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A Tripp to the London National Gallery

Not long after he had made his way to the other side, two years after he had passed over the border, as Sebald himself might have put it,¹ a volume entitled *Unerzählt* was published under the names of W. G. Sebald and Jan Peter Tripp. It is arranged with facing pages of Tripp's images of pairs of eyes and Sebald's laconic lines and implicitly contemplates the issues of perception, reality, and citation.

There had also been another, earlier encounter between Sebald's writing and Tripp's images in *Logis in einem Landhaus*.² How shall we pose the question of that relation? At the close of the preliminary remarks to that volume, we read:

And beforehand as a reader I therefore pay my tribute in what follows to the colleagues who went before in the form of several extended marginalia which otherwise make no particular claim. That at the end there is an essay about a painter – that is quite in order [Ordnung], not only because Jan Peter Tripp and I went to the same school in Oberstdorf for a rather long time and because Keller and Walser are equally meaningful to both of us, but also because I learned from his pictures that one has to look into the depths, that art does not get on without handwork and that one has to take many difficulties into account in enumerating things.

¹ “In order to call on death the painter had to pass over the border. On the way to the other side.” (“Um [den Tod] aufzusuchen, mußte der Maler über die Grenze. Auf dem Weg nach der anderen Seite” “Like Day and Night,” 86E, 180G). W. G. Sebald, “Like Day and Night: On the Pictures of Jan Peter Tripp” (published under the translated title “As Day and Night, Chalk and Cheese: On the Pictures of Jan Peter Tripp”), in W. G. Sebald and Jan Peter Tripp, *Unrecounted*, trans. Michael Hamburger, Penguin Books, New York and London 2004, pp. 78-94 and “Wie Tag und Nacht – Über die Bilder Jan Peter Tripps,” in *Logis in einem Landhaus*, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2002, pp. 169-188.

² *Logis in einem Landhaus* first appeared in 1998 but “Wie Tag und Nacht” was first published in 1993 in Jan Peter Tripp, *Die Aufzählung der Schwierigkeiten: Arbeiten von 1985-92* / Max Bense, Manfred Esser, Wendelin Niedlich, Peter Renz, W. G. Sebald, Kurt Weidemann, Kurt Zein, Reiff Schwarzwaldverlag, Offenburg 1993.

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Und vorab als Leser entrichte ich darum im Folgenden meinen Tribut an die vorangegangenen Kollegen in Form einiger ausgedehnter und sonst keinen besonderen Anspruch erhebenden Marginalien. Daß am Ende ein Aufsatz steht über einen Maler, das hat auch seine Ordnung, nicht nur weil Jan Peter Tripp und ich eine ziemliche Zeitlang in Oberstdorf in dieselbe Schule gegangen sind und weil Keller und Walser uns beiden gleichviel bedeuten, sondern auch weil ich an seinen Bildern gelernt habe, daß man weit in die Tiefe hineinschauen muß, daß die Kunst ohne das Handwerk nicht auskommt und daß man mit vielen Schwierigkeiten zu rechnen hat beim Aufzählen der Dinge. (*Logis in einem Landhaus* 7G)³

The tribute to previous colleagues takes the form of “marginalia.”⁴ What would it mean to write marginalia, to write on the margins of another’s work, just outside its frame? Is it the same as what the narrator of *Austerlitz* speaks of as vision at the edge of the field of sight (“am Rand des Gesichtsfeldes” *Austerlitz*, 51G)⁵? Would this account as well for Sebald’s essay on the painter? Or does Sebald’s attempt here to read Tripp’s work, particularly at the close of that essay, go off in a different direction? What does it mean to look into the depths (“in die Tiefe hinein[zu]schauen”)? Moreover, the essay on Tripp has its own order and is bound up with the difficulties of listing, enumeration, accounting for things.

As I account for this accounting (“[das] Aufzählen der Dinge”) I want, if at all possible, to set out on the right foot. And so I begin with a citation and with a citation within a citation, from the works of Jan Peter Tripp that I take from “Like Day and Night: On the Pictures of Jan Peter Tripp” (“Wie Tag und Nacht – Über die Bilder Jan Peter Tripps”).⁶ I wish to speak of what remains untold in the story

³ *Logis in einem Landhaus*, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2002.

