



The Photographic Metaphor: Heartfield, Brecht, Sebald¹

Ana Laguna Martínez²

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Abstract. From a semiotic point of view, photography is still considered a different kind of sign. Then, how can imagetext works be studied, formed by photography and word? This article argues that fictional texts expose the semiotic nature of photographs, showing that photographs are signs, different from their referents. The fictional, intermedial texts studied here are John Heartfield's, Bertolt Brecht's, and W.G. Sebald's: three authors linked by German history. In the light of Umberto Eco's semiotics, photographs can also be considered metaphors, enable to provide a new kind of iconicity and to overcome their realistic weight.

Keywords: photography; semiotics; Metaphor; Umberto Eco; John Hearfield; Bertolt Brecht; W.G. Sebald.

[es] La metáfora fotográfica: Heartfield, Brecht, Sebald

Resumen. Desde un punto de vista semiótico, la fotografía todavía se considera un tipo diferente de signo. Entonces, ¿cómo se pueden estudiar las obras de imagen y texto formadas por fotografía y palabra? Este artículo sostiene que los textos de ficción exponen la naturaleza semiótica de las fotografías, mostrando que las fotografías son signos que difieren de sus referentes. Los textos de ficción e intermediales aquí estudiados son los de John Heartfield, Bertolt Brecht y W.G. Sebald: tres autores vinculados por la historia de Alemania. A la luz de la semiótica de Umberto Eco, las fotografías también pueden considerarse metáforas, capaces de aportar un nuevo tipo de iconicidad y superar su peso realista.

Palabras clave: fotografía; semiótica; metáfora; Umberto Eco; John Hearfield; Bertolt Brecht; W.G. Sebald.

Sumario: 1. Introduction; 2. A semiotics' approach by Umberto Eco; 3. John Heartfield's photomontages; 4. Brecht's photo-epigrams; 5. W.G. Sebald's fictions; 5.1. Implicit metaphors and symbolic mode; 6. Conclusions; 7. Bibliography.

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² University of Granada
analaguna@ugr.es

1. Introduction

Das war ein Vorspiel nur, dort wo man Bücher
 Verbrennt, verbrennt man auch am Ende Menschen.³
 (A prelude only that. When men burn books,
 they will burn people in the end.)⁴

These verses, by Heinrich Heine's play *Almansor*, make up part of the memorial about the books burning in Bebelplatz on 10th May 1933. That day Bebelplatz was prepared with a wood scaffold and gasoline to burn books by un-German authors⁵ and, as it is known, "the 1933 book burnings in Nazi Germany foreshadowed the mass killings in the Nazi concentration and extermination camps"⁶. Although Heine's verses refer to another books fire, these seem to summarize what every books fire means and what has to be learned of them – humankind destruction. In short, these verses could be said to be indices of a certain state of affairs that can be interpreted as history signs.

This event was photographed in order to use its iconic representation as a symbol of the Nazi regimen⁷, and these pictures also serve as a proof of the historic event. This is also part of fictional literary works. The question is how historical events are recorded through both media: photography and literature. The intersection between these two media belongs to intermediality, according to Irina O. Rajewsky, who proposes a three-classification of intermediality for literary studies⁸. In a narrow sense, intermediality can consist of a medial transposition, a media combination, and intermedial references. This article will focus on the second kind – the intermedial combination – as was seen in the two representations of the books burning event above, that of photography and literature. The second kind focuses on the intermedial combination, defined as the combination of several "medial forms of articulation" in a distinct product in which each media is "present in their own materiality"⁹. The semiotic and visual nature of this event is the start point of this article, which analyses how the realistic ideology of photograph can be exposed in intermedial works compound by photographs and by fictional words.

The realistic ideology of photograph is here understood as the so-called "transparency of visual representation"¹⁰, that is to say, as indexical, iconic signs. This will be explored thorough using Umberto Eco's Semiotics. Eco¹¹ replaces the sign concept with that of sign-function, which correlates mutually expression's and content's functives; but this semiotic relationship happens between types, not

³ Heine, H., *Heinrich Heine, Historisch– Kritische Gesamtausgabe Der Werke. Hg. Von Manfred Windfuhr. Bd. 5: Almansor. William Ratcliff. Der Rabbi Von Bacherach. Aus Den Memoiren Des Herren Von Schnabelewopski. Florentinische Nächte. Bearbeitet Von Manfred Windfuhr*, Hamburg, Hoffmann und Campe, 1997, pp. 243-244.

⁴ Heine, H., *The Complete Poems of Heinrich Heine: A Modern English Version*, Trans. Hal Draper, Boston, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982, p. 187.

⁵ Fishburn, M., *Burning Books*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 31-34.

⁶ Bosmajian, H.A., *Burning Books*, Jefferson, N.C., McFarland, 2006, p. 18.

⁷ Fishburn, M., *Burning Books*, op. cit., p. 35.

⁸ Rajewsky, I.O., «Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality», *Intermedialities*, 6 (2005), pp. 43-64, doi:10.7202/1005505ar.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ Hutcheon, L., *The Politics of Postmodernism*, London, Routledge, 1991, p. 42.

¹¹ Eco, U., *A Theory of Semiotics*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1976, p. 49.

tokens¹². Types are the linguistic abstraction of tokens, which are real occurrences. Indeed, produced between types, this relationship is independent of the medium. This article will use Eco's Semiotics in order to analyse three German author's intermedial works. The first one is John Heartfield, who created photomontages about the Nazi regime and the Second World War using photographs and texts. His procedure was based on visual and linguistic metaphors. Secondly, Bertolt Brecht compounded his photo-epigrams, strongly influenced by Heartfield. Finally, W.G. Sebald inherited this image-text German tradition in a post-war time and postmodern one as well. In addition to metaphors, his works can be read by the sign production that Eco calls symbolic mode, for instance, the one that shows the books fire in Bebelplatz on 10th May 1933. These are the authors that this essay explores thorough and as can be seen, the image of the books burning will be the common thread.

Based on this analysis, the argument of this article is that fictional texts expose the semiotic nature of photographs by treating them as types, not as tokens. This means that photographs can overcome the knowledge of *certain* reality to allow a better knowledge of *historical* reality, as it happens with fictional texts and images. The first section revolves around Eco's semiotics, in order to define the nature of signs and sign-functions.

