the destruction" (351). To conclude, Presner claims that Sebald's novels are historical novels that approach history as a whole and generate a synoptic and artificial insight into a historical event through "the multiplicity of intersecting perspectives" (356).

Judith Ryan compares Sebald to other surrealist writers and Benjamin, who finds "profane illumination" in mundane objects and architecture in *The Arcade Project*. Judith Ryan acknowledges that Sebald's narrative and text-image interaction is a Surrealist attempt to find "profane illumination" in the modern city, as Walter Benjamin's *The Arcade Project* does, instead of depicting history from a traditional realist perspective. Sebald reworks a Surrealist model and alludes to other French Surrealists, such as André Breton and Louis Aragon, in his novels (particularly *Austerlitz*), and at the same time, he "invests it with more explicit historical

doi:10.6342/NTU202401671

significance" and "embeds the experience of modernity in a deep and complexly layered historical context" (235). Instead of the transcendental ecstatic experiences of Surrealism, Sebald's narrative brings its reader to a moment of "fulguration," clears a passage to historical events from the modernized urban landscape and reveals the coexistence of different historical events.

According to Timothy Bewes, the apparently disparate images and narratives in Sebald's novels cohere and pose questions to the category of fiction itself. Bewes argues the central logic of fiction is "[e]xemplarity" that "presupposes the existence of a conceptual whole" ("Against Exemplarity" 2). This direct and unambiguous form of exemplification, Bewes argues, is precisely what Sebald disapproves of due to the problem of representation in fiction. In light of this, Sebald employs a "suspension of exemplarity" to draw the implicit and immanent relationship. As Bewes explains, this suspension is initiated by the premises of Sebald's writing, which hold that logical connections themselves are uncertain, and that fiction no longer requires or can sustain an identifiable whole to authenticate it. The suspension of exemplarity explains the "enigmatic" quality of Sebald's writing, experienced as a situation of aporia where the desire for connection is equal to its impossibility (3). Sebald's winding narrative avoids any direct indication of an event or a subject. Nonetheless, it does not mean that Sebald's narrative is completely random and unrelated. It, instead, draws the mystical, interconnected, and immanent relationship between the seemingly distant individual elements that require mediation. By juxtaposing different images and narratives, Sebald preserves their singularities and authenticities without reducing them to mere exemplification.

Jessica Dubow compares Walter Benjamin and W. G. Sebald in terms of dialectical image. She argues that Sebald's images correspond to Benjamin's dialectical images which

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demonstrate the "dialectical reversal: a *countercase* in which circumstance relates to its structure not only by correspondence but by dissonance, by dissensus" (826). Dubow explains that similarly to Benjamin, Sebald's dialectical images confront historicism and periodization of time by providing a countercase and "reorient[ing] the historical case form" where "the world and life of things are parachuted into the activity of presentness, into the immoderate moment of the now, to awaken a very different understanding of historical and temporal process" (822). For both Sebald and Benjamin, instead of being treated as past events, history is found in the immediate present. To put it differently, through dialectical images, truth, life, and history that reside in the present are awakened and brought into sight. This argument reveals Sebald's historical view that history and the present are indeed coexistent.

In *Sebald's Vision*, Carol Jacobs also negates the typical historical reading of Sebald. She claims that images in Sebald's works call for attention to the inadequacy of literary representation and optical vision. Jacobs argues that Sebald's narrative is a "rebellion against mimesis" and that "neat conclusions about vision-of-the-eye are impossible" (xi). Jacobs argues that the intention of Sebald's novels is not to make the reader see; instead, the novels emphasize how optical vision and representation fall short of perceiving truth. Thus, the contradiction found in the "visual oddity of literary and essayistic works peppered with images" urges the reader to seek coincidences and correspondences in images with the mind's eye and confront "[t]he staged coincidences, connections, similarities, the rupture from the image world to its apparent other, the temporal volt over a threshold of centuries that seems to divide the past from the present and death from life" (x,4). In brief, while some readers interpret Sebald's images as photographic evidence of historical events, critics who notice the disparity between Sebald's images and narratives often argue that his novels do not aim to depict specific historical events. Instead,

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Sebald intends to reveal an extensive perspective on history. Through his seemingly random placement of images and narratives, he illustrates the coexistence of past and present. Events from the past might resurface uncannily.

To briefly conclude, contrary to scholars who consider Sebald's novels to be trying to represent the Holocaust, these scholars have different opinions on the subject matter in Sebald's novels. In *Vertigo*, aside from the Holocaust, Sebald's novels seek to disclose a more profound insight into history as well as the relationship between humans and Nature.

doi:10.6342/NTU202401671

Chapter Two: Walter Benjamin's Nonsensuous Similarity and Jacques Rancière's Parataxis

Benjamin's View on Text-Image Relationship

In Walter Benjamin's theory, the image actualizes the virtual and provides an external force for human beings to reshape their understanding of the world. However, by "image," he is not referring strictly to the visual field. He sees the image as the medium pointing to connections between an object of our sensory perception and the virtuality of this object. Meaning is created through the "mediality" of these connections, or what Miriam Bratu Hansen calls the "in-between substance or agency—such as language, writing, thinking, memory—that mediates and constitutes meaning" (Hansen, *CAE* 108).[2] According to Hansen, such agency "resonates no less with esoteric and spiritualist connotations pivoting on an embodied medium's capacity of communing with the dead" (108). Benjamin thinks highly of images because of their ability to reveal "where the world and life of things are parachuted into the activity of presentness, into the immoderate moment of the now, to awaken a very different understanding of historical and temporal process" (Dubow 822). In short, images in Benjamin's formulations are capable of revealing similarities between different entities.

With the invention of modern technologies such as photography and cinema, the nature of art in Benjamin's time underwent drastic transformations because handicrafts had been replaced by mechanical reproduction. Under these circumstances, *Erfahrung*, which "pertains not only to the organization of sensory perception but crucially to—individual and collective, conscious and unconscious—memory, the imagination, and generational transmissibility," was destroyed, and

[2] *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* will be hereafter abbreviated as *CAE*.

doi:10.6342/NTU202401671

there is only *Erlebnis,* the immediate experience, left for human beings (Hansen, *CAE* 79). Seeing this crisis, Benjamin in several of his works pays attention to the significance of images, arguing that they hold the power to bring epiphany and create new *Erfahrung* for human beings. To understand the external world and reclaim the traces of *Erfahrung*, human beings require the mediality of images as they are limited in their immediate sensory experiences. Through the mediation that "names the comprehensive force field that links human sensorium to world and that is constituted in doing so by the interplay between natural (physiological, physical) and historical (social, technological and aesthetic) factors," human beings can access virtuality and what has been lost in the progression of history (Wilke 40).

The Mimetic Faculty

In the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,"Benjamin explains the importance of images, in particular their capability for actualizing the virtual, and he calls these images "thought figures." Benjamin contends that a thought figure is "a constellation of resemblances (*Ähnlichkeitskonstellation*) which is figured in a third (*ein Drittes*), beyond a form-content relation" (Weigel 46). The mimetic faculty extracts resemblances, makes connections between distinct images, and produces meaning for the images and their spectator. The mimetic faculty's act of imitation is twofold: first, the images have the capacity to find similarities; second, the viewing human subject can interpret such similarities and formulate configurations of the world based on the raw material of the external world. At the opening of his article "On the Mimetic Faculty," he explains how human beings can utilize their mimetic faculty to understand the world or restore what is once lost:

doi:10.6342/NTU202401671

> Nature produces similarities; one need only think of mimicry. The highest capacity for producing similarities, however, is man's. His gift for seeing similarity is nothing but a rudiment of the once powerful compulsion to become similar and to behave mimetically. There is perhaps not a single one of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role. (720)

When human beings try to gain new knowledge, they exercise their mimetic faculty to correlate the new knowledge with the old, finding the resemblances between the two and imitating such similarities, for Benjamin thinks that "the fundamental human ability is imitation" (Ogden 57). Blair Ogden proceeds to explain that Benjamin's notion of the mimetic faculty can string together the experiences and objects that have no apparent logical connection (57). Benjamin considers the mimetic faculty as the primary principle that forms human beings' understanding of the world.[3] The first definition he gives in the essay describes the pedagogical usage of mimetic faculty—that human beings learn from finding the connection between a new object and

[3] Ogden explains that Benjamin's view of learning through imitation derives from Plato's view of mimesis, where Plato considers "mimetic activity" to play "a pivotal role in cognitive development from childhood onward" (Ogden 59). Ogden proceeds to explain that "the mimetic power used in the cave represents the first step on a ladder of knowledge" (59). In Plato's cave parable, the prisoners are only granted access to the shadow cast by the real (Ideas). Ideas are not immediately available to human beings, and what enters the prisoners' perception is merely a copy of the Idea. However, Benjamin puts a positive spin on this parable. By imitating and observing the shadow that resembles the Idea, the prisoners can gain an understanding of the world. In his article "Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge ('Theaetetus' 184-186)," John M. Cooper explains how, in Plato's philosophy, sensing similarities produces knowledge:

> In judgments we use such words as "is" and "similar", and the thought that something we are sensing exists or is similar to something else is not an achievement of mere sensing; we must bring in, and apply, the notions of existence and similarity, as well as use our senses. From this, it is inferred that even if the presentation of an object of sense in sensation is an instance of knowledge, our power of making judgments shows that there is another way of being presented with objects, namely the intuition of Forms, here instanced by Existence, Similarity and the other so-called *κοινά*. We could not apply the notion of existence to anything if we were not acquainted with Existence; and the knowledge of these (and other) Forms is not acquired by using the senses but by thinking - by an activity of the soul "all by herself" (185 e 1), without reliance on sensation. (Cooper 124)

Here, Cooper argues that the object of sense can produce knowledge if one can see beyond its presentation, sense the similarity between the object of sense perception and other objects, and think about the relation between the two. To Benjamin, this process cannot work without the mediation of thinking/imagination and the mediation of the object of sense, which further proves how important mediation is in Benjamin's theory.

doi:10.6342/NTU202401671

their own experience, imitating the similarities. The second approach, contrary to the first one which emphasizes the individual aspect of the mimetic faculty, highlights the collective feature of mimetic faculty, which forms the societal and community code by mutual imitation among members of the collective. The similarities that the mimetic faculty extracts form a mediating link between an object of senses and its virtuality.

In both "Doctrine of the Similar" and "On the Mimetic Faculty," Benjamin reiterates the importance of similarity, claiming that the modern human experience is essentially "unconsciously determined by similarity" (Benjamin, "Doctrine" 695). Benjamin provides a few examples of how the mimetic faculty constitutes and mediates meaning. An instance of the mimetic faculty is child's play. As Benjamin observes in children's role-playing games, not only can children turn themselves into other human characters, but they can also impersonate impersonal objects with their bodies. Their role-playing games are essentially determined by the mimetic faculty ("Doctrine" 694). Through their imitation of these impersonal objects, children discover the resemblances between objects and may reproduce such similarities. Benjamin sees this action as a manifestation of the mimetic faculty. The children observe the object, extract the similarity between the object and their body, and imitate the object with their body. For example, the children may see the rotating windmill blade as similar to the waving of their arms and are likely to imitate the windmill with their physical movement. Such impersonation, as Hansen elaborates, functions as follows:

> Children practice an inventive reception of this world of things in their modes of collecting and organizing objects, in particular discarded ones, thus producing a host of bewildering and hidden correspondences, tropes of creative miscognition. (*CAE* 150)

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Benjamin recognizes the revolutionary potential in children's play for their ability to "retrieve objects and stimulate life in a frozen cultural modernity" and "collect forgotten and ignored phenomena" (Lewandowski 154). To sum up, the mimetic faculty of children's play not only reveals an often-neglected principle, namely imitation, but also shows the way in which children gain knowledge about the imitated object, the lost world, and the virtual.

Another example of the mimetic faculty is astrology. Benjamin believes that astrology is human beings' imitative behavior toward the stars.

> [W]e must above all understand the horoscope as an originary totality which astronomical interpretation merely analyzes. (The state of the stars represents a characteristic unity, and the character of the individual planets can be recognized only by the way they function in relation to this state of the stars.) We must assume in principle that processes in the sky were imitable, both collectively and individually, by people who lived in earlier times; indeed, that this imitability contained instructions for mastering an already present similarity. (Benjamin, "Doctrine" 695)

Benjamin thinks what the ancient practitioners of astrology did was to find the similarity between the stars and human life. In the article "On Astrology," he further explains how human beings find similarities in the constellation of stars.

> The approach looks like this: We start with "similarity." We then try to obtain clarity about the fact that the resemblances we can perceive, for example, in people's faces, in buildings and plant forms, in certain cloud formations and skin diseases, are nothing more than tiny prospects from a cosmos of similarity. We can go beyond this and attempt to clarify for ourselves the fact that not only are

doi:10.6342/NTU202401671

> these resemblances imported into things by virtue of chance comparisons on our part, but that all of them—like the resemblances between parents and children—are the effects of an active, mimetic force working expressly inside things. (684)

The astrology practice looks for similarities between the sky and the object they observed. For example, finding the similarity between one's personality and horoscope and making predictions based on the constellation of the stars, which make the astrologers "mimetically gifted reader[s]" (Hansen, *CAE* 148) that interpret and extract the correspondences between human life and the stars.