⁴ It was Thomas Fries, who, in a superb paper given in Zurich in spring of 2008, made me aware of the strangeness of this phrase, the modesty of Sebald speaking of his own commentary as “marginalia” combined with claiming himself the colleague of such pivotal figures in world literature.

⁵ W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell, Random House, New York 2001, and, Carl Hanser Verlag, Munich and Vienna 2001.

⁶ Michael Hamburger translates Sebald’s title as “Like Day and Night, Chalk and Cheese: On the Pictures of Jan Peter Tripp” because, as he explains in his translator’s note, as chalk and cheese is the British idiom which would best render the German “wie Tag und Nacht.” The American usage “as different as night and day” is much closer to the German. (Hamburger, “Translator’s Note,” pp. 6-7)

of two paintings and to do so by way of Sebald's essay which in its closing pages purports to do just that, and yet still leaves a thing or two unrecounted.

Remembrance is basically nothing but a citation, ("Das Andenken ist ja im Grunde nichts anderes als ein Zitat" "Like Day and Night" 90E, 184G), Sebald tells us. Echoing Umberto Eco, he goes on to write:

And the citation incorporated in a text (or image) by montage compels us ... to probe [literally: to the looking through of] our knowledge of other texts and pictures and our knowledge of the world. This, in turn, takes time. By spending it, we enter into narrated time and into the time of culture. ("Like Day and Night" 90-91E)

Und das in einen Text (oder in ein Bild) einmontierte Zitat zwingt uns ... zur Durchsicht⁷ unserer Kenntnisse anderer Texte und Bilder und unserer Kenntnisse der Welt. Das wiederum erfordert Zeit. Indem wir sie aufwenden, treten wir ein in die erzählte Zeit und in die Zeit der Kultur. ("Wie Tag und Nacht" 184G)

Already we are out of time, or compelled at least to spend it, by entering into another time, "narrated time" and "the time of culture," in which our own "knowledge" (*Erkenntnisse*) is put to the test. What does it mean to step into the frames of time recounted or the time of culture? What can we know of other texts and other images? What can we know of time that has been narrated, given over, thus, to story telling? What can we know of the world?

Sebald proposes to "show" the necessity of all this by citing: that is, by the *Einmontierung*, the incorporation by montage, of Jan Peter Tripp's "Déclaration de guerre" into his text. Despite its apparent lack of ambiguity⁸ something is immediately amiss. There is indeed a war raging, as the title of the painting insists, though perhaps not openly declared, and certainly not explained (*erklärt*)⁹: in the juxtaposition of the two patterns.

⁷ Which is not at all the same as the "Durchschauen" of the closing line.

⁸ A counterpart in this, no doubt, to Van Gogh's "Peasant Shoes."

⁹ Throughout the essay Sebald plays on Erklären and Erklärung (explain and explanation or declaration). The most obvious instance is the German of "Déclaration de guerre," Kriegserklärung (186G).



Jan Peter Tripp, *Déclaration de guerre*.
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permission of the artist (in "As Day and Night
91E, 185G).

Let us finally try to show that in the picture "La déclaration de guerre" measuring 370 by 220 centimeters and in which an elegant pair of ladies' shoes are to be seen on a tiled floor. The pale blue-natural white ornament of the tiles, the gray lines of the joints, the lozenge-net from a leaden glass window cast by sunlight onto the picture's middle section, in which the black shoes stand between two shadow areas, all this makes a geometric pattern of a complexity not to be described in words. ("Like Day and Night" 91E)

Versuchen wir das zuletzt zu zeigen an dem 370 x 220 cm messenden Bild "La déclaration de guerre," auf welchem ein feines Paar Damenschuhe zu sehen ist, das auf einem gekachelten Fußboden steht. Das blaßblau-naturweiße Ornament der Kacheln, die grauen Linien der Verfugung, das Rautennetz der Bleiverglasung eines Fensters, das vom Sonnenlicht über den mittleren Teil des Bildes gebreitet wird, in welchem die schwarzen Schuhe zwischen zwei Schattenbereichen stehen, all das ergibt zusammen ein geometrisches Muster von einer mit Worten nicht zu beschreibenden Komplexität. ("Wie Tag und Nacht" 184-85G)