2. A semiotics' approach by Umberto Eco

As intermedial works are a "communicative-semiotic concept"¹³, Semiotics seems appropriate to study them. The question is in which way images and texts are different signs: can the same tools be used for studying both? Traditional linguistic semiotics has considered linguistic signs to be arbitrary¹⁴ and conventional¹⁵ ones, taking for granted that there were natural mimetic signs¹⁶. Although photographs are not considered transparent media but practices of representation that give meaning to the world like language does¹⁷, Semiotics goes on to be inefficient because this persists in adopting Barthes's¹⁸ considerations about photography as a different kind of sign: index and icon, in Peirce's¹⁹ terms. In this section, Eco's semiotics is proposed as an appropriate methodology to the study of intermedial works because Eco's notion of sign-function overcomes the special assumption of photography as index and icon.

In *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, Eco enumerates six uses of the concept of sign²⁰, overcoming Peirce's three-classification of icon, index and

¹² Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, London, Macmillan, 1984, p. 216.

¹³ Rajewsky, I.O., «Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality», op. cit., p. 52.

¹⁴ De Saussure, F., *Course in General Linguistics*, LaSalle, Ill., Open Court, 1983, p. 67.

¹⁵ Peirce, C.S., *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, Ed. Houser, N., and Kloesel, C.J.W., Project Peirce Edition, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1992, p. 9.

¹⁶ De Saussure, F., *Course in General Linguistics*, op. cit., p. 68.

¹⁷ Sturken, M. and Cartwright, L., *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, (3rd ed.), New York, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 18-19.

¹⁸ Barthes, R., «Rhetoric of the Image», in *Image, Music, Text*, London, Fontana, 1977, pp. 32-51.

¹⁹ Peirce, C.S., *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, op. cit.

²⁰ Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, op. cit., pp. 15-18.

symbol²¹. Eco's sign-function is based on an inferential mechanism ($p \supset q$)²², which is sustained by Peirce's key notion of interpretation: "all reasoning is an interpretation of signs"²³. Eco indeed shows that an operation of abduction to process signs is necessary, because "the understanding of signs is not a mere matter of recognition (of a stable equivalence); it is a matter of interpretation"²⁴, which requires hypothesizing a code.

According to Peirce, signs are in a causal relation to objects and interpretants. At the same time, Dynamic Objects – "the object outside the sign"²⁵ – determine Immediate objects – "the object as the sign represents it"²⁶. However, Eco seems to understand that the Dynamic-Immediate determination is not consistent with the implications of interpretation, and goes on to inverse this: "the form that we attribute to the Dynamic object is continuously changed through the formulation of Immediate objects and their constant redefinition by successive interpretants"²⁷. This inversion means that photographs, which are physical records of their Dynamic objects, also change the very nature of them by the act of being interpreted.

Eco states the physical relationship of photographs as imprints²⁸ but also overcomes Peirce's index's broad category with "projections", defined as the result of a transformation by the selection of points, therefore it is necessary to learn to recognize them, and they can be faked²⁹. On the other hand, Eco demonstrates that index is not a semiotic category but a scientific one. According to Eco, "(i)f there is a difference, it is not between linguistic and natural signs or between words and symptoms, but rather between semiotic and scientific inference, or between two kinds of certitude"³⁰. Unlike scientific certitudes, in semiotic sign-function between types the antecedent (expression) does not require the consequent. Moreover, Eco realizes that there are not only indices of the object (or of the context, using Jakobson's term) but of the sender. As will be seen, this has consequences to photograph.

At this point, Eco's semiotics differs from Barthes'³¹, which pivots on the third message as the distinctive feature of photograph. The third message is based on the necessary relation between signified and signifier due to the physical footprint of the object³². Conversely, Eco states that "someone could have produced the image of something that did not exist, had no existed, and will never exist. A photograph can lie"³³. Besides misunderstanding scientific and semiotic certitudes, the problem of Barthes' semiotics is that his notions of denotation and connotation imply that what signifies in photographs is the result of guilty effects, which take advantage of the

²¹ Peirce, C.S., *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, op. cit.

²² Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, op. cit.

²³ Peirce, C.S., *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, op. cit., p. 4.

²⁴ Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, op. cit., p. 43.

²⁵ Peirce, C.S., *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, op. cit., p. 480.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 482.

²⁷ Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, op. cit., p. 45.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 223.

²⁹ Eco, U., *A Theory of Semiotics*, op. cit., p. 204.

³⁰ Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, op. cit., p. 43.

³¹ Barthes, R., «The Photographic Message», in *Image, Music, Text*, London, Fontana, 1977, pp. 15-31.; Barthes, «Rhetoric of the Image», op. cit., pp. 32-51.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 34.

³³ Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, op. cit., p. 223.

pure natural meaning, “a message without a code”³⁴.

On the other hand, photographs have been considered the more perfect icon, which has ideological consequences since there is a tradition that regards likeness in a positive way, like St John of Damascus’ tradition in the Byzantine iconoclastic context. On the top of St John of Damascus’ ladder is the “natural” image, as it is “identical to its prototype”³⁵. Consequently, photographs seem to embody this kind of image and be superior as well³⁶, where the natural image takes root as “the fetish or idol of western culture”³⁷.

In *A Theory of Semiotics*, Eco suggests that what is understood as iconism obeys to a cultural convention, which is not a unique phenomenon³⁸. He goes on to suggest that “it is the very notion of sign which is untenable”³⁹, so when enumerating the meanings of sign, he shows the difficulty to maintain the pertinence of icons. While images are susceptible to resemble of their reference, when this resemblance is a distinctive element in the transmission of meaning is difficult to say. In other words, it is about when a pictogram becomes a symbolic ideogram going on to be iconic. In addition, it puts in doubt the pre-eminence of the pure denoted message of a photograph⁴⁰ as communicatively pertinent one in the way Barthes distinguishes ideograms and photographs⁴¹. In short, while Barthes⁴² called photographs a “perfect analogon” of their referent, Eco points out that “there is no absolute icon”⁴³, and explores through the differences between mirror images and photograph images.