Nonsensuous Similarity

Here, however, one should not confuse Benjamin's concept of mimesis with direct copying. As opposed to the "resemblance that appears overt and self-evident," Benjamin distinguishes two types of similarities—sensuous similarity and nonsensuous similarity (Hansen, *CAE* 147). For sensuous similarity, Benjamin refers to the kind that can be captured immediately by senses without mediation while nonsensuous similarity "concerns a process through which two dissimilar impressions, the sign and the signified, coincide" (Ogden 64). However, the nonsensuous similarity is not simply putting two things together. Instead of a random juxtaposition of two dissimilar objects, Benjamin's mimesis and nonsensuous similarity, as Miriam Hansen suggests, have an underlying logic that escapes human senses, and only through mediation can human beings discover the nonsensuous similarity.

> [T]he mimetic is not a category of representation, pertaining to a particular relationship with a referent, but a *rational* practice—a process, comportment, or activity of "producing similarities," . . . a mode of access to the world involving

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> sensuous, somatic, and tactile, that is, embodied, forms of perception and cognition; a noncoercive engagement with the other that resists dualistic conceptions of subject and object. (Hansen, *CAE* 147)

Nonsensuous similarity helps explain what phenomenology or affect theory cannot, as both phenomenology and affect theory rely heavily on human perception and immediacy.[4] Yet, as a nonsensuous experience requires mediation, it can be discovered and received in a non-perceptual way and connect two dissimilar impressions together.

The Canon of the Mimetic Faculty: Language

Of all who possess the mimetic faculty, Benjamin considers language the "canon" of the mimetic faculty as it produces sensuous similarity and nonsensuous similarity at the same time. In the article "On the Mimetic Faculty," he explains that languages exhibit their mimetic faculty "under the name of onomatopoeia" (721). By imitating the sound, onomatopoeia produces similarities between the "content" and the "form." Yet, the mimetic behavior of languages is not limited to onomatopoeia. There is, however, another aspect of the mimetic faculty in language—that it is "the highest level of mimetic behavior and the most complete archive of nonsensuous similarity" (722). He calls for attention to the semiotic and nonsensuous aspect of language, claiming that language formation is not arbitrary. There are nonsensuous similarities between words and their meaning (Rabinbach 61). In "Doctrine of the Similar," he explains:

[4] In Peter Fenves's article "The Genesis of Judgement," he explains why phenomenology fails in literary study: "Conceived in these terms, it skips over a constituent element of literature: it leaps over language. Nothing has contributed so much to the perception that phenomenology is not only incompetent in matters of literature, but incompatible with literary studies than the curious ways in which its founding gesture must—and yet cannot—suspend language in order to guarantee its access to phenomena whose very phenomenality consists in the always incomplete bracketing of their linguisticity" (Fenves 76).

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> For if words meaning the same thing in different languages are arranged about that signified as their center, we have to inquire how they all—while often possessing not the slightest similarity to one another—are similar to the signified at their center. (696)

As Benjamin observes, certain meanings of particular words are similar across different languages because "[t]he nonsensuous similarity that is at the root of language is in essence the reminder of a lost world of experience" (Rabinbach 62). Benjamin uses this as an example to explain that language formation derives from the same principle—nonsensuous similarity, and the mimetic faculty of languages brings such similarities to light.

Miriam Hansen proceeds to explain that "the mimetic qualities of script and reading are not obvious or commonplace, but hidden, encrypted, hinging (as in astrology) on a past conjuncture, a lost indexical bond" ("Benjamin and Cinema" 330). This means that languages are not formed arbitrarily but are determined by nonsensuous similarities, and that there is a certain degree of underlying logic in them. Peter Fenves elaborates on the relationship between sense, language, and content, emphasizing the transcendental, spiritual, and nonsensuous aspects of language (79). In this regard, language in Benjamin's formulations mediates "the semiotic element" to uncover nonsensuous similarities and constitutes meaning (Benjamin, "Mimetic Faculty" 722). Toward the end of the article, Benjamin concludes that language is "the highest level of mimetic behavior and the most complete archive of nonsensuous similarity," reaffirming language's capacity to mediate the nonsensuous similarity (722).

One example of discovering similarities in literature is Marcel Proust. In "On the Image of Proust," Benjamin argues that the images in Proust's work uncover all kinds of similarities:

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> Enough inconspicuous gates lead into it—Proust's frenetic study, his impassioned cult of similarity. The true signs of its hegemony do not become obvious where he unexpectedly and startlingly uncovers similarities in action, physiognomies, or speech mannerisms. The similarity of one thing to another which we are used to, which occupies us in a wakeful state, reflects only vaguely the deeper similarity of the dream world in which everything that happens appears not in identical but in similar guise, opaquely similar to itself. (239)

Benjamin claims that Proust's works are attempts to discover similarities. However, these similarities are neither identical nor obvious. The similarities Proust lays bare are the nonsensuous ones that are connected to the dream world, where virtuality is presented to the dreamer and cannot be captured immediately with the senses. According to this passage, Benjamin reads Proust's literary images as the medium that could relate the nonsensuous similarities between the immediate experience and the virtual.

However, Benjamin's language does not refer exclusively to the spoken language. It refers to a larger category of "medium," and visual images are among them. In "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," Benjamin expands the definition of language, saying that "[e]very expression of human mental life can be understood as a kind of language" and "all communication of the contents of the mind is language" (62). Benjamin refers to language not only linguistically but also as "the 'medium' of the communication" (64). Any form of communication—"color, the pictorial mark, language, criticism, memory . . . in which some kind of material, cognitive, or discursive mediation occurs"—can be seen as thought-image in terms of its function (Somaini 27). Among all means of communication, Benjamin considers images as "the primary mode and the primary material of thought and ideas" as they allow human beings to

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think and act in images (Weigel 3). Images can be viewed as a kind of language, and vice versa. Both languages and images are rendered readable as they become thought-images that mediate the nonsensuous similarities to human beings. This argument makes thinking-in-images possible (Weigel 50). In the "Surrealism" essay, Benjamin reiterates his thoughts on images and languages.

> Life seemed worth living only where the threshold between waking and sleeping was worn away in everyone as by the steps of multitudinous images flooding back and forth; language seemed itself only where sound and image, image and sound, interpenetrated with automatic precision and such felicity that no chink was left for the penny-in-the-slot called "meaning." Image and language take precedence. (208)

There are at least two things noteworthy in this passage. First, it shows Benjamin's firm belief in dream images. Second, it reaffirms that language and image are interpenetrated and interrelated. They are both capable of mediating nonsensuous similarities to human beings.

Images and Nonsensuous Similarities in *One-Way Street*

Benjamin's prose collection *One-Way Street* is full of attempts to discover nonsensuous similarities in images produced by languages. The prose collection is comprised of numerous pieces of prose titled with an object, banners, or his immediate experience on the imaginary one-way street "named Asja Lacis Street" (*OWS* 444).[5] Benjamin describes what he thinks of when encountering the objects and banners on the one-way street. Yet, there is no direct relationship between Benjamin's description and the title. For example, in the section "Breakfast Room," he

[5] *One-Way Street* will be hereafter abbreviated as *OWS.*

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does not write about his actual encounter with the breakfast room or describe what the room looks like. Instead, he describes a half-awake state which he associates with the breakfast room.

> In this state, though awake, one remains under the spell of the dream. . . . He thus avoids a rupture between the nocturnal and the day time worlds. . . . In this condition, the narration of dreams can bring calamity, because a person still half in league with the dream world betrays it in his words and must incur its revenge. To express this in more modern terms: he betrays himself. He has outgrown the protection of dreaming naïvete, and in laying hands on his dream visages without thinking, he surrenders himself. (*OWS* 445)

This passage serves two purposes. First, it shows how the image of an immediate, objective experience, like a breakfast room, can serve as an exterior force, be mediated by the spectators' imagination, and inspire the subject. It shows "the nonlinear, vertiginous paths of feelings, desire, and the unconscious" that are encrypted in the experience for Benjamin and, through his writing, for the reader as well (Hansen, *CAE* 135). The second significance of this passage is it reveals that Benjamin regards highly of dream images. He considers the dream images the actualization of the virtual that reveals the hidden order of the world to the dreamers, and the illusory experience of the dream can potentially broaden human beings' understanding of the world. Miriam Hansen notes that "[d]reaming . . . entails a mimetic blending with such moving and morphing images and, accordingly, an erosion of the boundaries between subject and object" (Hansen, *CAE* 125-26). In the drowsy state, the effect of virtual images presented by dreams extends to real life, and the dreamer can find the resemblances between the two. In brief, conjoining the breakfast room with the state of dreaming, Benjamin expresses his view on dreams with the emergence of the breakfast room. The whimsical and hallucinatory experience

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of dreams is in fact, potent in imposing influence on human beings' knowledge of the world, and at the same time, Benjamin demonstrates how it is possible to discover nonsensuous similarities from mundane everyday objects, images, or languages as he involuntarily associates the experience of going to the breakfast room with a half-awake state that remains "under the spell of the dream" (446). With that, Benjamin demonstrates how nonsensuous similarity can be found with the help of images and the subject's mediation.

There are more instances where Benjamin discovers the nonsensuous similarity between physical objects and dream images. In "Number 113," upon seeing the house, the narrator describes: "The hours that hold the figure and the form/ Have run their course within the house of dream" (445). The images of the cellar, the vestibule, and the dining hall in Number 113 all remind him of the dream of visiting Goethe's house:

> In a dream I saw myself in Goethe's study. It bore no resemblance to the one in Weimar. . . . Doubtless there were places for my ancestors, too. At the end, on the right, I sat down beside Goethe. . . . Touching his elbow, I began to weep with emotion. (445-46)

Goethe's house can be read as a metaphor for a state undisturbed by modern technology where *Erfahrung* still exists. As the dining hall bears "no resemblance to the one in Weimar," Benjamin further emphasizes that the connection between Goethe's house and Number 113 is a nonsensuous one, and shows how virtuality can be found in the real world (445).

Another instance would be the "Mexican Embassy," where Benjamin recollects a dream in ancient Mexico when running into the Mexican Embassy.

> I dreamed I was a member of an exploring party in Mexico. After crossing a high, primeval jungle, we came upon a system of above-ground caves in the mountains.

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> Here, a religious order had survived from the time of the first missionaries till now, its monks continuing the work of conversion among the natives. . . . Mass was celebrated according to the most ancient rites. (448)

The Mexican Embassy triggers the dream image of ancient Mexico. Since the dream takes place on an ancient and prehistorical mountain, the passage can be interpreted as a summoning of the residual memory of the past. Manifesting the mimetic faculty, the image of the urban Mexican Embassy is thus turned to be where the spectators can access the history and human beings' primal relationship with nature.

The emphasis on the mimetic faculty is throughout *One-Way Street*. In both "Attested Auditor of Books," "Construction Site," and "Enlargement," Benjamin explains how the mimetic faculty of images mediate the nonsensuous similarity by drawing the example of language and child's play. In "Attested Auditor of Books," similar to the Surrealism essay, Benjamin points out the possibility for languages to create dream-like images that access the virtual:

> Script—having found, in the book, a refuge in which it can lead an autonomous existence—is pitilessly dragged out into the street by advertisements and subjected to the brutal heteronomies of economic chaos. . . . [B]efore a contemporary finds his way clear to opening a book, his eyes have been exposed to such a blizzard of changing, colorful, conflicting letters that the chances of his penetrating the archaic stillness of the book are slight. (456)

As a language, the script has the power of mediating and actualizing the unimaginable virtual to its reader. It should be noted that the language Benjamin refers to is not just literal language. He includes different mediums, for example, card index, graphs, advertisements, etc, in his discussion:

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> But it is quite beyond doubt that the development of writing will not indefinitely be bound by the claims to power of a chaotic academic and commercial activity; rather, quantity is approaching the moment of a qualitative leap when writing, advancing ever more deeply into the graphic regions of its new eccentric figurativeness, will suddenly take possession of an adequate material content. (456-57)

Benjamin claims that graphic, image-like mediums like these can enter the realm of writing, as he calls "picture-writing" (457). As texts and images merge, they become a new medium that can cause "nervous reactions" and "reveal themselves as antiquated daydreams," and bring the nonsensuous similarity and virtuality to the senses (456-57).[6]

In "Construction Site," Benjamin draws a child's development with the help of visual and bodily experience as an example.