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A challenge is made to the pattern of the ornamental tile on which the shoes stand, a challenge made by the rhomboid net, a second pattern, cast as shadow by the sunlight passing through the leaden glass window we are compelled to imagine at the right ("Like Day and Night" 91E, 184-85G).¹⁰ The right shoe is

¹⁰ We might think this as well of the struggle between a positive presence of an object (the tile, the shoes) and the absence of an object (the window frames). Those frames leave their mark as shadow, the light they refuse to let pass.

aligned with the grid of the shadow; the left shoe with that of the grouted tile joints. A war is played out as well between the visual complexity all this produces and the descriptive word that is bound to fail: a complexity that is not to be described in language. If there is some sort of *declaration of war*, it jumps to the eye, then, as a question of form and it announces as well the limits of representation. This takes place with respect to an object that, nevertheless, apparently claims to communicate as a “mediating object of [the] representation” (“vermittelnder Gegenstand der Darstellung” (“Like Day and Night” 91E, 186G)

Still, suddenly thereafter, we enter a realm in which description proves to be no challenge whatsoever.

A picture puzzle arises out of this pattern illustrating the degree of difficulty of the different relationships, connections and interweavings and the mysterious pair of black shoes – a *picture puzzle* which the *observer* who does not know the *pre-history* will hardly be able to solve. To which woman do the shoes belong? Where did she go? Did the shoes pass over into the possession of another person? (“Like Day and Night” 93E, my emphasis)

Aus diesem, den Schwierigkeitsgrad der verschiedenen Verhältnisse, Verbindungen und Verstrickungen illustrierenden Muster und dem mysteriösen Paar schwarzer Schuhe entsteht eine Art *Bilderrätsel*, das der *Betrachter*, der die *Vorgeschichte* nicht kennt, kaum wird auflösen können. *Welcher* Frau haben die Schuhe gehört? *Wohin* ist sie gekommen? Sind die Schuhe übergegangen in den *Besitz eines anderen*? (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 185G, emphasis mine)¹¹

The narrator shifts the stakes abruptly from the clashing formal relations among texts and images into a realm we might call “narrated time,” a “time of culture,” or even “knowledge of the world” (“Like Day and Night” 93E, 184G). The essay turns from the war of patterns within the image to finding a woman from without. It passes as well from the incommensurability of image and text to assuming that the enigma of the picture might be solvable. It poses the frame-jumping

¹¹ To be sure, there is the throw away answer that follows: “Or, ultimately, are they nothing more than the paradigm of that fetish which the painter is forced to make out of everything he produces?” (“Oder sind sie am Ende nichts als das Paradigma für den Fetisch, den der Maler aus allem, was er malt, zu machen gezwungen ist?” (“Like Day and Night” 91E, 185G) But this formal explanation, held onto for a moment, completely disappears.

question: “To whom did the shoes belong?” and will venture to show us what has happened to her. This will take place by way of Tripp’s second painting. The two shoes of the “Declaration” do not declare and do not explain. They do not give away their secret (“geben ihr Geheimnis nicht preis” (“Like Day and Night” 91E, 185G), at least not before they are mounted into a subsequent work of the artist. What Sebald himself creates is a picture puzzle (*Bilderrätsel*).

What sort of solution (*Auflösung*) will that second citation make possible? Can it bring about the shift from image to language that we expect in a rebus? The pages solving the puzzle begin with the description of what we observe and end with us as the object of observation. This solution stands, admittedly, in place of the formal conundrum in which words were seen as incapable of either describing or explaining the *Déclaration*. That shift is made possible as he gives up description and becomes instead a storyteller, displacing the endlessly complex formal aspects of art – its relationships, connections and interweavings – for a story-line of human events. We find tales of people and dogs, of time and space, of paintings and their painters, and the artist as creator, observer and witness; stories of fidelity and of secrets revealed, of knowledge and perspicacity, of domestication and wildness, and, above all, of the inexplicable losses and gains implicit in citation’s relation to realism.