After this summarize of Eco’s semiotics, this seems to be adequate to interpret every kind of sign – images of the books burning in Bebelplatz, Heine’s fictional quote, and intermedial works as well. The notions of index and icon that differentiated photographs seems to be overcome, and a definition of sign that allows the reading of both media – word and photograph – is achieved: sign-functions as inferential, linguistic relations between types. In the following sections, Heartfield’s, Brecht’s and Sebald’s works will be explored through using the concepts of metaphor and symbolic mode. As fictional works, these let proceed with the argument above suggested, that fictional texts expose the realistic weight of photographs.

3. John Heartfield’s photomontages

Although the term photomontage can refer in a wide sense to a set of practices existing before its adoption by the avant-garde, this starts to be practiced after the First World War by Berlin Dadaists and Russian Constructivist⁴⁴. John Heartfield belongs to the former. This section explores though some Heartfield’s photomontages as metaphors

³⁴ Barthes, U., «The Photographic Message», op. cit., p. 17.

³⁵ Downing, D.B., and Bazargan, S., *Image and Ideology in Modern/Postmodern Discourse*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1991, p. 12.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ Mitchell, W.J.T., *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2010, p. 90.

³⁸ Eco, U., *A Theory of Semiotics*, op. cit., pp. 191-217.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 216.

⁴⁰ Barthes, R., «Rhetoric of the Image», op. cit.

⁴¹ Barthes, R., «The Photographic Message», op. cit., p. 28.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 17.

⁴³ Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, op. cit., p. 213.

⁴⁴ Ades, D., *Photomontage*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1996.

in the cognitive sense that Eco exposes from Aristotle's *Poetics* as generating new content⁴⁵. For Aristotle, metaphors are the name of one object by other's name, by displacement or analogy. There are four kinds of metaphor that Eco⁴⁶ understands differently: while the first two are displacements from genus to species and from species to genus, the two last are truly displacements, between two species or by analogy. The third kind responds to the scheme $A/B=C/B$, while the last one is $A/B=C/D$ or $A/B=x/D$. These two are constructed by similar and dissimilar semes: in every system properties can be designed by the same interpretants, "verbal or not", though the properties are not perceived as similar⁴⁷.

This exploration of Heartfield's photomontages tries to show the cognitive value of metaphor as "knowledge of the dynamic of the real"⁴⁸, and the construction of reality by the semiotic-encyclopedic model pointed out by Eco: there is no literal sign but an infinite definition by other's interpretants' signs⁴⁹. This also leads to understand the ideological manipulation of reality, which consist of the use of one selected property as what makes the object known⁵⁰. This manipulation is especially important for photographs as the imposition of Barthes' third message⁵¹ is ideologically biased and do not let recognize how they construct reality.

A visual metaphor takes place in the photomontage "In diesem Zeichen will man euch verraten und verkaufen" ("In this sign shall you be betrayed and sold!")⁵², which shows a swastika made by coins between that sentence. The sign of the sentence is formed by two visual interpretants: one as form and another as content. Eco⁵³ proposes a semiotic analysis for metaphor that is used for this photomontage as follows (see tables 1 and 2):

/swastika/ >	F (Perceptual aspect of x)	A (Who or what produces x)	M (What x is made of)	P (What x is supposed to do or to serve for)
	The form of <i>this sign</i> Ideogram of Nazi regime	Nazi regime	Coins, genus of money (species)	To be betrayed and sold

Table 1. Analyse of the interpretant /swastika/ by Eco's methodology in *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*.

⁴⁵ Eco, U., *A Theory of Semiotics*, op. cit., p. 204; Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, op. cit.

⁴⁶ Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, op. cit., p. 91-96.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 113.

⁴⁸ Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, op. cit., p. 102.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 113.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 103.

⁵¹ Barthes, R., «Rhetoric of the Image», op. cit., p. 34.

⁵² Heartfield, J., *Photomontages of the Nazi Period*, New York, Universe Books, 1977, p. 42.

⁵³ Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, op. cit.

/coins/ >	F	A	M	P
	The content of <i>this sign</i> Genus of money (species)	Capital, money	Metal Debt	To be betrayed and sold

Table 2. Analyse of the interpretant /coins/ by Eco’s methodology in *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*.

The result of this recurring procedure is a new metaphorical sign in which the ideogram of Nazis is made by coins and therefore serves as treason exchange currency, while coins are genus of capital and Nazis as well. In a religious context, *this sign* collects the reference of the coins that Judas Iscariot used to betrayed Jesus to put Germans in the same place.

The photomontage “Der Sinn des Hitlergrusses” (“The meaning of the Hitler salute”)⁵⁴ shows that the Nazi salute is also the interpretant of the gesture of receive money by the back: gesture/Nazi salute=gesture/being bribed. The salute acquires another meaning – to be bribed – that is conventionalized by another iconic similitude: the performing of “the same function”⁵⁵. Indeed, the representation goes from what is seen – the salute as a Nazi gesture – to what is known – the salute as a bribe gesture⁵⁶. This metaphor makes evident a new sign-function in reality: “Nazi salute ⊃ to be bribed”, which changes the experience of the salute and modifies its interpretation by becoming a new convention (see table 3).

raise the arm	{ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (cont_{Nazi}) ----- d₁ salute ----- c₁ Nazi support - (cont_{photomontage}) { <ul style="list-style-type: none"> d₁ receiving money d₂ Nazi salute
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Table 3. Analyse of the significant |raise the arm| by the Semantic Model Reformulated (SMR) explained by Eco in *A Theory of Semiotics*.

Heartfield’s photomontages pose the question of why and how photographs make a difference in this kind of works. In any case, photographs could not be oblivious to the formulation of their times. As Heartfield purported to communicate a message referred to his historical and immediate situation, it could be thought that his works take advantage of the facility of the photograph to make recognizable the real referent. This is Berger’s point when stating that “the peculiar advantage of photo-montage lies in the fact that everything which has been cut out keeps its familiar photographic

⁵⁴ Heartfield, J., *Photomontages of the Nazi Period*, op. cit., p. 46.

⁵⁵ Eco, U., *A Theory of Semiotics*, op. cit., p. 208.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 207.

appearance. We are still looking first at things and only afterwards at symbols”⁵⁷.

However, Berger’s assessment does not point out the difference between photographs and drawings, but the fact that iconism is a matter of convention, not “between the image and its object but that between the image and a previously culturalized content”⁵⁸. Ades asserts that photomontages can easily imply the opposite of the intended meaning because “so narrow the dividing line between thesis and antithesis” is, using the example of “The Suicide’s Wish Fulfilment” by Heartfield⁵⁹. Indeed, what Ades sees as “a threat or liberation according to one’s prejudice”⁶⁰ is an image that can be defined by several interpretants – conventional contents – and whose context or circumstance does not make clear which is chosen.