> It is folly to brood pedantically over the production of objects—visual aids, toys, or books—that are supposed to be suitable for children. . . . Their infatuation with psychology keeps them from perceiving that the world is full of the most unrivaled objects for children's attention and use. And the most specific. For children are particularly fond of haunting any site where things are being visibly worked on. (449)

For a child to experience the world, images or visual aids are indispensable because, as mentioned before, children learn as they exercise their mimetic faculty. While playing, the

[6] The term "nervous reaction" refers to Benjamin's other term: innervation. Benjamin argues that the incorporation of image and text, "picture-writing," and the random juxtaposition of things can be seen as *Spiel*, which means "'play,' 'game,' 'performance' and 'gamble'" in German (Hansen, *CAE* 183). It has the power to trigger bodily innervations for human beings to gather back mimetic faculty and urges them to find similarities within it. In contrast to the first technology that makes "the maximum possible use of human beings" and masters over nature, *Spiel* "reduces their use to the minimum" and aims "at an interplay between nature and humanity" ("Work of Art" 107).

doi:10.6342/NTU202401671

children “produce their own small world of things within the greater one” (450). By associating the image of the construction site with the developmental stage of children, Benjamin again illustrates that the mimetic faculty of images can illuminate people and how images can be in written form.

To conclude, in *One-Way Street*, as Benjamin places the images of the imaginary Lacis Street in front of the reader’s eyes, the graphic tension incorporated in the “script-image” suggests how writings can produce an immersive experience of images that urges the reader to discover the nonsensuous similarity in daily lives. Such writing emphasizes the mobile, imagistic, mimetic, and tactile qualities of writing that “makes reading a more kinetic, haptic experience” and thus, creates a body- and image-space (Hansen, *CAE* 152). As Hansen puts it, *One-Way Street* can be read as Benjamin’s attempt to create a body- and image-space with a script:

> Benjamin’s notion of an interpenetration of “body- and image-space” implies yet another dimension. The spaces that intermingle and interrelate, the image-things that intrude into the psychophysiological space and presumed autonomy of the metropolitan subject, pertain to both actual and virtual registers. (Hansen, *CAE* 152)

Like the advertisement and card indexes described in “Attested Auditor of Books,” Benjamin’s writing aims at a three-dimensional effect that “the collective is transposed into the arcades and passageways of the city which the author enters as a reader in order to decipher them” (Weigel 19). Mimicking the immersive collective innervation experience and bombarding the reader with images, Benjamin sends the reader to imagine themselves in the one-way street, identify the

doi:10.6342/NTU202401671

nonsensuous similarities along with Benjamin himself, and learn to identify the thought figures behind an image that brings about profane illuminations.

Rancière's View on Text-Image Relationship

Jacques Rancière considers word and image to be opposite to each other:

> This is the sense in which art is made up of images, regardless of whether it is figurative, of whether we recognize the form of identifiable characters and spectacles in it. The images of art are operations that produce a discrepancy, a dissemblance. Words describe what the eye might see or express what it will never see; they deliberately clarify or obscure an idea. Visible forms yield a meaning to be construed or subtract it. (Rancière 7)

For Rancière, words and images serve quite different purposes. Words do not refer exclusively to the linguistic field, and images do not refer to the visual field alone. Their difference does not lie in the opposition between the visible and the sayable. Words are the parts of an artwork that produce meaning whereas images are those elements in the artwork that create discrepancy and disrupt the production of meaning: "[t]he text's part in the representative schema was the conceptual linking of actions, while the image's was the supplement of presence that imparted flesh and substance to it" (Rancière 46). In Rancière's formulations, the regimes of the visible and the sayable enter each other; the visible can produce meaning in the artwork while the sayable is able to obstruct it: "[t]he visible can be arranged in meaningful tropes; words deploy a visibility that can be blinding" (Rancière 7).

Yet, another question arises: Why are images important for Rancière if they restrain the words from producing cohesive meaning in an artwork? As Rancière explains, the discrepancy

doi:10.6342/NTU202401671

produced by the images "discover a different resemblance en route—a resemblance that defines the relation of a being to its provenance and destination, one that rejects the mirror in favor of the immediate relationship between progenitor and engendered: direct vision, glorious body of the community, or stamp on the thing itself" (Rancière 8). In other words, although images seem to obstruct meanings, by breaking the linear narrative of words, images impose alterity on the reader, urging the reader to think differently and to discover the "hyper-resemblance" between the image and the word.

Parataxis, Sentence-image, and Silent Speech[7]

In light of this redefined concept of word and image, Jacques Rancière invents the term "sentence-image" in *The Future of the Image*, which according to Aimee Israel-Pelletier marks "the new paradigm" that "explains the collapse of distance between words and images" (Israel-Pelletier 33). The sentence-image is the combination of words and images. As they coexist, the sentence-image becomes "the unit of expression that evokes their confluence, their cohesion and commonality" (Israel-Pelletier 34). From here, Rancière shifts his discussion of art from the representative regime to the aesthetic regime. Through parataxis that juxtaposes words and images, the boundary between words and images vanishes. Images can be found in verbal languages, and words can also be found in visual images. For example, "by way of narration and description," Rancière explains that words can create the effect of images that "make something visible, yet not present, seen" (Rancière 12). Besides, words are also capable of explaining abstract ideas that are not visible: "words make seen what does not pertain to the visible, by

[7] Rancière's original French coinage is *phrase-image*, which is supposed to be rendered as *image-sentence* in English. However, since this study relies on the English translation by Gregory Elliott, I adopt the construct Elliott uses: *sentence-image*.

doi:10.6342/NTU202401671

reinforcing, attenuating or dissimulating the expression of an idea, by making the strength or control of an emotion felt" (Rancière 12). His more detailed definition of sentence-image is as such:

> By sentence-image I intend the combination of two functions that are to be defined aesthetically—that is, by the way in which they undo the representative relationship between text and image. . . . The sentence-function is still that of linking. But the sentence now links in as much as it is what fives flesh. And this flesh or substance is, paradoxically, that of the great passivity of things without any rationale. For its part the image has become the active, disruptive power of the leap—that of the change of regime between two sensory orders. The sentence-image is the union of these two functions. It is the unit that divides the chaotic force of the great parataxis into phrasal power of continuity and imaging power of rupture. As sentence, it accommodates paratactic power by repelling the schizophrenic explosion. As image, with its disruptive force it repels the big sleep of indifferent triteness or the great communal intoxication of bodies. (Rancière 46)

Verbal sentences can be explosive to the narrative; visual images can assemble meanings. In other words, sentence-image can manifest itself as verbal sentences or visual images. This, as Timothy Bewes calls it, is a "practice of the redistribution of perception" ("Introduction" 189).

Rancière's explanation of the term "sentence-image" starts with examples in cinema. As an art form that assembles, trims, cuts, and edits different visual images together, cinema undoubtedly is an art of visualization. Rancière argues that in cinema the "[v]isual and textual elements are in effect conceived together, interlaced with one another" (Rancière 35). He

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proceeds to explain that "[t]his means that the visible forms speak and that words possess the weight of visible realities; that signs and forms mutually revive their powers of material presentations and signification" (Rancière 35). The dialogue and visual elements in cinema aid each other and heighten the significance and meaning. Rancière takes Jean-Luc Godard's film *Histoire(s) du cinéma* as an example that explains how the sentence-image works in cinema. Rancière finds that Godard "illustrates it [the sentence-image] by heterogeneous visual elements whose connection on the screen is enigmatic, and with words whose relationship to what we see we cannot grasp" (Rancière 35). One of the examples provided by Godard is Sergei Eisenstein's film *Alexander Nevsky*, where "an episode begins in which repeated superimposed images, answering one another in twos, impart a unity that is confirmed by the continuity of two texts, which have seemingly been taken from a speech in one instance, from a poem in the other" (Rancière 35). In *Alexander Nevsky*, Rancière observes the juxtaposition of different visual images that have no immediate relationship together. Yet, as these "heterogeneous visual elements" are put together by way of cinematic montage, they form a link between two texts, and the link cannot be connected well with words. Aimee Israel-Pelletier, in her article "Godard, Rohmer, and Ranciere's *Phrase-Image*," explains Godard's rationale behind his mixing and matching of images and words in his films:

> Godard seems to want to celebrate their art and his own side by side—to bridge the distance between artists. . . . Godard celebrates contact between cultures, cinemas, and languages. . . . In Godard, the *phrase-image* [sentence-image] is montage taken a notch above the capacity of our mind and our senses to process meaning in accustomed ways. (37-38)

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In Godard's film, the cinematic montage can be understood as an instance of sentence-image in Rancière's view.

Aside from cinema, as Rancière observes, sentence-image exists in novels as well. Timothy Bewes writes:

> According to Rancière, it is with Flaubert . . . that the novel awakens to the fact that literary language is no longer determined by any relation of appropriateness to its subject matter. The "descriptive excess" of the novel . . . is evidence not of the operation of a "reality effect" (Barthes) but, on the contrary, of a break in the arrangement according to which words are judged by their quotient of truth, or significance. ("Introduction" 189)

Rancière takes Gustave Flaubert's novel, *Madame Bovary*, as an example, showing that the parataxis of sentence-image in novels is similar to the ones in cinema: "the camera's fixing on the hand that . . . is no more peculiar to cinema than the fixing of Doctor Bovary's gaze on Mademoiselle Emma's nails . . . is peculiar to literature" (Rancière 5). He argues that the way Flaubert describes things is similar to a cinematic montage. Aimée Israel-Pelletier then further explains how the sentence-image is analogous to cinematic montage: "[t]he *phrase-image* [sentence-image] is not a phrase that allows us to visualize a meaning; it is not an image that carries meaning, but something closer to, but not exactly the same as cinematic montage—words, sounds, and images set up in such a way as to create an impact and/or a meaning" (44).

In addition, in *Madame Bovary*, Rancière considers the overly detailed description of the impersonal beings—dust, snow, or donkeys—sentence-image:

> A little dust shining in the sun, a drop of melted snow falling on the moiré silk of a parasol, a blade of foliage on the muzzle of a donkey—these are the tropes of

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matter that invent love by ranking its rationale with the great absence of any rationale of things. (44)

The description of such things does not help develop the plot. The description, thus, becomes the explosive image that cuts off the continuity of meaning in the novel. Émile Zola's *Le Ventre de Paris* and *Au Bonheur des Dames* are mentioned as examples of sentence-image in novels, too, as these novels give exhaustive details of things such as vegetables, fish, cheeses, white cloth set, etc, without making clear of their significance. Rancière then argues that in the aesthetic regime of art, the images are "no longer the codified expression of a thought or feeling" but the "silent speech" that allows the voices of impersonal beings to be heard despite being silent (13). Rancière gives two possible instances where silent speech can take place. The first one is that the meaning of things is "inscribed directly on their bodies" and "the eloquence of the very thing that is silent" allows the messages to be expressed (13). Its visibility becomes a kind of non-verbal language that can only be interpreted by sight. Hence, the description that makes the impersonal figures visible gives the chance for things to speak in writing. The second is "their obstinate silence" (13). Rancière takes Charles Bovary's hat as an example, saying that its "ugliness possesses a profundity of silent expression like the face of an imbecile" (13). Rancière distinguishes the impersonal beings as "silent" but "eloquent" through the use of parataxis that turns the novel into an instance of sentence-image.

Are Some Things Unrepresentable?

To wrap up Rancière's aesthetic theory, one should return to the critical question Rancière raises in the last chapter of *The Future of the Image*: Are some things unrepresentable? Are the intolerable violent events, such as the Holocaust, unrepresentable because of their

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extreme, impossible, and unthinkable nature? Are the impersonal objects unrepresentable because of their inability to speak? Rancière answers these questions by confronting the representative regime of art, which seeks to imitate the object or event. As Rancière argues, to bring the "essential character of the thing in question present" is impossible, and thus, his discussion moved away from the representative regime to the aesthetic regime (Rancière 109-10). The concept of sentence-image, hence, as Rancière explains, can aesthetically approach the arguably "unrepresentable" objects or events. As argued, sentence-image in literary works is able to put things onto the page aesthetically, be it history, sound, etc. Events and objects that are said to be unrepresentable are no exception, even if the speech is not visible. This anti-representation movement, as Rancière calls it, is "novelistic realism":

> Such is the disruption that critics of Flaubert denounced at the time under the heading of realism: everything is now on the same level, the great and the small, important events and insignificant episodes, human beings and things. Everything is equal, equally representable. (Rancière 120)

Through sentence-image, everything can be figured in art, and a meticulous spectator can discover the silent speech that represents the unrepresentable.

Rancière provides Robert Antelme's *The Human Race* as an example of novelistic realism that "represents" the unrepresentable. The book is dedicated to telling the experience of the Nazi concentration camp. The experience of being in the concentration camp is too specific, too violent, and too extreme that it seems unrepresentable in language. Yet, Rancière sees that in *The Human Race* Antelme succeeds in presenting the inhuman experience by the "paratactic linking of simple perceptions" (Rancière 124). The narrator uses plain language to tell a story of going to take a piss. However, the narrator is not really narrating a story. He describes what he

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sees and what he hears. The descriptive excess of this passage thus can be seen as the image that disrupts. Yet, this image brings the unimaginable and inhuman experience to the reader. In other words, the disruptive image, in fact, forms a sentence-image that represents the unrepresentable successfully.