Jan Peter Tripp, *Déjà vu oder der Zwischenfall* (*Déjà vu or the Incident*).

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Two years later, to be sure, the painter shifts his puzzle-image at least a bit further into the public sphere. In a work of a significantly smaller format (100 x 145 cm) the larger painting reappears, not only as a quotation but as a mediating object of representation. Filling the upper two-thirds of the canvas, it now evidently hangs in its place; and in front of it, in front of the “Déclaration de guerre,” turning away from the viewer, sideways on a white-upholstered mahogany chair, sits a flamingly red-haired woman. She is elegantly dressed, but somehow is someone tired by evening of the day’s burdens. She has taken off one of her shoes – and they are the same that she contemplates on the large picture. (“Like Day and Night” 92E)

Zwei Jahre später allerdings rückt der Maler sein Rätselbild ein Stückchen weiter wenigstens in die Öffentlichkeit. In einem Werk von bedeutend kleinerem Format (100 x 145 cm) taucht das große Bild noch einmal auf, nicht bloß als Zitat, sondern als vermittelnder Gegenstand der Darstellung. Es hängt, die oberen zwei Drittel der Leinwand ausfüllend, offenbar jetzt an seinem Platz, und vor ihm, vor der ‚Déclaration de guerre‘ sitzt, vom Betrachter abgewandt, seitwärts auf einem weißgepolsterten Mahagonisessel eine flammend rothaarige Frau. Elegant ist sie gekleidet, aber doch jemand, der müd ist am Abend von des Tages Last. Sie hat einen ihrer Schuhe – und es sind dieselben, die sie betrachtet auf dem großen Bild – ausgezogen. (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 185-186G)

Just as the smaller painting, has, in the act of citation, shrunk the scale of the much larger one reproduced therein, the name of the larger will also soon be shortened and domesticated into the German *Kriegserklärung*. The woman in white contemplates the image of the two shoes. Turned away from us, the observers, she sits in for us as well, domesticating not only the foreignness of its title but also of its representation. The formerly unreadable “Declaration” can now be pondered, not as a formal jumble of lines and patterns, but as a circumscribable object read for the plot. For she appears as an answer to the questions it first posed, (To which woman do the shoes belong? Where did she go?) and she poses in turn, in a compelling manner, the third and most puzzling of the narrator’s queries: “Did the shoes pass over into the possession of another person?” (“Sind die Schuhe übergegangen in den Besitz eines anderen?” (“Like Day and Night” 91E, 185G). For only here, as we observe the second painting, just as we seem to account for the initial pair in “La déclaration de guerre,” just as we seem to have found the woman to whom the shoes belonged, one of her pair goes missing.

Thus we must recognize “that one has to take many difficulties into account in enumerating things” (“daß man mit vielen Schwierigkeiten zu rechnen hat beim Aufzählen der Dinge” *Logis* 7G) and that art is no simple doubling of this world into an aesthetic realm: it cannot be accounted for by the “obliteration of the visible world in interminable series of reproductions” (“Auslöschung der sichtbaren Welt in endlosen Serien der Reproduktion” “Like Day and Night” 84E, 178G). In this regard, art distinguishes itself from photography, as Sebald chooses to understand it.