Maybe Goebbel’s gesture in “Durch Licht zur Nacht” (“Through light to night”)⁶¹ could also be ambiguous. This photomontage shows the books fire in May 1933 with the text: „Also sprach Dr. Goebbels: Lasst uns aufs neue Brände Entfachen, auf dass die Verblendeten nicht erwachen!“⁶² (“Thus spake Dr. Goebbels: ‘Let us start new fires so that those who are blinded don’t awaken’”)⁶³. Conversely, the words that Goebbel is supposed to have said are “These flames do not only illuminate the final end of the old era, they also light up the new”⁶⁴. The fictional caption makes clear which is the fictional image’s meaning: fire is not antecedent of a new era, but of keeping people blind.

The procedures of connotation that Barthes⁶⁵ enumerates are presented with full right in photomontages. These procedures give up the “special credibility” of the third message in order to be a cognitive tool in front of reality. Indeed, the great achievement of photography – iconicity – results to be halfway between what is seen and what is known⁶⁶.

4. Brecht’s photo-epigrams

No wonder that Bertolt Brecht considered Heartfield as a classic⁶⁷ because his photomontages are alive in Brecht’s photo-epigrams. As this name indicates, photo-epigrams can be defined as a kind of epigram: a montage by a press or documentary picture and a quatrain, which compound his work *Kriegsfibel*⁶⁸. Although Brecht wrote about the ancient Greek epigrams in his *Journals*⁶⁹, the imagetext pattern of photo-epigrams cannot be reduced to a dual image-text relationship due to the multiplicity of paratext in the book and points of view in the poems⁷⁰. As Brecht’s

⁵⁷ Berger, J., *Selected Essays and Articles. The Look of Things*, Victoria, Australia, Penguin Books, 1972, p. 185.

⁵⁸ Eco, U., *A Theory of Semiotics*, op. cit., p. 204.

⁵⁹ Ades, D., *Photomontage*, op. cit., p. 50.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁶¹ Heartfield, J., *Photomontages of the Nazi Period*, op. cit., p. 52.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 143.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 121.

⁶⁴ Birchall, F., «Nazi Bookburning Fails to Stir Berlin», *New York Times* (1933), p. 2.

⁶⁵ Barthes, R., «The Photographic Message», op. cit., pp. 21-24.

⁶⁶ Eco, U., *A Theory of Semiotics*, op. cit., p. 207.

⁶⁷ Heartfield, J., *Photomontages of the Nazi Period*, op. cit., p. 2.

⁶⁸ Brecht, B., *Kriegsfibel*, Berlin, Eulenspiegel Verlag, 1955.

⁶⁹ Brecht, B., *Journals 1934-1955*, London, Bloomsbury, 2016, p. 40.

⁷⁰ Long, J.J., «Paratextual Profusion: Photography and Text in Bertolt Brecht’s War Primer», *Poetics Today*, 1, vol. 29 (2008), pp. 197-224, //doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2007-023.

imagetexts set different spatial configurations, image-text relationships are not reduced to photographs and poems. There are captions inscribed in the original press photo, translated into German in the previous page; there are also captions that were not in the press photo; there are other paratexts that remit to the pictures. Given the argument of this article, the key issue is the effect of compounding fictional poems in *Kriegsfibel*, however.

Brecht did not compound fictional pictures by montage, but moved documental photographs to a new context, and highlighted the indexicality – the real referent – of most photographs – twenty times he added captions, fulfilling the function of anchorage⁷¹, to determinate the physical referents of pictures. Their relationships with the poems, however, use similarities in order to reveal metaphors, formed by linguistic interpretants in the poems and visual interpretants in the photographs.

The 52th photo-epigram shows nine photographs of soldiers sleeping, mostly in holes on the ground. The poem says:

Die ihr hier liegen seht, gedeckt vom Kot
 Als lägen sie nun scho in ihren Gräbern, ach –
 Sie achlafen nur, sie sind nicht wirklich tot.
 Doch wären sie, nicht schlafend, auch nicht wach.⁷²
 (Those you see lying here, buried in mud
 As if they lay already in their grave –
 They're merely sleeping, are not really dead
 Yet, not asleep, would still not be awake).⁷³

Here there is a fourth-kind metaphor constructed with pictures and words: (photograph) sleeping soldiers / holes = (poem) dead soldiers / graves. The poem establishes a similitude between holes and graves: both are hollow spaces made by men in the ground, the first one to protect and the second one to be buried. On the other hand, sleeping soldiers and dead ones are lying because of the war and in order to win it.

This is not a mere similitude but a conceptual hybrid that gives the key about interpreting photographs. The last two verses present a paradox about the soldiers: they are not dead but they could not be awake. As they *seem to be dead*, their asleep state is a metaphorical interpretant in the place of a nameless one – A/B=x/D. There is a different state for war times: called as the alive one, is similar to be dead. This means that the key of the metaphor is not the referents of the photographs but the similarities that suggests.

The same procedure happens in a previous photo-epigram with the following caption: “A Japanese soldier’s skull is propped up on a burned out Jap tank by U.S. troops. Fire destroyed the rest of the corpse”. The poem is as follows:

O armer Yorick aus dem Dschungeltank!
 Hier steckt dein kopf auf einem Deichselstiel
 Dein Feuertod war für die Domeibank.

⁷¹ Barthes, R., «Rhetoric of the Image», op. cit., p. 39.

⁷² Brecht, B., *Kriegsfibel*, op. cit., p. 52.

⁷³ Brecht, B., *War Primer*, Ed. Willett, J., London, New York, Verso, 2017, p. 62.

Doch deine Eltern schulden ihr noch viel.⁷⁴
 (Alas, poor Yorick of the burnt-out tank!
 Upon an axle-shaft your head is set.
 Your death by fire was for the Domei Bank
 To whom your parents still remain in debt).⁷⁵

During Shakespeare's play, Hamlet takes Yorick's skull and exclaims about the dead and *ubi sunt*?⁷⁶ as the voice in the poem does. Yorick was a genus of skull species, but this became a new species, identified with a proper name. The correlation that links the interpretant /Yorick/ with their Shakespearean content is as cultural as the correlation between /Yorick/ and the picture. The Japanese's skull is a new genus of the recognizable species Yorick, due to a conceptual similitude held by a visual one. Indeed, skulls are symbols of the dead as well, and "excellent elements of signification"⁷⁷.