Another example is, again, *Madame Bovary* by Flaubert. Rancière cites a passage from the novel where Flaubert provides too much detail about the dust and the surroundings instead of focusing on Charles and Emma. This action is a direct confrontation with traditional realism, which aims to imitate an event and focuses on the details that reduce the objects into a figure of speech. Rancière reads the passage as a parataxis of words and images that puts side by side the plot and the insignificant objects. Since the objects do not relate themselves to human beings nor bear any symbolic significance and causality, the objects in *Madame Bovary*, as Rancière contends, are heard by Flaubert's "paratactic syntax" that makes their silent speech apparent to the reader (Rancière 125).

To conclude, Rancière contends that words and images, though serving different functions, when put together paratactically, can create the sentence-image to represent the unrepresentable. Rancière writes:

> It is a world where all the histories have dissolved into sentences, which have themselves dissolved into words, exchangeable with the lines, strokes or "dynamisms" that any pictorial subject has dissolved into; or with the sound intensities in which the notes of the melody merge with ship horns, car noise, and the rattle of machine-guns. Such, for example, is the 'profound today' celebrated in 1917 by Blaise Cendrars in phrases that tend to reduce to juxtapositions between words, boiled down to elementary sensory tempos. (Rancière 44)

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He acknowledges the capability of verbal language to express every kind of sense perception through the technique of parataxis. In other words, in novel writing, despite being unrelated to the words that create continuity, the images that disrupt the progression of the plot disclose the hidden order or the silent speech that cannot be discovered by words.

Both theorists acknowledge language's ability to produce images, which helps the reader approach the text-image relationship in Sebald's novels in a more emancipatory way. The term "image" is not restricted to photographic images alone. Therefore, the text-image relationship in Sebald's novels becomes twofold: the relationship between text and photographic images and the relationship between text and images produced by words. While this methodology can be used to decipher both kinds of text-image relationships, this thesis will focus more on the relationship between text and images produced by words to maintain a manageable and focused scope.

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Chapter Three: Nonsensuous Similarities in *Vertigo*

Sebald's first prose novel, *Vertigo*, is divided into four sections: "Beyle, or Love is a Madness Most Discreet," "All'estero," "Dr. K. Takes the Waters at Riva," and "Il ritorno in patria." The first and third sections feature the memoirs of fictional characters Beyle and Dr K., who are modeled after Sebald's literary precursors Stendhal and Franz Kafka, respectively. The first section outlines the biography of Marie Henri Beyle whereas the third section chronicles Dr K.'s trip to Riva. In the second and fourth sections, Sebald's narrator, who resembles Sebald in many aspects, recounts his experiences during three journeys. The second section details the narrator's travels from Vienna to Venice and Verona in 1980 and 1987. The final section, "Il ritorno in patria," which means "the return of homeland," details the narrator's return to his homeland, W. in the Alps, after departing Verona in 1987.

Despite initially appearing unrelated, these stories are intricately woven together through Sebald's meticulous observations, to the effect that almost every detail becomes interconnected. Carole Angier argues that the "coincidence of events is one of the main movers of Sebald's imagination" (10). Sebald values coincidence and similarities, believing that all things possess underlying commonalities that may potentially reveal imperceptible messages. Therefore, unraveling the mystical relationships among things becomes one of the central thematic concerns of his novels. Similar to the unnamed narrator in *Vertigo*, who, while sitting in a café in Riva, spreads out all the papers and notes he has collected around him and starts "drawing connections between events that lay far apart but . . . to be of the same order," Sebald is equally obsessed with uncovering the hidden order or coincidence between disparate events or objects (*V* 94).

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As mentioned in the first chapter, one of the most significant coincidences Sebald endeavors to discover is history, and *Vertigo* is no exception. Throughout the novel, Sebald reveals various kinds of similarities, among which coexistences and correspondences in different historical events stand out as meaningful discoveries. Jeannette Baxter argues that the vertiginous feeling invoked in the novel aims to "negotiate difficult and exigent questions pertaining to historical representation, memory and subjectivity" (77). The juxtaposition of different historical events prompts the reader to ponder the legitimacy of authoritative historical representation and the similitude between history and the present.

Lynn L. Wolff, in her book *W. G. Sebald's Hybrid Poetics: Literature as Historiography*, notes that Sebald's practice of seeking out physical traces becomes part of his fictional texts. His narrators or characters travel to specific geographical destinations in hopes of gaining knowledge or insight from the past. Their aimless wandering often leads to spontaneous discoveries and connections (Wolff 16). The wanderers in Sebald's novels often recall a historical event triggered by a particular encounter in the present, showing that through some form of mindful connection, dissimilar images of different times and places can be associated. Timothy Bewes notes that Sebald's "use of the 'as if' forges a relation of indissociability between subjective and objective perception and between sensory (immediate) and textual (mediated) experience" ("Literary Landscape" 84). Sebald's use of "as if" and similes serve a greater purpose than merely illustrating an event. They reveal the shared aspects between seemingly unrelated things with the mediation of writing. *Vertigo* is replete with Sebald's attempts to uncover connections between disparate subjects or events. This chapter will delve into some of the ways in which Sebald explores the interconnectedness between history and the present in *Vertigo*, examining how the narrator mediates his immediate experience to uncover the nonsensuous similarities

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within subjects.[8] Additionally, this chapter will examine whether there are other nonsensuous similarities between different subjects explored in the novel.

Nonsensuous Similarities in *Vertigo*

In *Vertigo*, the narrator discovers the connections between different events, and "even when there seem to be no interconnections, Sebald finds connections" (McCulloh 98). Sebald skillfully weaves the seemingly irrelevant events together, revealing the nonsensuous similarities among them. Through the narrator's reflections, the hidden order of the world becomes perceptible. The kind of connections Sebald uncovers are uncanny and might not always be accounted for by a cogent logic. This recalls what Benjamin calls "nonsensuous similarities." This section will examine how *Vertigo*, through the narrator's mediation, intertwines different experiences as nonsensuous similarities.

At the beginning of *Vertigo*, when the narrator wanders through the city, he describes the experience as strange yet somehow familiar:

> Often, probably because I was so very tired, I believed I saw someone I knew walking ahead of me. Those who appeared in these hallucinations, for that is what they were, were always people I had not thought of for years, or who had long since departed, such as Mathild Seelos or the one-armed village clerk Fürgut. On one occasion, in Gonzagagasse, I even thought I recognized the poet Dante,

[8] For Walter Benjamin, the disintegration of experience is so extreme that "neither [past nor present] could have any direct and immediate bearing on the other" (Wolin 17). With time, "nonsensuous similarities" become increasingly unrecognizable. Thus, mediation plays a crucial role in Benjamin's theory to reclaim lost experiences. Through mediation, nonsensuous similarities that approach the virtual realm can be discovered. As the previous chapter argued, Benjamin's explanation of nonsensuous similarities starts with sensuous similarities (e.g., astrology, child play), and through mediation, the nonsensuous similarities are brought to light (Benjamin, "On Astrology" 684; "Doctrine" 695). Similarly, in *Vertigo*, despite some cases appearing to be sensuous similarities, through language and the narrator's reflections, the narrator's immediate experiences are mediated, revealing the nonsensuous similarities. Here, the literal is transformed into the figurative, granting the reader access to the virtual realm.

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> banished from his home town on pain of being burned at the stake. For some considerable time he walked a short distance ahead of me, with the familiar cowl on his head, distinctly taller than the people in the street, yet he passed by them unnoticed. . . . After one or two turns of this kind I began to sense in me a vague apprehension, which manifested itself as a feeling of vertigo. The outlines on which I tried to focus dissolved, and my thought disintegrated before I could fully grasp them. (*V* 35-36)[9]

When walking through the city, the narrator believes he runs into Mathild Seelos, a neighbor from his childhood, and Dante, the renowned Italian poet. At this point, the two figures are already deceased or absent. However, in a moment of misrecognition, the narrator identifies the passersby as Mathild and Dante, discerning the peculiar similarities between these figures. In Venice, the city that confronts the narrator with a sense of perplexity, he misrecognizes a passerby as a historical figure again. As he strolls down the street, he believes he sees "King Ludwig II of Bavaria." Despite the fact that the passerby strangely speaks "in the strongly nasal English of the upper classes," he bears such a striking resemblance to the king that the narrator even refers to him as "Il re Lodovico to the life" (*V* 53). These instances of misrecognition plunge the narrator into a vertiginous state, blurring the distinction between different time frames. The similarities are not apparent, nor can they be discerned through the senses alone. Via the narrator's imagination, he interprets his experience as nonsensuous similarities, wherein a collision between history and the immediate reality he is living in is presented to him. This kind of similarity resonates with Benjamin's idea of "historiography," where "'historicism' [seeks] the re-establishment of continuity between past and present in an abstract and chronological

[9] *Vertigo* will be hereafter abbreviated as *V.*

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form" (Crownshaw 218). By comparing the passerby with historical figures, these episodes reveal how the traces of history can resurface in an unexpected manner in the narrator's lived experience.

Literary Landscapes: Nonsensuous Similarities between Human History and Natural History

The misrecognitions are not the only instances where the narrator discovers similarities on his trips. The narrator's wandering through numerous cities and countryside in *Vertigo* plays an important part in discovering the congruence between the past and the present. As the witness of history, landscapes carry memories and reflections of events, even if their current appearance differs from how they looked during the time when a specific event unfolded. Taking the significance of landscape into account, Timothy Bewes explores the aesthetic dimension of landscape in Sebald's writing. Landscape in literary writing, as Bewes elaborates, is capable of connecting the representational literary element with the immanent. Taking his cue from Gilles Deleuze's and György Lukács's writings, Bewes explains that the "material thickness" of literature subtracts the "substance" or the "essence" from the sensuous presence, bringing the nonsensuous memories into the reader's consciousness ("Literary Landscape" 66, 68). The literary landscape and spatial description in Sebald's writing, then, is semiotic, encoded with meaning beyond its surface text. The landscape serves as a metaphor for different historical events:

> The single narrative plane constructed by Sebald's prose implicates not only every person reading it but every tree, every blade of grass, and every conceivable human "relation" to them in the existence of unimaginable horror. Landscape is

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> not innocent; landscape, in fact, is less innocent than anything. At a certain point in history, or should one say, in the aftermath of certain catastrophic events, the kind of intimacy with the homeland . . . is no longer conceivable. (Bewes, "Literary Landscape" 86)

Sebald's literary landscapes show the nonsensuous similarities between an immediate experience and history, revealing the juncture between history and the present. Karen Remmler explains that "[s]ites of memory are often meant to commemorate the dead, even as they stand as a point of reference for the living" (46). Sebald's literary landscapes are no exception. They aim to recollect cultural memory and uncover one's relation to the past. When the narrator passes by Friaul on a train ride from Vienna to Venice, he instantly associates the image of the landscape with several other memories:

> It occurred to me that this was the Friaul, and with that thought came naturally the memory of the destruction which that region had suffered some few months before. Gradually the daybreak revealed landslides, great boulders, collapsed buildings, mounds of rubble and piles of stones, and here and there encampments of people living in tents. . . . The low-lying cloud drifting in from the Alpine valleys and across that desolated country was conjoined in my mind's eye with a Tiepolo painting. . . . It shows the plague-ravaged town of Este on the plain, seemingly unscathed. (*V* 50-51)

These memories appear fragmented and have no apparent relevance to each other. Upon viewing the landscape, the narrator recollects the collective cultural memory that occurred in Friaul. His imagination discerns the nonsensuous similarities beyond their visual similarities and directly

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connects the landscape of Friaul to the traumatic memories of a natural disaster and a painting by Tiepolo in which he depicts a serious plague.

Similar encounters where the narrator's imagination associates an image of a landscape with destructive memories can be found throughout the novel. When the narrator walks through Krummenbach during another train ride to W., his immediate experience evokes catastrophic feelings and memories as his imagination penetrates through the sensuous presence, drawing out the nonsensuous similarities between events. As he walks, the weather changes and becomes gloomier, increasing the narrator's "sense of trepidation," foreshadowing the feeling that the memories he recalls during his walk will be pertinent to something apocalyptic (*V* 178). While sitting at the Krummenbach chapel, the stone wall reminds the narrator of "Stations of the Cross," a painting that depicts the crucifixion of Jesus. The painting, as the narrator describes, portrays "faces distorted in pain and anger, dislocated limbs, an arm raised to strike" and "some ghostly battle of faces and hands suspended in the gloom of decay" (*V* 179). Then, his mind turns to his childhood memories. He cannot remember if he has ever been to the Krummenbach chapel, but, as he recalls, there are many similar chapels around W., and he describes the feeling those chapels evoke:

> [M]uch of what I saw and felt in them at the time will have stayed with me – a fear of the acts of cruelty depicted there no less than the wish, in all its impossibility, that the perfect tranquillity prevailing within them might sometime be recaptured. (*V* 179-80)

Though the chapels are supposed to bring peacefulness, the narrator somehow perceives the dreadfulness masked behind their sensuous form. After leaving the Krummenbach chapel, the narrator continues his wandering, and his thoughts return to Tiepolo. He imagines that when the

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Krummenbach painter painted, he must have undergone similar hardships as Tiepolo, who, as the narrator beholds, suffered "badly from gout, lying in the cold of the winter months at the top of the scaffolding half a metre below the ceiling of the grand stairway in the palace at Würzburg" (*V* 180). Resuming his journey to W., the narrator recalls even more traumatic events. Passing by Enge Plätt, he recalls a "so-called last skirmish" that took place in April 1945 and resulted in numerous deaths and imagines the "combatants with soot-blackened faces, crouching behind tree trunks with their rifles at the ready or leaping from rock to rock across the deepest chasms, suspended motionless in mid-air" (*V* 181-82). As he walks past the Plätt, he spots a burned "black sawmill" that reminds him of the "huge fire that lit up the whole of the valley" (*V* 182-83). Before entering W., the narrator gazes at a barren land, reminded of the gypsy camp that was once there, where the survivors settled after the war. During the narrator's journey, almost all of his immediate experience is connected to a catastrophic event.