This is a third-kind metaphor, as the soldier's skull and Yorick are identified as the same: (photograph) Japanese soldier's skull / (poem) "hier" = (poem) Yorick / (Shakespeare's play) *there*. This allows to realize the contrast of each interlocutor's message: while Hamlet questions about what is no longer, the voice in the poem does about what the soldier left – banks' debts. As in the photo-epigram about the asleep soldiers, this relationship means that *another* iconicity is possible, based on sharing features, not on identity – metaphor.

Imagetext in these two photo-epigrams suggests that even when the referent is underlined – indexicality – "in any imprint (...) generic characters ultimately prevail over specific ones"⁷⁸. This reading of photo-epigrams maintains that this connotative meaning is as *natural* as the "un-coded iconic message"⁷⁹, and that the natural one is also cultural. Symbolization is the capacity that makes humans as such.

However, the key issue of this reading is to be aware that avoiding the realistic ideology of photography – the prevalence of the third message – is bias and ideological, as well. There is a racism weight in the impudent act of showing a skull identified as Japanese's, while there is no similar construction of American identity in Brecht's book. According to Imbrigotta, "the press photograph was staged for mass effect (...) both as a signifier of future warning to the Japanese army and to signify victory for the American and Western European readership of Life magazine"⁸⁰. The next photo-epigram has the following caption: "A line of crude crosses marks American graves near Buna. A grave registrar's glove accidentally points toward the sky". The poem says:

Wir hörten auf der Schulbank, daß dort oben
 Ein Rächer allen Unrechts wohnt und trafen
 Den Tod, als wir zum Töten uns erhoben.

⁷⁴ Brecht, B., *Kriegsfibel*, op. cit., p. 44.

⁷⁵ Brecht, B., *War Primer*, op. cit., p. 53.

⁷⁶ Shakespeare, W., *Hamlet*, Ed. Taylor, N., Zrinski, Croatia, Arden Shakespeare, 2006, p. 422.

⁷⁷ Barthes, R., «The Photographic Message», op. cit., p. 22.

⁷⁸ Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, op. cit., p. 223.

⁷⁹ Barthes, R., «Rhetoric of the Image», op. cit., p. 36.

⁸⁰ Imbrigotta, K., «History and the Challenge of Photography in Bertolt Brecht's *Kriegsfibel*», *Radical History Review*, 106 (2010), p. 37.

Die uns hinaufgeschickt müßt ihr bestrafen.⁸¹
 (In school we learned of an Avenger who
 Would punish all injustice here on earth.
 We went to kill, and met with Death. Now you
 Must punish those whose orders sent us forth).⁸²

The difference is overwhelming: while the Japanese soldier is a passive interlocutor of an active poetic voice, American soldiers are able to speak and address an Avenger, even demand revenge. Unlike the Japanese, Americans take part in the rhetoric of the book about soldiers as victims of the powerful. However, this image is partially counteracted by a previous photo-epigram that shows an American soldier that had killed a Japanese one. The poem ends like this: “Sie waren, heißt’s, gezwungen, sich zu töten. / Ich glaubs, ich glaubs. Und frag nur noch: von wem?”⁸³ (“That they were forced to kill each other. True. / My only question is: who forced them to?”)⁸⁴. Possibly, this “multiplicity of subject positions”⁸⁵ is the way to try to avoid an ideological construction of reality, what Imbrigotta defines as “contradictions” that result from bunching messages previously coded⁸⁶.

Although Heartfield and Brecht make evident the metaphorical construction of reality through photography, each one presents evidences in a different way. Heartfield’s works use the disposition of the photomontage in order to achieve new signs and change the iconicity that is known – the new sign of betrayal, the new meaning of the salute. On the other hand, in Brecht’s works there is a new metaphor derived from what is seen: the poem highlights what is visually evident – soldiers are dead, the skull is a new Yorick. This means that Heartfield creates explicit fictions – photomontages – based on visual and textual fictions about how reality works, while Brecht compounds explicit fictions – photo-epigrams – based on textual fictions – poems – and non-fictional photographs about how reality works. The fictional nature of their works is based on the metaphorical use of photographs as icons, which is not incompatible with indexicality and their documentary purpose.

5. W.G. Sebald’s fictions

W.G. Sebald seems to be the necessary continuation of Heartfield and Brecht works as he inherited not just a post-war reality but an imagetext fiction. In this section, some photographs of *Die Ausgewanderten*⁸⁷ will be used in order to show the use of photographs as explicit metaphors and implicit ones. It is not the seeking of identities but metaphors what discovers the working of reality.

⁸¹ Brecht, B., *Kriegsfibel*, op. cit., p. 45.

⁸² Brecht, B., *War Primer*, op. cit., p. 54.

⁸³ Brecht, B., *Kriegsfibel*, op. cit., p. 47.

⁸⁴ Brecht, B., *War Primer*, op. cit., p. 57.

⁸⁵ Long, J.J., «Paratextual Profusion: Photography and Text in Bertolt Brecht’s War Primer», op. cit.

⁸⁶ Imbrigotta, K., «History and the Challenge of Photography in Bertolt Brecht’s *Kriegsfibel*», op. cit., p. 37.

⁸⁷ Sebald, W.G., *Die Ausgewanderten*, Frankfurt am Main, Eichborn, 1993.

5.1 Explicit metaphors

“Max Aurach” is the larger and last story the *Die Ausgewanderten*⁸⁸. The narrator starts telling that in 1966 he moves to England and meets the painter Max Aurach in Manchester. When he later reads about Max, he discovers that his parents died having been deported in Germany. The narrator realizes that he did not understand Max so “entweder verabsäumt oder nicht fertiggebracht hatte, Aurach jene Fragen zu stellen, die er erwartet haben musste von mir”⁸⁹ (“I should have omitted, or failed (...) to ask Ferber the questions he must surely have expected from me”)⁹⁰. He comes back to find Max and speak with him again.