These instances highlight the fact that the landscapes in Sebald's writing transcend mere physical experience. Through the narrator's imagination, Sebald's literary agenda reveals the nonsensuous similarities between immediate experiences and the immanent "substance" or "essence" (Bewes, "Literary Landscape" 66). The "substance," in a historical sense, encompasses the history of destruction. As the narrator wanders through the wilderness, he discerns the nonsensuous similarities that associate the experience with different historical events, particularly the traumatic ones. Thus, the landscapes in Sebald's writing serve as a reference point, revealing the parallels between apocalyptic events throughout history and hinting at the inevitability of the return of destruction.

In addition to uncovering the similarities between different time frames, these wanderings also unveil the alignment between human history and natural history. The traumatic events

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recalled by the narrator encompass both natural disasters, such as landslides, as well as human disasters such as war. These passages not only blur the distinction between past and present but also highlight the interconnectedness between humans and nature. Thereby, the literary landscape reveals the profound parallels between human experiences and the forces of nature.

The Extraordinary in Ordinary Things: Nonsensuous Similarities between Personal History and Impersonal History

Apart from the literary landscapes, Sebald's writing also "illustrates how the nightmarish qualities of some familiar and mundane experiences can be showcased convincingly, and everyday reality can be presented as horrifying in its absurdity" (McCulloh 93). Sebald's novelistic agenda showcases that the extraordinary can also be found in prosaic experiences. For example, at Santa Lucia station, the narrator experiences a disorderly situation where the crowd of people at the buffet is described as "swaying like a field of corn in the wind, passing in and out of the doors, pushing against the food counter, and surging on to the cashiers who sat some way off their elevated posts" (*V* 66). The chaotic situation and the travelers who are eager to secure a ticket at the train station are compared to something else. The narrator compares the station to a cornfield, portraying the travelers as resembling corn being carried away by the wind, unable to decide their own destiny. This comparison underscores how modern human activities can mirror the natural world, dehumanizing the crowd of travelers and revealing nonsensuous similarities between the human world and nature, as well as between the human and nonhuman realms.

Furthermore, the disarrayed station is described as resembling "an infernal upheaval." The narrator says:

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> If one did not have a ticket, one had to shout up to these enthroned women, who, clad only in the thinnest of overalls, with curled-up hair and half-lowered gaze, appeared to float, quite unaffected by the general commotion, above the heads of the supplicants and would pick out at random one of the pleas emerging from this crossfire of voices, repeat it over the uproar with a loud bending down a little, indulgent and at the same time disdainful, hand over the ticket together with the change. Once in possession of this scrap of paper, which had by now come to seem a matter of life and death, one had to fight one's way out of the crowd and across to the middle of the cafeteria, where the male employees of this awesome gastronomic establishment, positioned behind a circular food counter, faced the jostling masses with withering contempt, performing their duties in an unperturbed manner which, given the prevailing panic, gave an impression of a film in slow motion. (*V* 66-67)

The passengers are anxious to get their tickets and food while the staff seems to be greater than those passengers. The narrator continues to describe that the staff "resemble[s] some strange company of higher beings sitting in judgment, under the rules of an obscure system, on the endemic greed of a corrupted species" (*V* 67). Then, when the narrator's cappuccino is served in Santa Lucia station, he suddenly feels that he sees a scene of total destruction:

> I surveyed the scene and immediately saw my mistake, for the people around me now looked like a circle of severed heads. I should not have been surprised, and indeed it would have seemed justified, even as I expired, if one of the white-breasted waiters had swept those severed heads, my own not expected, off the

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> smooth marble top into a knacker's pit, since every single one of them was intent on gorging itself to the last. (*V* 68)

Though not explicitly stated, the chaotic scene at Santa Lucia station bears resemblance to the infernal landscape depicted in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, with the narrator's misrecognition of a passerby as Dante serving as foreshadowing. The staff in the station holds the power to determine the fate of the passengers, echoing the role of Minos in Dante's work, who sorts the sinners into different circles of the Inferno. When Dante wrote *The Divine Comedy* around 1300, he was exiled from Florence and prosecuted under the political and religious conflict in Italy. Thus, in *The Divine Comedy*, Dante expresses his own belief in Christian doctrine, his criticism of political propaganda, his moral judgment, and the socio-historical condition of Italy of his time. Moreover, Dante's interweaving of different historical figures and their stories suspends temporal constraints, showing the recurring pattern in human events. As *The Divine Comedy* serves as an allegory of human history's destructive tendencies, the nonsensuous similarities between the scene in Santa Lucia station and *The Divine Comedy* hint that *Vertigo* can be interpreted as the modern rendition of Dante's work, documenting the history of human destruction. By referencing *The Divine Comedy*, Sebald transforms *Vertigo* into a contemporary version of Dante's epic, linking individual experiences to collective human history, and critiquing the cyclic nature of human destructiveness.

Apart from the scene in Santa Lucia, *Vertigo* presents numerous instances of associating mundane objects with traumatic memories, both collective and individual. The descriptions of objects in Sebald's novels, such as "photographs, chance encounters, architectural spaces, and obscure objects" offer the reader an "alternative to cultural memories that are dictated solely through the search for coherent national and individual memories" (Remmler 47). Sebald's

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writing recalls not only collective trauma but also individual memories, uncovering the nonsensuous similarities between the personal and the impersonal and unveiling how individual history is aligned with collective history. This writing technique is particularly significant in "Il ritorno in patria," where the narrator returns to his homeland. As the narrator recollects, though the furniture in the Engelwirt, the inn where it once was the home of the narrator, has been relocated, he can still vividly recall the room's original appearance. The room, the narrator says, is adorned with pieces his parents purchased in 1936, triggering the narrator's childhood memories. He recalls that in 1938, amidst the tumultuous end of the Weimar era, his father was "enlisted in the so-called army of the One Hundred Thousand" (*V* 193). Also, the narrator reflects on how the furnishing style of the living room reflected their social status:

> For my parents, both of whom came from provincial backwaters, . . . the acquisition of living room furniture befitting their station, which, as the unwritten rule required, had to conform in every detail with the tastes of the average couple representative of the emerging classless society, probably marked the moment when, in the wake of their in some respects rather difficult early lives, it must have seemed to them if there were, after all, something like a higher justice. (*V* 193)

While these everyday objects trigger the narrator's personal memories on the surface, they also serve as fragments of collective memories reflecting the socio-historical conditions of his childhood. Thus, the narrator's recollections encompass not only his own memory but also the collective memory, blurring the distinction between the personal and impersonal. There are even more instances of recollecting personal memories from the narrator's modern experience when he strolls around W. For example, as he sees the "Seelos house, where the Ambrose family

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lived" across the street from the Engelwird inn, the narrator starts to recall the family history of Ambrose: "The Ambroses had come to W. during the last century from Imst in the Tyrol, and whenever there was fault to be found with them, they were still referred to as the Tyroleans" (*V* 199). The narrator then starts to recall the story of each member of the family in his memory. He tells the story of Baptist, who "died of a stroke . . . in his workplace." He tells the story of Seelos Lena, who delivered an infant that "lived for only a week." He tells the story of the entire family climbing up to the Salttl to "watch the enormous fire blazing into the sky and lighting from below the pall of smoke drifting a long way out" when the sawmill burned. He tells the story of Uncle Peter, the wheelwright who escaped from the hospital in Pfronten and left a note that informs the doctor that he had gone to the Tyrol (*V* 200-04).

Afterward, when the narrator visits Lukas, the last member of the Seelos family who still lives in W., and learns about the fate of other family members, Lukas recounts a series of tragedies: The mother of Uncle Peter died soon after Uncle Peter disappeared in the Tyrol; Aunt Babett and Bina died on the same day; Lena and her husband were killed in a car accident in America; Mathild died due to her old age (*V* 210-12). After telling the narrator of his family stories in which everyone is deceased, Lukas tells the narrator that "it [is] his own turn" to "[bring] to an end" of "his chronicle of the Ambrose family" (*V* 212). As argued earlier, personal memories intertwine with collective history, blurring the distinction between personal and impersonal. In this regard, the Seelos family can be interpreted as a microcosm of human history where everything is ordained to death.

When the narrator meets Lukas for the second time, they go up to an attic, where various random old objects are stored. These objects, as the narrator describes, are "tokens of the slow disintegration of all material forms in the complete silence of this attic" (*V* 223-24). Despite their

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mundane nature, the narrator perceives these items as symbols of gradual destruction since these objects are either old or decayed. As the narrator gazes at these objects, he starts to recall memories attached to the objects. For example, when the narrator finds a collection of literary works owned by Mathild, he is reminded that Mathild "entered the convent of the Englische Fräulein" before the First World War, and Lukas recalls the time when Mathild returned to W. during "the time of the ill-fated Red Republic" (*V* 226). When the narrator inspects an "old tailor's dummy," he suspects that the "pike-grey breeches and a pike-grey jacket" belongs "to one of the Austrian *chasseurs* who [fights] against the French as irregulars around 1800," and Lukas starts to explain that one of his ancestors participated in the Battle of Marengo and was killed in the war (*V* 227-28). In spite of their ordinariness, these items, as the narrator imagines, evoke not only his personal memories but also collective memories of wars and destruction, highlighting the intertwined nature of history and present, personal and impersonal.

In brief, the narrator discerns the nonsensuous similarities between ordinary objects and their historical significance, whether personal or impersonal. From the Santa Lucia station, the Engelwirt inn, the story of the Seelos family, to the attic filled with old relics of the Seelos family, Sebald explores how an ordinary object can evoke memories through the narrator's imagination. While these memories reflect both the collective cultural and social status of the past, the remembrance of personal memories also commemorates the collective traumatic memory, emphasizing the interconnection of personal history and impersonal history.

The Literary Ghosts: Nonsensuous Similarities with Stendhal and Franz Kafka

In addition to Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, Sebald's engagement with other literary canons, particularly focusing on Stendhal (Beyle) and Franz Kafka, reveals his attempt to discern

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nonsensuous similarities between past and present. These two literary figures profoundly influence Sebald and his narrator. Based on the images of Stendhal and Kafka, Sebald creates two fictionalized biographies of Beyle and Dr K. The resemblances between Sebald's fictional characters and their prototypes are multifaceted. Firstly, the names of Sebald's characters, Beyle and Dr K., directly echo Stendhal and Kafka. Beyle's full name, Marie Henri Beyle, mirrors Stendhal's birthname as the letter "K" not only serves as the acronym for Kafka but also appears as a name frequently used by Kafka in his works. For example, the protagonist of *The Trial* is Josef K., and in *The Castle*, the character is known simply as K.

Moreover, the stories of Beyle and Dr K. align with the biographies of Stendhal and Kafka. Both Beyle and Stendhal participate in Napoleon's parade in 1800; both Beyle and Stendhal suffer from syphilis; both Beyle and Stendhal use "crystallisation" as "an allegory for the growth of love" (*V* 26). Instances of resemblances between Beyle and Stendhal continue at length. Similarly, in "Dr K, Takes the Waters at Riva," Dr K.'s experiences parallel those of Kafka's, as "Sebald's reconstruction of Dr K.'s experiences during this journey draws on remarks in Kafka's letters and diaries" (Klebes 133). This affinity is further emphasized by the inclusion of an actual photograph of Kafka alongside Albert Ehrenstein, Otto Pick, and Lise Kanelson in an amusement park, appearing at the beginning of Dr K.'s section. With these correspondences, when Sebald references Beyle and Dr K., Sebald directly alludes to his literary precursors—Stendhal and Kafka. This section will delve into the influence of Stendhal and Kafka from "Beyle, or Love is a Madness Most Discreet" and "Dr K. Takes the Water at Riva," examining how the two literary precursors converge with Sebald's narrator. In unraveling this connection that bridges Stendhal, Kafka, and Sebald, the section will first explore how Sebald intricately weaves the narrator and the two literary figures into the narrative with the help of

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nonsensuous similarities. Subsequently, after unraveling these connections, this section will shed light on how Sebald explores the coexistence of past and present.