Among the pictures in the story, three of them relate to Max in different ways. The first photograph is one of Max’s paintings⁹¹, a portrait that Max made and erased several times until the paper did not resist more. This painting is not an index of the referent – in Peircean terms – but an index of the painter, Max, physically linked to this. The third photograph is Max’s portrait⁹², which is part of the article read by the narrator. As he keeps the picture and study his eye, the image is framed to only see his eye, so this is shown as an intradiegetic vision: its bias responds to the narrator’s gaze. Both photographs are removed from the English translation, as Max Aurach belongs to a real identity whose proper name is also changed to the translation.

The second photograph of Max, however, works in a different way. Max is shown when being a child in a picture that reminds him the position he has being ill:

Ich erinnere mich außerdem, daß die krumme Stellung, die ich notgedrungen einnahm, mir quer durch den Schmerz hindurch eine Fotografie ins Gedächtnis rief, die der Vater von mir als Zweitkläßler gemacht hatte und die mich zeigte tief über die Schrift gebeugt⁹³ (I also remember that the crooked position I was forced to stand in reminded me, even in my pain, of a photograph my father had taken of me in the second form at school, bent over my writing).⁹⁴

This photograph is reproduced not to show the physical referent but other referent – Max’s “halbaufgerichteten Haltung”⁹⁵ (“semi-erect position”)⁹⁶ during his illness. This picture – the only one of Max that remains – follows the metaphorical iconicity pointed out.

Brecht and Sebald use photographs as vehicles of metaphors. In Brecht’s photo-epigrams, the metaphor is enunciated in the poems but both terms – tenor and vehicle, that is to say, real and imaginary – are seen at the same time in the photograph. In the poem, both terms – asleep soldiers and dead soldiers, holes and graves – have the same linguistic reality. In the picture, just one of them has a real, indexical presence, while the other is a fictional term – dead men, Yorick. However,

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 266.

⁹⁰ Sebald, W.G., *The Emigrants*, Ed. Hulse, M., London, Vintage, 2002, p. 178.

⁹¹ Sebald, W.G., *Die Ausgewanderten*, op. cit., p. 240.

⁹² *Ibidem*, p. 265.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 255-256.

⁹⁴ Sebald, W.G., *The Emigrants*, op. cit., p. 172.

⁹⁵ Sebald, W.G., *Die Ausgewanderten*, op. cit., p. 254.

⁹⁶ Sebald, W.G., *The Emigrants*, op. cit., p. 171.

both terms are seen at the same time in the picture: the real term is anchored by a caption and the imagined term is recognized by a cultural knowledge that could be appreciated without the poem because is based in a visual similitude. The fact of being recognized in the picture does not imply a natural relation between object and interpretant, but the assumption of a cultural recognition: do the asleep soldiers seem to asleep ones because they are sleeping, or are the asleep soldiers sleeping because they seem to asleep soldiers?

Conversely, the tenors in Sebald's metaphors are not part of the general knowledge, but fictional characters, therefore their iconic similitude could not be seen without the text. While the vehicle is showed in the picture, the tenor is a mental image created by the fictional text, so this cannot be recognized but learned. For the first time, the imagetext work is a fiction that conceals its fictional nature by documentary procedures. One of them is the inclusion of photographs. Metaphors in Sebald's work are part of a fictional plot so they are recognized by the cultural knowledge of another world. This means that Sebald's work is an explicit fiction that uses fictional text and non-fictional photographs in order to seem documentary.

5.2 Implicit metaphors and symbolic mode

The second story of *Die Ausgewanderten* is "Paul Bereyter", the reconstruction of Paul's life, after his suicide on the train line. Paul's suicide is the most important function from a structural point of view, an act that gives sense to some indices⁹⁷ about the way he died. Marked by Nazi regime, Bereyter's life is told by Mme. Landau, who shows some pictures in an album. As the story goes on, it is shown Paul's obsession with trains, and the loss of Helen, his lover, deported on a train in Germany. Besides the images, there are another ones created by the narrator: a picture of the train line in the place where Paul committed suicide, and two drawings that Paul drew in his classes and students had to draw in their books, one of them a plan with train⁹⁸. These two images – the picture of the trainline and the draw by the narrator – have a metaphorical role, being in the place of the original ones, showing an *otherness*.

As the photographs of Mme. Landau's album, these pictures search for identity. However, the first photograph can be understood as a proof of "the limitations of the narrator's perspective"⁹⁹, as the narrator does not know to pay attention to some indications. Sebald seems to be ironic about this. His *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* – like García Márquez's one¹⁰⁰ – has no enigma about Paul's suicide but characters that are not capable of recognizing the cause. Osborne stresses the importance of the loss of his lover¹⁰¹ but does not point out the fact that the characters do not highlight this loss as a true cause for his suicide. This means that where the reason for his death has to be sought is not in Paul's photographs, but in Helen's photographs: "ist für den Paul, einer Mutmaßung Mme. Landaus zufolge, nicht weniger als eine Offenbarung gewesen, denn wenn diese Bilder nicht trügen, sagte sie, dann

⁹⁷ Barthes, R., «Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives», in *Image, Music, Text*, London, Fontana, 1977, p. 92.

⁹⁸ Sebald, W.G., *Die Ausgewanderten*, op. cit., p. 91.

⁹⁹ Osborne, D., *Traces of Trauma in W.G. Sebald and Christoph Ransmayr*, London, Legenda, 2013, p. 113.

¹⁰⁰ García Márquez, G., *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, London, Penguin UK, 2014.

¹⁰¹ Osborne, D., *Traces of Trauma in W.G. Sebald and Christoph Ransmayr*, op. cit.

war die Helen Hollaender freimütig, klug und zudem ein ziemlich tiefes Wasser, *in welchem der Paul gerne sich spiegelte*¹⁰² (“Helen, so Mme Landau believed, came as a veritable revelation to Paul; for if these pictures can be trusted, she said, Helen Hollaender was an independent-spirited, clever woman, and furthermore her waters ran deep. *And in those waters Paul liked to see his own reflection*”)¹⁰³.

In the middle of this paragraph, there is a three-picture series of photographs that shows Paul and Helen, which “evoke either the consecutive images running by a train window, or a railway track”¹⁰⁴. Helen’s photographs are also Paul’s images, so that Helen’s deportation is the key function needed to understand Paul’s suicide, but indices are not read properly. In this semiotic universe, photographs do not signify for their likeness but metaphorically: Helen’s photographs signify an *otherness* – Paul. As in the explicit metaphors, this implicit metaphor is allowed by the knowledge given by the text, not because of what is seen.

Scott asserts that photographs in Sebald cannot be satisfactorily understood by semiotics but by phenomenology¹⁰⁵. However, the “vertigo, perplexity”¹⁰⁶ that seem not to be reached by semiotics are indeed pointed out by the symbolic mode, defined as “a particular modality of sign production”¹⁰⁷, which appears when certain maxims in the text are violated¹⁰⁸, so the reader seeks a symbolic interpretation. “A positive way to approach every instance of the symbolic mode would be to ask: which theology legitimates it?”¹⁰⁹: as will be seen, theology or not, it is the postmodern one that could legitimate the symbolic mode in Sebald.

Sebald’s fictions can be considered an example of postmodern texts – although there is no unanimity about this¹¹⁰. The ironic attitude of postmodern fictions – “where what is said is contradicted by what is meant”¹¹¹ – is used by Sebald’s autofictional narrator, who is ironically identified with the author. Sebald’s fictions are also enrolled in “the politics of Postmodernism”¹¹², in which photography is a key issue.

The first thought about adding photographs to fictional text could be thought as closer to the aim of realism than to postmodern one, because realistic literature tries to be like a mirror. However, Postmodernism focuses on the ways reality and past come to be known, against the realist assumption about the transparency of media, language and photograph¹¹³. Then photographs appear into novels as a way of metafiction, disturbing a convention of writing fiction¹¹⁴. In this path Sebald can be found. The way Sebald’s narrators collect information brings to foreground the very notion of frames: “we experience the world as mediated through a range of discursive

¹⁰² Sebald, W.G., *Die Ausgewanderten*, op. cit. p. 71-72.

¹⁰³ Sebald, W.G., *The Emigrants*, op. cit., p. 48.

¹⁰⁴ Osborne, D., *Traces of Trauma in W.G. Sebald and Christoph Ransmayr*, op. cit., p. 113.

¹⁰⁵ Scott, C., «Sebald’s Photographic Annotations», in Catling, J., and Hibbitt, R., (ed.), *Saturn’s Moons: W.G. Sebald. A Handbook*, London, Legenda, 2011, p. 231.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁷ Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, op. cit., p. 162.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 157.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 163.

¹¹⁰ Long, J.J., *W.G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

¹¹¹ Nicol, B., *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 13.

¹¹² Hutcheon, L., *The Politics of Postmodernism*, op. cit.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁴ Nicol, B., *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*, op. cit.

and narrative constructs, especially from culture, media and advertising¹¹⁵. As a result, no omniscient narrator is possible but through witnesses and documents.

In “Max Aurach” there is a photograph that seems to show this problematic. Max’s uncle ensured that there was a published fake photograph of the books fire in Bebelplatz on 10th May 1933. After a time, the narrator finds the picture and shows that this was indeed a fake. Max’s uncle drew some conclusions from it:

Der Onkel bezeichnete diese Fotografie als eine Fälschung. Die Bücherverbrennung, so sagte er, habe in den Abendstunden des 10. Mai — das wiederholte er mehrmals —, in den Abendstunden des 10. Mai habe die Bücherverbrennung stattgefunden, und weil man aufgrund der zu diesem Zeitpunkt bereits herrschenden Dunkelheit keine brauchbaren Fotografien habe machen können, sei man, so behauptete der Onkel, kurzerhand hergegangen und habe in das Bild irgendeiner anderen Ansammlung vor der Residenz eine mächtige Rauchfahne und einen tiefschwarzen Nachthimmel hineinkopiert. Das in der Zeitung veröffentlichte fotografische Dokument sei somit eine Fälschung war, sagte der Onkel, als stelle die von ihm gemachte Entdeckung den entscheidenden Indizienbeweis bei, so war alles eine Fälschung von Anfang an.¹¹⁶

(That photograph, said Uncle, was a forgery. The burning of the books took place on the evening of the 10th of May, he said – he repeated it several times – the books were burnt on the evening of the 10th of May, but since it was already dark, and they couldn’t take any decent photographs, they simply took a picture of some other gathering outside the place, Uncle claimed, and added a swathe of smoke and a dark night sky. In other words, the photographic document published in the paper was a fake. And just as that document was a fake, said Uncle, as if he discovered were the one vital proof, so too everything else has been a fake, from the very start).¹¹⁷

This passage makes clear the postmodern consciousness of constructing past as a (possible faked) representation: “all past ‘events’ are potential historical ‘facts’, but the ones that become facts are those that are chosen to be narrated¹¹⁸, or to be photographed, it could be said. Here, the imagetext relationship seems to be clear: the text tells that photographs can be faked, and therefore they are not reliable.

However, this evident interpretation results suspicious – maybe as part of the paranoid reading in postmodern fiction – because this imagetext seems to disturb the narration: an indication of the symbolic mode¹¹⁹. This disturbance, for example, makes the reader wonder if any of the previous pictures was also a fake one. But as a detective seek, this has no sense, because of the historicity of the event and such an obvious trick effect. In McHale’s terms of dominant¹²⁰, instead of any epistemological surprise, this imagetext presents an ontological suspicion about not only the consistence of the proof, but the consistence of the very event. There is a question about the reality of the world from its representations. Cause and consequence seem to be inversed. Or, in semiotics words, antecedent and consequent.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

¹¹⁶ Sebald, W.G., *Die Ausgewanderten*, op. cit., p. 274.

¹¹⁷ Sebald, W.G., *The Emigrants*, op. cit., pp. 183-184.

¹¹⁸ Hutcheon, L., *The Politics of Postmodernism*, op. cit., p. 78.

¹¹⁹ Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, op. cit., p. 167.

¹²⁰ McHale, B., *Postmodernist Fiction*, London, New York, Routledge, 2004.

The symbolic interpretation of this photograph is key to understand Sebald's fictions, as the reader is directly addressed: does a fictional image destroy the reality of the real event? The irony is evident, but not so simple: as every fictional sign, the image creates its object. Photographs are signs that can indeed be "realistic", truer than the original"¹²¹. Sebald's texts, as the faked picture, play with reader's credulity about its fictional or non-fictional condition. But when it is discovered that the texts are fictions, does it destroy the reality of their objects?