As the primary figure in the opening chapter, the motif and image of Beyle, modeled after the French writer Stendhal, permeates the entire novel, and Sebald's narrator shares some similar traits of Beyle. The first chapter of the novel, titled "Beyle, or Love is a Madness Most Discreet," documents various episodes of Beyle's life, spanning his journey across the Great St Bernard pass in the year 1800 with Napoleon's troop to his death after writing "his great novels between 1829 and 1842, plagued constantly by the symptoms of syphilis" (*V* 29). Beyle's experiences in Italy, his romantic entanglements, visits to historical battlefields like Marengo, and travels with Mme Gherardi, seem unrelated to Sebald's narrator. Yet, subtle and unexplained parallels exist between Beyle and Sebald's narrator. For instance, they share similar travel routes and vertiginous experiences during their journeys. Although not overtly articulated, these similarities serve to merge the two figures, suggesting that Beyle exerts a profound influence on the narrator, shaping the decisions and narrative trajectory of both Sebald's protagonist and the novel itself.

The characteristics of Dr K. are mirrored in Sebald's narrator as well. The most notable example is the travel route that coincidentally overlaps with Dr K.'s (and also with Beyle's)—from Vienna to Venice, Verona, and finally to Riva, where Kafka's short story "The Hunter Gracchus" takes place. Beyond the shared route, additional coincidences exist between the narrator and Dr K. For example, while the narrator reads Grillparzer's *Italian Diary* in Vienna, Dr K. encounters Grillparzer in person at the Hotel Matschakerhof. At the dining table, Grillparzer, "a man now so ancient that he has almost faded away" sits beside Dr K., almost ethereal in presence (*V* 142). Another shared experience is the encounter with Pisanello's

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artwork during their respective trips. Despite viewing the same painting from the same artist, the narrator and Dr K. have distinct emotional responses. While Sebald's narrator marvels at the egalitarianism of every subject in Pisanello's painting, the painting leaves Dr K. with the impression of "a mirroring effect he was familiar with from his dreams, in which everything was forever splitting and multiplying, over and again, in the most terrifying manner" (*V* 149). Even though their experiences are different, Sebald conjoins two characters with a coincidence of their experiences—Pisanello. With the painting, this rendezvous experience unites the narrator and Dr K.

During the narrator's bus ride to Riva, another occurrence that associates Sebald's narrator and Kafka occurs. Here, the narrator encounters twin boys who bear "the most uncanny resemblance imaginable to pictures of Franz Kafka." This encounter induces a "vertiginous feeling" that comes "over [him] as it used to in [his] childhood" (*V* 88-89). The twins, resembling Kafka, blur the timeline, making the narrator unable to distinguish his whereabouts. Is he on a bus to Riva in 1980, transported back to his childhood, or to the days when Kafka was a schoolboy? Despite the apparent setting of the bus ride in 1980, different timelines overlap when the narrator encounters the twins. This coincidence and similarity illustrate the coexistence of past experiences, history, and the present, further strengthening the link between Sebald's narrator and Dr K.

The motifs of Gracchus, the protagonist of Kafka's short story "The Hunter Gracchus," also permeate the narrative of *Vertigo*. Toward the end of the chapter "Dr K. Takes the Water at Riva," Sebald briefly summarizes Gracchus's life, detailing the reason behind his endless voyage on the ocean due to a navigational error:

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> [H]e went in pursuit of a chamois and fell to his death from the face of a mountain; and that because of a wrong turn of the tiller, a moment of inattention on the part of the helmsman, distracted by the beauty of the huntsman's dark green country, the barque which was to have ferried him to the shore beyond failed to make the crossing, so that he, Gracchus, has been voyaging the seas of the world ever since, without respite, as he says, attempting now here and now there to make land. (*V* 165)

Gracchus's fate is altered by an error that prevents him from landing. In his never-ending voyage, he makes several futile attempts to make land and amends the mistake. Yet, since his fate is predetermined, Gracchus is unable to break away from it, destined to wander across the ocean eternally and aimlessly. Gracchus's story begins with his arrival at the port of Riva, where he tells his tale to the mayor. Coincidentally, both Sebald's narrator and Dr K. have been to Riva as well, which creates an obscure linkage between the narrator, Dr K., and Gracchus. In light of this, several critics argue that the motif of Gracchus permeates the novel in the course of its development. Eric L. Santner notes that "the constrained agitation of such mental activity" resulted from Gracchus's inability to make land "transforms the narrator himself into a kind of Gracchus figure" since both figures attempt to get away from a difficult situation in their lives and wander around (118).

The motif of Gracchus is reinforced through recurring imagery of boats, seasickness, and water throughout the novel. One night, when the narrator returns to the bar on the Riva, he takes a Venetian's boat, marveling at the "lights of the Mestre refineries stretching for miles along the coast" (*V* 61). The narrator's act of marveling at the coast "as though it were a celestial city" resembles Gracchus's, whose eagerness to make land makes him gaze at the coast in wonder all

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the time. Similarly, in a pizzeria in Verona, when the narrator dines at a horrible restaurant that leaves a "disreputable impression" on him, he describes his horrible experience as similar to seasickness. The restaurant, by his imagination, becomes a boat that nauseates the narrator:

> The decor of the floor and walls was a hideous marine blue which put an end to all hope I might have entertained of ever seeing dry land again. The sense of being wholly surrounded by water was rendered complete by a sea piece that hung right below the ceiling opposite me, in a frame painted a golden bronze. As is commonly the case with such sea pieces, it showed a ship, on the crest of a turquoise wave crowned with snow-white foam, about to plunge into the yawning depths that gaped beneath her bows. Plainly this was the moment immediately before a disaster. A mounting sense of unease took possession of me. I was obliged to push aside the plate, barely half of the pizza eaten, and grip the table edge, as a seasick man might grip a ship's rail. (*V* 77)

The imagery of a boat and sailing further conjoins the narrator and the Hunter Gracchus. Similarly to the narrator, Dr K.'s story is filled with motifs and imagery of sailing, ocean, or water. For example, during his stay in Riva, he "spends three weeks in Riva at Dr von Hartungen's hydropathic establishment" and "immerse[s] himself entirely in quiet and tranquility" in the water and his room at Riva is around the lake where he can "gaze[] out over the lake, serenely peaceful in the gathering darkness" (*V* 155). Or, when the girl from Genoa, who sits beside him at the dining table of the sanatorium, leaves Riva, Dr K. sends her off on a seaming ship. All these coincidences of experiences, again, connect the narrator, Dr K., and Gracchus. In Russell J. A. Kilbourn's investigation of the intertextuality between Sebald and Kafka, he argues that as "the nautical imagery [of the Hunter Gracchus] merges with the

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depiction of the narrator's nomadic and alienated existence, his [Sebald's narrator's] subjectivity (voice, point of view) increasingly overlaps with that of the Hunter Gracchus" ("Kafka" 46). As similar imagery recurs in the novel, Sebald stitches his narrator, Hunter Gracchus, and Dr K. with these motifs.

These recurring themes are subtle; yet, they play vital roles in connecting these figures, allowing the reader to associate these figures with one another. These motifs can be read as the nonsensuous similarities that conjoin different figures and at the same time, blur the distinction between history and the present. Since Sebald's narrator embodies modernity while Dr K. and Gracchus embody history and products of cultural heritage, these motifs can thereby be read as the junctures which express a parallel of history and the present. In a nutshell, the coincidental experiences between Sebald's narrator, Stendhal, Beyle, Kafka, and Dr K draw a mystical yet intricate connection that exquisitely conjoins them into one, showing the parallel between past and present, fictional and truthful.

Never-Ending Quests

The similarities between Sebald's narrator, Stendhal (Beyle), and Kafka (Dr K.) extend beyond just the recurring motifs. They also share similar behavioral patterns. These characters repeatedly return to certain places in search of something yet their endeavors are always fruitless. Beyle's story features two types of returns. Firstly, he constantly revisits places associated with traumatic or destructive memories and events. Secondly, he returns to seek pleasure, but every attempt ends up in vain. A notable example of returning to a traumatic place occurs when Beyle revisits the site of the Battle of Marengo. He undergoes a sense of vertigo as he confronts the once chaotic and violent battlefield, which becomes serene and quiet upon his return:

doi:10.6342/NTU202401671

> The difference between the images of the battle which he had in his head and what he now saw before him as evidence that the battle had in fact taken place occasioned in him a vertiginous sense of confusion such as he had never previously experienced. (*V* 17)

When passing by the battlefield of the Battle of Marengo that takes place in 1800, Beyle finds it perplexing that the landscape before him is completely different from what it was a year earlier. The plain, where thousands of lives were taken, is described as demolished and silent with "few start trees, and saw, scattered over a vast area . . . bleached and shining with dew" (*V* 17). Although the immediate experience for Beyle is of a barren land, his mind and experiences mediate the image of the battlefield, connecting it to the chaotic event. Through Beyle's perspective, the two vastly different experiences and events collide and coexist. This occurrence holds a dual significance. On one hand, it underscores that even though a historical event has concluded, its memory can persist. On the other hand, the resurgence of memories in Beyle's mind suggests the potential return of historical events, akin to the vertiginous confusion he experiences, which is almost as devastating as the battle itself.

Another instance of returning to the same space occurs at the opera, where Beyle attempts to seek pleasure. Upon his initial arrival in Ivrea, Beyle attends a performance of *Il Matrimonio Segreto*, an opera by Domenico Cimarosa, feeling moved as "his heart stirred" and tears [comes] repeatedly to his eyes" (*V 9*). Much to his dismay, when Beyle returns to see the opera again at La Scala a few months later, he experiences a completely different sensation:

> Indeed, he was now so far removed from it all that the music well-nigh broke his heart. The thunderous applause which shook the opera house at the close of the performance struck him as the final act in a process of destruction, like the

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> crackling caused by a tremendous conflagration, and for a long time he remained in his sear, numbed by his hope that the fire might consume him. (*V* 15)

Beyle returns to the opera in the hope to recapture the same ecstatic sensation. Much to his disappointment, despite the play being the same, and the setting and actress being perfect, he fails to evoke the same emotion, leading to a sense of disappointment.

The opera is not the sole instance of Beyle's failure to find pleasure. Love, in particular, is a subject Beyle is most eager to pursue. However, as far as Beyle tries, his attempts to quest for love are always unsuccessful. When Beyle first meets Angela Pietragrua, he instantly falls in love with her. Angela, however, only offers "the ugly young dragoon the occasional pitying look" (*V* 11-13). Eleven years later, when Beyle returns to Milan and "[plucks] up the courage to tell her of his exalted feelings," Angela is only "[s]omewhat discomfited by the passion of her unorthodox admirer" (*V* 13). Angela's response again marks Beyle's unsuccessful quest for love. Following his encounter with Angela, Beyle's romantic pursuits frequently end in disappointment. In Beyle's frustrated love affairs, a spiral of events emerges: he tirelessly seeks love, yet his attempts continuously fail to meet his expectations. Regardless of how earnestly Beyle tries to look for pleasure or salvation, he can never escape from the cycle of failure, disappointment, or destruction.

A similar pattern of recurrence of events can be observed in the story of Dr K. and Gracchus. In Verona, after admiring a painting by Pisanello which gives him a vertiginous effect, Dr K. seeks refuge in a cinema for a moment of salvation (*V* 150). the specific film Dr K. watches is not disclosed, Sebald's narrator speculates that Dr K. may have chosen a story of Balduin, as Dr K. sees a reflection of himself in the character—a *doppelgänger* he cannot escape from (*V* 151). Balduin's reflection in the mirror becomes a "ghostly shadow of his own

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restlessness" that Balduin tries to run away from (*V* 152). The narrator then reflects that Dr K. might have been moved by the story because the scenario of Balduin is somewhat similar to the conundrum Dr K. depicted in his short story "Description of a Struggle," where the protagonist is "in the most intimate and self-destructive of relationships" with his opponent (*V* 152). Both Balduin and the protagonist in "Description of a Struggle" strive to flee from their *doppelgänger*, but their efforts are futile. Though Balduin feels a moment of freedom as a pistol shot through his chest, he subsequently suffers a tragic demise, which suggests his inability to escape from his *doppelgänger*.

The theme of failure is shared by both Dr K. and the protagonist of his short story. In "The Hunter Gracchus," the titular character is also unable to escape from his fate. As mentioned, Gracchus is doomed to eternal damnation. The significance of Gracchus's story is that Gracchus's "indeterminate status" serves as an allegory for the futile struggle against fate (Klebes 126). Gracchus's failure to make land hints at the impossibility of human beings to seek salvation from the repetitive pattern of destruction. Sebald, by correlating Gracchus in both Dr K. and his narrator, illustrates that history, the present, and the natural rhythm of destruction are interrelated.

Sebald's narrator, similarly to Beyle and Dr K., also encounters the conundrum of the recurrence of destructive events and memories. His attempts to break away from such calamities always culminate in defeat. At the outset of his journeys, the narrator articulates his quest for connections between events:

> If the paths I had followed had been inked in, it would have seemed as though a man had kept trying out new tracks and connections over and over, only to be thwarted each time by the limitations of his reason, imagination or will-power,

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> and obliged to turn back again. My traversing of the city, often continuing for hours, thus had very clear bounds, and yet at no point did my incomprehensible behavior become apparent to me: that is to say, my continual walking and my reluctance to cross certain lines which were both invisible and, I presume, wholly arbitrary. (*V* 34)

In his seemingly aimless wanderings, he is in fact seeking connections between events while simultaneously attempting to transcend boundaries and become lost. The boundary can be interpreted as the repetition of similar events or the inescapable nature of the history of destruction. His efforts to break away suggest a quest for salvation or redemption from the recurrence of historical events. Nevertheless, as hard as he tries, the narrator remains unsuccessful as if there is a mysterious or transcendental force that prevents him from escaping (Bewes, "Literary Landscape" 84-85). His efforts always end up being unsuccessful.