On the other hand, this faked picture contrasts with Heartfield's photomontages. In the story, the faked photograph is thought to be a perfect icon of its object, so that this has to be adulterated to look like what is known about the object, and at the same time this has to hide its adulterated nature as this is supposed to be an index. In short, this picture represents the fetishism of natural images, as Mitchell affirms, that seeks the identity¹²². Conversely, Heartfield's photomontages are explicit fictions whose disposition creates a new metaphorical sign about reality, an improbable message that results "tragically meaningful"¹²³ with a documental claim.

As Eco insists, photographs can lie¹²⁴: the smoke in the picture does not need the books fire, although this is supposed to be the cause. Once the lie is discovered, the sign seems to be cancelled, based its operability on its indexical nature. A faked image is not allowed to illustrate a documental text, but what is the effect of this fake in the fictional text? The image becomes a paradigm of any fictional representation that is supposed to be less valid than an indexical object. As Sebald's works pretend not to be fictions, they are suspicious of trying to seem real witnesses instead of credible imagined works. The unclear attitude about the fictional nature of Sebald's works serves to discover the communicational importance given to the indexical nature of signs.

Sebald constructs his fictions with historical consciousness inherited from Heartfield and Brecht. The way these authors construct signs in history is similar to Walter Benjamin's dialectical image. Benjamin speaks about an image that is dialectical in the "relation of what-has-been to the now", the relationship between past and present "to form a constellation"¹²⁵. These images are recognizable, so "what has been within a particular epoch is always simultaneously, 'what has been from the immemorial'"¹²⁶. As dialectic images are recognizable and recognized, these act as signs in Eco's terms, conventionally known by experience¹²⁷, in this case historical experience.

Its eternal repetition denies the progression of time, but at the same time this is understood as a sign in history. Significantly, Brecht opens and closes *Kriegsfiel* with two images of Hitler, which are essentially the same: what Hitler did was enrolled in his first image, but this has to be recognized. Sebald, however, is able of transfer the ontological issue of postmodernism to Benjamin's dialectic image: is it the dialectical image what does create the event?

¹²¹ Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, op. cit., p. 226.

¹²² Mitchell, W.J.T., *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, op. cit., p. 90.

¹²³ Heartfield, J., *Photomontages of the Nazi Period*, op. cit., p. 64.

¹²⁴ Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, op. cit., p. 223.

¹²⁵ Benjamin, W., «The Dialectical Image. Walter Benjamin», in Manghani, S., Piper, A., and Simons, J., (ed.), *Images: A Reader*, London, SAGE Publications, 2006, p. 212.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁷ Eco, U., *A Theory of Semiotics*, op. cit., p. 204.

6. Conclusions

Having started with the books burning in Bebelplatz on 10th May 1933, this article ends with the very event. Meanwhile, it has been developed the argument about how fictional texts expose the semiotic nature of photographs in order to show their realistic ideology.

The first step was to propose Umberto Eco's Semiotics as suitable methodology in order to analyse intermedial works. Eco overcomes the notions of index and icon that are in the origin of the realistic ideology of photography. Conversely, he achieves a definition of sign-function that allows the reading of word and photograph as signs – an inferential, linguistic relation between types. Index is not a semiotic category but a scientific one that does not take part in the process of interpretation. On the other hand, Eco suggests that icons are correlational conventions as well. In *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, Eco goes on to compare mirror images with photographs, which allows to counterargue Barthes' point about the third message.

Once it is shown in theory, the exploration of Heartfield's, Brecht's and Sebald's work illustrates this argument in fiction. First, Heartfield's photomontages show the function of metaphors as a tool of cognitive value. The key issue is the creation of metaphors with words and photographs, which makes clear that photographs can be used in order to create fictional messages, and these shed light on the ideological construction of reality. On the other hand, iconicity is used in a metaphorical way, so the supposed identical appearance of images is set aside in order to look for similarities and dissimilarities. Heartfield's photomontages illustrate Eco's theory about the multiplicity of iconism and its functioning as a relationship between the image and its culturalized content¹²⁸.

Brecht's photo-epigrams use similarities in order to construct metaphors derived from iconic relationships that can be seen, based on cultural knowledge. While indexicality of the object is strongly marked, the imagetext relation constructs an intermedial interpretant among the linguistic one in the poems and the visual one in the documental photograph. The metaphor is constructed in the poem, so can be seen in the photography without photomontage. However, the key issue of this reading is to realize the way this construction of reality is ideological. The manipulation comes when the selected feature is presented as the only possible perspective¹²⁹. In order to avoid this, Brecht contradictorily multiplies the points of view and hinders a unit reading¹³⁰.

W.G. Sebald supposes a continuity of historical consciousness embodied in imagetext works, and a break of postmodern autofiction. As Brecht and Heartfeld do, Sebald looks for another iconicity based on metaphorical similarity instead of identity. On the other hand, the way Sebald is intentionally ambiguous about the fictional nature of his works raises a new game about photographs' supposed indexicality.

Sebald's metaphors in pictures are allowed by what the text tells, as they are referred to characters unknown by the readers. These metaphors can be explicitly or implicitly constructed: in the first case, the metaphor is coded, while in the

¹²⁸ Eco, U., *A Theory of Semiotics*, op. cit., p. 204.

¹²⁹ Eco, U., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, op. cit., p. 102.

¹³⁰ Long, J.J., «Paratextual Profusion: Photography and Text in Bertolt Brecht's War Primer», op. cit.

second case there is not a closed code to interpret them, so they can belong to Eco's symbolic code. Postmodern fictions seem to be close to the symbolic mode as a way of disturbing conventions of writing fiction and a result of readers' suspicious.

His postmodern characteristics lead him to deal with the representational construction of history and the ontological truth of the world. Historic consciousness in Sebald's works seems close to Benjamin's dialectic image, as a way of understanding time as the repetition of this images. As these have to be interpreted, these act as signs of history.

The books burning in Bebelplatz on 10th May 1933 was a real event, and then this became a newspaper article, a photograph, a photomontage, a faked picture in a fictional book, a memorial in Berlin, even any other books burning in history. This is a dialectic image that can be recognized as a sign in history not just in a fictional text but in a photographic image.

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