In "All'estero," Sebald's narrator flees from Verona in 1980 since his journey turns out to be a disaster. Seven years later, however, he resumes his journey, retracing the same route "in order to probe [his] somewhat imprecise recollections of those fraught and hazardous days and perhaps record some of them" (*V* 81). After his wretched experience, Sebald's narrator returns to the same cities in search of redemption, only to find that his "attempt to escape the mortifying effects of the past fails" (Zilcosky 105). Similarly, in the last section of *Vertigo*, "Il ritorno in patria," The narrator decides to stop by his hometown W. where he "had not been since [his] childhood" after his stay at Verona, hoping to reclaim lost memories and discover new meanings. Nevertheless, the memories and images that come to his mind are all related to death, war, destruction, etc. Though he strives to escape from the influence of history and discover new

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meanings or salvations from modern experience, he witnesses the relentless resurgence of memories, which implies that in the repetitive pattern of history, no one can break away from it.

The Influence of The Literary Precursors

The influence of Sebald's literary precursors, Stendhal and Kafka, does not stop at shaping the characteristics of Sebald's fictional figures. Aside from the similitude of characteristics and themes among these figures, Sebald also adopts similar writing strategies to his predecessor in *Vertigo*. Stendhal and Kafka, as well as their works, stand out as the literary tradition that Sebald tries to imitate. James Chandler notes that the beginning of *Vertigo*, where Sebald reinvents Stendhal's memoir, shapes the narrative style of the novel:

> [T]he use of Stendhal as the starting point for the entire project should not be taken to be a matter of serendipity. . . . To appreciate the deep propriety of Sebald's framing of the first of his series of books by way of Stendhal's memoir, it helps to grasp the importance of a particular set of concepts informing Sebald's practice: impression, image, trace, layer, association, digression, and order or design. These concepts are everywhere important in what Sebald sets out to accomplish, and together they help to furnish the peculiar brand of "narrative" in his books. (247-48)

Sebald's narrator delves into Stendhal's writing style and technique in the first section, offering a reflection on Stendhal's work. Nonetheless, the first section of the novel is not merely an analysis of Stendhal's writing style. It is also the groundwork of Sebald's narrative strategy. Sebald intentionally and discreetly utilizes some narrative strategies in *Vertigo* that are similar to Stendhal's. In accordance, the significant traits of Stendhal's writing can also be identified in

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Sebald's novelistic intentions and his literary agenda in *Vertigo*. One example is the factual status of their writing. Both Stendhal's and Sebald's writings are travelogues that describe their journeys. In *De l'Amour* Beyle depicts a journey with an enigmatic lady, Mme Gherardi, with whom he shares his thoughts about love. Similarly, Sebald describes the encounters in his trips through Italy, Germany, and England in *Vertigo*. Their writings seem to be authentic. Yet, as Sebald's narrator remarks, Stendhal's writing might not be completely real:

> The leave he took in upper Italy after recovering was marked by a sensation of debility and quietude, which caused him to view the natural world around him, and the longing for love which he continued to feel, in a wholly new way. A curious lightness such as he had never known took hold of him, and it is the recollection of that lightness which informs the account he wrote seven years later of a journey that may have been wholly imaginary, made with a companion who may likewise have been a mere figment of his own mind. (*V* 23)

Sebald's narrator suspects the authenticity of Stendhal's writing. Specifically, Mme Gherardi's presence catches the narrator's attention. The narrator contends that though Beyle provides numerous "documentary evidence" for Mme Gherardi and his journey, the evidence is "merely a phantom" (*V* 22). Mme Gherardi's obscure existence causes the narrator to assume that she is a fictional figure who bears some resemblances to Stendhal's lovers in real life, blurring the fine line between the fictional and the real. A similar narrative strategy is applied by Sebald as well. Although he attempts to trick the reader into believing his writings are authentic, Sebald's writing is, after all, novelistic. Aside from this instance, Sebald's fertile engagement with his literary precursors is everywhere in *Vertigo*. In short, the nonsensuous similarities between Sebald, Stendhal, and Kafka are not only manifested in their characteristics but also in the form

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and style of literary writing. From several aspects, Sebald exhibits the mimetic faculty as he engages himself with different literary precursors. Simultaneously, Sebald places himself in the genealogy of literary history, showing how literary history can be found in his writing, and it indicates the historical significance of his writing. Instead of being a "misappropriation" or "literary exhibitionism," Sebald's inclusion of Stendhal and Kafka "contributes to the historical layering of his narratives" (Pearson 262). In other words, Sebald incorporates literary history into *Vertigo*, suggesting the coexistence of past and present and how traces of history are discovered in modern experiences.

Nonsensuous similarities are scattered everywhere in *Vertigo*. The similarities conflate past and present, fictional and truthful, showcasing that "[t]he modern is the site of an eternal present and inherently antique/obsolescent" in the form of novels (Crownshaw 218). Besides, the recurring theme of failure implies that similar historical events, particularly traumatic and destructive ones, persistently return to haunt the present. Even if one tries to seek salvation, the cycle of history of destruction or wars is inescapable and unavoidable. Sebald's narrator remarks the history of destruction when he wakes up in Verona on All Saints' Day:

> For some time now I have been convinced that it is out of this din that the life is being born which will come after us and will spell our gradual destruction, just as we have been gradually destroying what was there long before us. (*V* 63)

In his eyes, destruction is doomed to recur, and there is no possible way to escape from it.

doi:10.6342/NTU202401671

Chapter Four: Parataxis and Sentence-Images in *Vertigo*

As discussed in Chapter Three, a central theme of *Vertigo* is the exploration of nonsensuous similarities among various subjects. These similarities, however, as implied by their name, cannot be perceived through the senses alone and require a form of mediation for discernment. Then, a question arises: how does Sebald reveal the nonsensuous similarities to the reader? In Chapter Two, Jacques Rancière's theory of parataxis and sentence-images is introduced. This theory involves juxtaposing elements that appear dissimilar to create a silent speech that addresses implicit messages to the reader. In *Vertigo*, Sebald utilizes a similar narrative strategy. Though his narratives may appear digressive at times, he uses the technique of parataxis to bridge unrelated matters. This chapter will first identify some instances of sentence-images encountered by the narrator during his journeys. Then, the chapter will examine how these instances of sentence-image contribute to Sebald's narrative strategy and the overall structure of *Vertigo*. By analyzing these elements, the reader can uncover the nonsensuous similarities between different subjects or events in the text.

Sentence-Images in Art

Throughout his journeys, the narrator encounters various art pieces in different forms, and through the meticulous observation of the narrator, he discerns some artworks he encounters as instances of sentence-image. Though his reflections appear fragmented, the juxtaposition of different narratives and the observation of the narrator allow the reader to discern the silent speech expressed in the artwork. An exemplary instance of this is found in his description of Pisanello's painting. Here, Sebald masterfully showcases how an extraordinary artwork, such as

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Pisanello's painting, can be understood as an instance of sentence-image. The narrator notices that Pisanello's paintings not only narrate a single event or subject but also include other features. Although these features seem insignificant, in Sebald's eyes, they add extra layers of meaning to the artwork. The apparent subject of the painting forms what Rancière would call the "sentence" part while the other seemingly disruptive elements would be called the "image." As the painting *principessa* lays out everything in front of the spectator's eyes at once, it can be seen as an illustration of sentence-image. Sebald elaborates on the details of the painting:

> Then one sees St George setting off to fight the dragon, taking his leave of the *principessa.* All that remains in the left half of the painting is the somewhat faded monster and two as yet flightless young. Bones and skeletons of animals and humans sacrificed to placate the dragon lie strewn around. The vacancy into which the fragment dissolves still conveys something of the terror which, long ago, must have filled the people of the Palestinian city of Lydia according to the legend. The right portion of the fresco, the other principal part, is almost completely preserved. A landscape of a more northerly character rises (the word is suggested by the nature of the depiction) into a blue sky. A ship with billowing sails, making headway on an inlet, is the only element in the composition hinting at remoteness and distance; everything else is very much of the present and of this world, the undulating land, the sloughed fields, the hedgerows and hills, the city with its roofs, towers and battlements, and—a favorite motif at that time—the gallows with the hanged men from it, which paradoxically imparts something lifelike to the scene. (*V* 74-75)

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The narrator meticulously observes that Pisanello's painting *principessa*, ostensibly portraying a princess, extends beyond its primary subject. Aside from the princess, the narrator observes that Pisanello pays attention to the insignificant background features as well, suggesting that they are as equally important as the princess. From the castle, the sky, the mountain, to the animals, Pisanello treats them with care as each element contributes to the narrative complexity. The technique that allows all things "an equal and undiminished right to exist," is favored by the narrator (*V* 73). As the narrator observes, by way of parataxis, Pisanello grants equal significance to both foreground and background, allowing disparate narratives to coexist in an egalitarian way.

In particular, Pisanello's painting juxtaposes the cruel scene of a battle on one side and a resting dragon along with the corpses of humans and animals on the other. These images, despite bearing no apparent relationship, share the theme of destruction. On the one hand, it depicts the destruction of human beings and on the other, it depicts the natural destruction. Thus, through parataxis that conjoins dissimilar images, the painting discovers the nonsensuous similarities between the history of human destruction and natural destruction. In other words, through the narrator's contemplation, the nonsensuous similarities in the painting are brought to light, inviting the reader to delve deeper into its nuanced symbolism.

Cinema and films are also a medium through which the narrator discovers instances of Rancière's sentence-image. When the narrator enters the Engelwirt inn, he recalls that there was "a large function room" where films were screened every two weeks. The narrator proceeds to recount the plotlines of these films:

> Every fortnight the newsreel would be shown there and feature films such as *Pirtenliebe, Niccolò Paganini, Tomahawk* and *Mönche, Mädchen und Panduren*.

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> The cavalry irregulars referred to in this this last title could be seen charging through dappled birch woods; Indians rode across limitless plains; the crippled violinist reeled off a cadenza at the base of a prison wall while his companion field through the iron bars of his cell window; General Eisenhower, on his return from Korea, got out of an aeroplane, the propeller of which was still revolving slowly; a hunter whose chest had been torn open by a bear's paw staggered down into the valley; politicians were seen in front of the new parliament, climbing out of the back of a Volkswagen; and almost every week we saw the mountains of rubble in places like Berlin or Hamburg, which for a long time I did not associate with the destruction wrought in the closing years of the war, knowing nothing of it, but considered them a natural condition of all larger cities. (*V* 187)

The narrator catalogs the films watched during his childhood. While on the surface, he merely describes the films, the fact that they were all shown in the same room and their plots recounted without specific attribution to individual films becomes an instance of sentence-image collectively. The descriptive excess of these films conveys a deeper message to the reader through silent speech. Though the films depict different tragic events, they share a common theme of destruction, evoking melancholy tones. By juxtaposing the films that involve different tragic events, the narrator implicitly prompts the reader to ponder on the similitude between these stories. This silent speech, expressed through the collective sentence-image, resonates with Sebald's central message that all destructive events are inherently similar. Besides, as the narrator reflects that he considered the destruction of larger cities "a natural condition," he, again, underscores his observation that traumatic events often resurface repeatedly. In sum, this passage where the narrator recollects the films he watched in the old function room can be

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interpreted as an instance of Rancière's sentence-image that explores the interconnectedness of memory, history, and trauma.

Another instance of sentence-image is the newspapers. Throughout the narrator's journey, he reads newspapers on several occasions. However, the articles in the newspapers often bear no apparent relation to each other and the narrator's experience. Therefore, J. J. Long proposes to understand the newspapers in *Vertigo* as an approach to explore some generic conceptual ideas rather than providing any specific information about the narrator's journey (*Image, Archive, Modernity* 92). Newspapers, Long proceeds to explain, are "structured additively" since the "articles are discrete, decontextualised, detached and possess no necessary connections to each other beyond those imposed by the exigencies of layout" (93). The newspapers are a medium that collects different narratives and archives of memories, presenting them on the same surface. On the surface, the detailed description of the newspaper appears to be descriptive excess. Nonetheless, through the thoughtful observation of the narrator, Sebald shows the reader that the fragmented nature of the newspaper can construct a coherent meaning within the view of sentence-image.

During the narrator's second visit to Verona, he visits the Biblioteca Civica to read the old Verona newspapers from August and September 1913. He describes his reading experience as akin to "silent movie scenes" that "[begin] to be enacted before [his] eyes," implying the newspaper's ability to archive and evoke memories to its reader (*V* 118). As the narrator reads through the newspapers, he spontaneously associates the stories and advertisements in the newspaper with other events or memories via his imagination. Different images and stories capture his attention, with each piece of news or advertisement conjuring up a variety of memories or reflections. Upon reading a piece of news about Dr Ringger, he imagines himself

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standing in Via Alberto Mario, watching a group of gentlemen flocking into the house of Dr Ringger, who is in preparation for surgery and "a range of outsized pictorial reproductions of the inflorescences caused by diseases of the skin, spread out before him [Dr Ringger] on a huge table like the multicolored ordnance maps at a war council of the general staff" (*V* 119). Similarly, an advertisement for Dr Pesavento prompts the narrator to imagine witnessing a patient who appears sound and relaxed while her body looks twisted and agonized (*V* 119). When the narrator reads the news about the "Tyrolese missionary Giuseppe Ohrwalder," who was reported missing, he reflects on the socio-historical condition of 1913, saying that "1913 was a peculiar year":

> The times were changing, and the spark was racing along the fuse like an adder through the grass. Everywhere there were great effusions of feeling. The people were trying out a new role. The sacred and righteous wrath of the nation was invoked. (*V* 121)

The narrator puts special emphasis on the year 1913, a year prior to the First World War, saying that everything underwent drastic changes at the time. Associations related to death or destruction emerge as the narrator reads the newspaper.

These associations underscore two different merits of newspapers. Firstly, the intertwining of articles and images with memory or imagination accentuates the mnemonic function of newspapers, revealing how an immediate experience can be linked to past events. Secondly, the technique of parataxis aligns the newspaper alongside the narrator's reflections, forming an instance of sentence-image that produces a cohesive narrative from fragmented content. The reader can thus explore connections between articles, images, and the narrator's reflections. Thus, the historical perspective Sebald seeks to convey through the newspaper becomes a pertinent question. Given that memories associated with the newspaper often depict

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destruction or death, it conveys a recurring message—that history, war, and destruction follow a repetitive pattern. The newspaper in *Vertigo* presents a wide range of stories, guiding both the narrator and the reader in discerning nonsensuous similarities and conceptual links between each story, showing the newspaper's ability to relate "individual events and pieces of information to the wider whole" (Long, *Image, Archive, Modernity* 93). Thus, the passages of reading the newspapers can be discerned as an instance of sentence-image that prompts the reader to consider the relationship between the newspaper, a medium reflecting the socio-historical condition of the time, and the narrator's contemplation of the newspaper, where he reflects on other historical events. At the same time, he articulates his historical viewpoint that history, war, and destruction follow a repetitive pattern. In summary, the technique of parataxis facilitates the discovery of nonsensuous similarities in Sebald's novels as the instances of sentence-image prompt the reader to explore similar aspects between seemingly disparate events or subjects. He shows how a coherent message can be formed from the seemingly fragmented narrative with examples such as Pisanello's painting, the cinema, and the newspapers.

Parataxis as the Main Narrative Strategy of *Vertigo*

After exploring how the sentence-image produce silent speech that reveals the nonsensuous similarities, Sebald employs this technique extensively in his novelistic writing within *Vertigo*. He inserts images and narratives that appear irrelevant to craft instances of sentence-image that encourage the reader to discover the silent speeches within them. Essentially, Sebald makes parataxis a central narrative technique in *Vertigo*, transforming the novel into a collection of sentence-images where the silent speech revealing nonsensuous similarities between different subjects can be discerned.

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As mentioned, Sebald juxtaposes different narratives in *Vertigo* without providing explicit connections. These digressions seem to be the descriptive excess. Yet, they are vital in deciphering Sebald's intended message. The reader must unravel the mental connections and nonsensuous similarities among seemingly random alignment of narratives and images to understand the novel. Despite appearing digressive and disruptive, the narratives and images in *Vertigo* are all interrelated. For example, throughout the narrator's journey, he is consistently reminded of past events or memories that may not directly relate to the narrator's immediate present experience. However, by juxtaposing past events with the immediate present, Sebald induces the reader to contemplate the relationship between past and present.

One example of sentence-image in Sebald's novelistic writing is the inclusion of Giacomo Casanova's story in "All'estero." Casanova's tale seems irrelevant and deviant to the narrator's journey. While reading Grillparzer's Italian Diary, the narrator unexpectedly shifts focus to Casanova without providing clear justification for how his story fits into the broader narrative. Subsequently, after addressing Casanova's story, the narrative seamlessly returns to the evening conversation at the bar on the Riva without Casanova's tale disrupting the flow. The omission of this episode would not disturb the narrative flow. Moreover, the narrator is entirely absent from Casanova's story, rendering it independent of the narrator's account of his experience. Nevertheless, this digression enriches the narrative by offering additional background information about the history of Venice and its traumatic past. Casanova's story of persecution, imprisonment, and jailbreak urges the reader to explore the connection between Casanova's personal story and other details in the narrator's journey in Venice.

The inclusion of Casanova's tale also strengthens the similarity and intertextuality between Casanova and the prominent motif of *Vertigo*, Kafka. On the surface, Casanova's tale

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appears unrelated to the journey of Sebald's narrator or Kafka's Gracchus and Josef K. Yet, Daniel L. Medin notes that Casanova's story is analogous to Kafka's characters Gracchus and Josef K. from *The Trial* as these figures face prosecution in different forms:

> Casanova's story is a historical example of brute power masquerading as justice; Josef K.'s an existential one. The arrest of both characters raises questions regarding punishment and the law—hence Sebald's attentiveness to instances of *Verbrechen* (crime) in the chapter. Gracchus too is harshly sentenced for having taken a wrong turn. (107)

Despite their disparate circumstances and historical origins, all these figures endure persecution. Sebald views their experiences through the lens of nonsensuous similarity. Rather than explicitly elucidating the connections between Casanova, the narrator's journey, and Kafka, Sebald merely juxtaposes them. Through the technique of parataxis, Sebald creates sentence-images, inviting the reader to uncover the silent speech behind these juxtapositions—the nonsensuous similarities among these figures. In this case, the silent speech within the sentence-image mirrors the nonsensuous similarities shared by all these figures, enabling the reader to discover their interconnectedness. The inclusion of Casanova's story thus forges a relationship between these different figures from both history and present, reality and fiction, thereby revealing the collision of history and the present. Similar instances of seemingly irrelevant insertions in the narrator's journey can be found throughout the novel, each revealing nonsensuous similarities and junctures among various elements.

The technique of parataxis is not found merely in the narrator's journey. The structure of *Vertigo* is itself a product of sentence-image. Though the novel is often categorized as a travelogue that recounts the narrator's trips, the first and third sections of the novel, "Beyle, or

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Love is a Madness Most Discreet," and "Dr. K. Takes the Waters at Riva," appear irrelevant to the narrator's trip. However, by utilizing the technique of parataxis, Sebald transform the novel into a sentence-image that spurs the reader to link Beyle's and Dr K.'s stories to the narrator's travelogue. As discussed in Chapter Three, nonsensuous similarities exist between Sebald's fictional figures, revealed through the technique of parataxis. This narrative strategy permeates *Vertigo*, compelling the reader to contemplate potential connections between various historical events and figures, thereby revealing the recurring and inevitable patterns of history. Sebald's deliberate choice of using Rancière's theory of parataxis as his main writing strategy can also be considered his attempt to advocate egalitarianism. As explained in Chapter Two, the core value of Rancière's theory of parataxis is to grant every being an equal right to exist. Similarly, in *Vertigo*, Sebald's thematic concern is to find the juncture of all things, which coincidentally aligns with the principal matter of Rancière's. To briefly conclude, Jacques Rancière's theories of parataxis and sentence-images offer valuable insights into deciphering the fragmented and erratic narrative of *Vertigo*. Sebald's narrative is far from arbitrary or meaningless; rather, his meticulous employment of narrative techniques illuminates the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman, individual and collective experiences, as well as the continuum between history and the present.

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Conclusion

Throughout *Vertigo*, the parataxis of different tragedies creates sentence-images that reveal the nonsensuous similarities between different kinds of disastrous events, whether they are personal or impersonal, natural, or artificial. With this technique, Sebald diminishes the distinction between seemingly disparate subjects, uncovering the juncture of all things and the inevitable nature of the history of destruction. In the concluding episodes of *Vertigo*, Sebald's adept use of parataxis becomes particularly pronounced. As the narrator's stay in W. draws to a close, various memories involving death or mass destruction flood his consciousness. These recollections span from personal childhood experiences to mythical narratives like that of Noah, and even encompass historical calamities such as the black death or the flame that ravaged W. The relentless resurgence of these traumatic memories leads the narrator to a chilling realization: disastrous events are inescapable and destined to recur in various guises. Unable to retrieve salvation from W., the narrator retreats to London, where a sense of numbness pervades him:

> The following day, after changing several times and spending lengthy periods waiting on the platforms of draughty provincial stations – I cannot remember anything about this journey. . . . Everything appeared to be appeased and numbed in some sinister way, and this sense of numbness soon came over me also. (*V* 253)

Nonetheless, the narrator still attempts to seek a way out of the repetitive nature of destruction after he goes back to London. While leaving the National Gallery, the narrator resists following the same route he usually follows. Instead, he "negotiate[s] the labyrinth of smaller streets above these busy thoroughfares" as if he is trying to break away from a routine or a mystical power that dominates him. However, his efforts prove to be in vain. As he reaches "the western perimeter of

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the City," he realizes that he "cannot have covered much more than three miles" (*V* 258). Despite his attempt to break away from routine by navigating unfamiliar streets, he finds himself inexorably drawn back to familiar territory as he ends up in an underground station that he always passes by "on [his] frequently journeys by tube" (*V* 259). This futile struggle against the repetitive cycle of destruction underscores Sebald's thematic exploration of the inexorable nature of the history of destruction.

Prompted by a desire to flee the atrocious resurfacing of traumatic memories, the narrator embarks on a final train journey, seeking solace in the tranquility of the countryside. However, this escape proves to be illusory, as the train ride only serves to reinforce the somber truths that Sebald has subtly woven throughout the narrative. As he immerses himself in Samuel Pepys's diary during the journey, the narrator involuntarily dreams of a procession of haunting images, each reminding him of the inescapable cycle of devastation that haunts both past and present.

> Idly I turned the pages of an India paper edition of Samuel Pepy's diary, Everyman's Library, 1913, which I had purchased that afternoon, . . . until drowsiness overcame me and I found myself going over the same few lines again and again without any notion what they meant. And then I dreamed that I was walking through a mountainous terrain. . . . I recognised in my dream as the Alps. Everything I saw from up there was of the same chalky colour, a bright, glaring grey in which a myriad of quartz fragments glimmered, as if the rocks, by a force deep inside them, were being dissolved into radiant light. . . . The silence was absolute, for even the last traces of plant life, the last rustling leaf or strip of bark, were long gone, and only the stones lay unmoved upon on the ground. (*V* 261-62)

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Falling asleep after reading Samuel Pepy's diary, the narrator is plunged into a nightmarish vision of the Alps. Far from the idyllic landscapes one might expect, the scene is shrouded in bleakness and despair. On the narrator's right side, there is a lofty mountain which he fears, and on the left, there is a chasm with "vertiginous depths" (*V* 262). Not a single trace of life is detected. The panorama of such natural devastation instills a profound sense of dread in the narrator's heart. Before the narrator recovers from the fright, the dream abruptly shifts to another catastrophe—the Great Fire of London:

> Into that breathless void, then, words returned to me as an echo that had almost faded away—fragments from the account of the Great Fire of London as recorded by Samuel Pepys. We saw the fire grow. It was not bright, it was a gruesome, evil, bloody flame, sweeping, before the wind, through all the City. (*V* 262)

As the narrator describes, the fire claims the lives of hundreds of pigeons, destroys churches and houses, and incites criminal acts such as burglary or grave robbery. The fire, as the most severe conflagration in the history of London, leaves the narrator to ponder whether it heralds the end of days.

> Is this the end of time? A muffled, fearful, thudding sound, moving, like waves, throughout the air. The powder house exploded. We flee onto the water. The glare around us everywhere, and yonder, before the darkened skies, in one great arc the jagged wall of fire. (*V* 262-63)

The juxtaposition of these two dreams, seemingly disparate in nature, serves to create a sentence-image that conjoins natural disasters with human calamities, revealing the nonsensuous similarities between humanity and the forces of nature. At the same time, the recurrence of different destructive events reminds the narrator that it is futile to seek escape from the cycle of

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destruction. The novel's final sentence, hinting at yet another cycle of disaster with "a silent rain of ashes, westward, as far as Windsor Park," extinguishes any hope of salvation from the relentless march of destruction (*V* 263).

Sebald's meticulous narrative construction invites the reader to discern the nonsensuous similarities between various forms of trauma, blurring the boundaries between human and natural disasters, past and present, allowing all things to coexist in an egalitarian fashion. *Vertigo* is not a novel that only seeks to represent the collective Jewish trauma of the Holocaust. It is a novel that unfolds the intricate connection between different historical events. As traumatic memories resurface with relentless persistence, the novel underscores the inescapable nature of destruction, urging contemplation on the interconnectedness of all things and the cyclical nature of calamity.

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doi:10.6342/NTU202401671