The photographic image turns reality into tautology... Roland Barthes saw in the by now omnipresent man with a camera an agent of death, and in photographs something like the residue of a life perpetually perishing. (“Like Day and Night” 84E)

Das photographische Bild verwandelt die Wirklichkeit in eine Tautologie... Roland Barthes sah in dem inzwischen omnipräsenten Mann mit der Kamera einen Agenten des Todes und in den Photographien so etwas wie Relikte des fortwährend absterbenden Lebens. (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 178G)

In photography, life dies into and becomes the image. But, Sebald insists, art is in need of “the transcendence of that which according to an incontrovertible sentence is the case” (“der Transzendierung dessen, was nach einem unumstößlichen Satz der Fall ist” “Like Day and Night” 84E, 178G). Thus Tripp’s second painting only half-heartedly suggests that the shoes in the work of art result from reality being ferried over into a nether world by an agent of death. Were that inexorably the case, how to explain the anomaly that, while both shoes appear in “La déclaration de guerre,” the left shoe remains on the woman’s foot?¹²

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What citation generates, just as the narrator had forewarned, requires turning to yet other texts and other images, to the time of culture and narrated time. For what Sebald now invents to explain the puzzle is a series of stories about what happened over time, to the woman and to the dog, speaking of them, so caught up in their realism is he, as if they had lives independent of Tripp’s crea-

¹² All this assumes, of course, that the woman’s shoes were the source for Tripp’s first painting, its pre-history (*Vorgeschichte*). Ultimately, can one say that this is the case? The painting of the two shoes, after all, pre-existed the painting that incorporates it. Both are paintings. Perhaps the woman is the result of the pair of shoes, that is, she is their pretext.

tion. Thus it is evening and the woman, “wearied from the burdens of the day” (“Like Day and Night” 92E, 186G), has removed one of her shoes, which is now no longer to be seen – shoes that are (but are also not) the *same* as those in the puzzling “Déclaration de guerre.” She ponders an inexplicable loss (“unerklärlichen Verlust” “Like Day and Night” 93E, 188G).

As surely as we regard her from outside the frame of art, she too, from within, regards the painting hanging before her.

Originally, so I was told, she held this shoe taken off in her left hand, then it lay on the floor on the right, next to the chair, and finally it had wholly vanished. (“Like Day and Night“ 92E)

Ursprünglich, so habe ich mir sagen lassen, hat sie diesen ausgezogenen Schuh in der linken Hand gehalten, dann war er rechts neben dem Sessel am Boden gelegen, und schließlich war er ganz verschwunden. (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 186G)

How are we to understand this slide from left to right and ultimately to nowhere? If the elegant woman held the shoe to one side, was it she who, taking on a life of her own, then shifted it and laid it on the floor to the right? What to make, moreover, of the utter lack of agency in its ultimate disappearance: “and finally it had totally vanished” (“Like Day and Night” 92E, 186G). Or are we to understand, pairing this passage with the one to come, that what the narrator has heard told, what has taken form in “narrated time,” is, rather, three versions of the painting, the first with the shoe in her left hand, then with it laid on the floor at her right, and finally out of sight? For not only the shoe, but the dog as well, has done some moving around.

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The woman with the one shoe, alone with herself and the enigmatic declaration of war, alone except for the faithful dog at her side, who, to be sure, is not interested in the painted shoes, but looks straight ahead out of the picture and into our eyes. (“Like Day and Night” 92E)¹³

¹³ The dog is not true to the painted shoes – in the “Déclaration de guerre.” True to what, then? Not her. It is us he looks at. Nor is there any obvious sign of marriage (whose fidelity the dog might be a symbol of) as in van Eyck’s painting of Arnolfini and his Giovanna Cenami.

Die Frau mit dem einen Schuh, mit sich und der rätselhaften Kriegserklärung allein, allein bis auf den treuen Hund an ihrer Seite, der sich freilich nicht interessiert für die gemalten Schuhe, sondern gerade herauschaut aus dem Bild und uns in die Augen. (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 186G)

The woman and dog are a couple, but are, then again, like night and day: she aligned with the right shoe, the dog with the left in “Déclaration de guerre”; the one with her back to us seems caught up in the painting, the other, indifferent to that which is painted, casts his eyes outside the frame and confronts us head on. The woman makes us the observer of the observer. With the dog we become the observed. Still, since “an X-ray would show that earlier on he had once stood at the center of the picture” (“Eine Röntgenaufnahme würde erweisen, daß [der Hund] zuvor schon einmal in der Bildmitte gestanden hat” “Like Day and Night” 92E, 186G), it might tell us, then, as well, that the dog who gives such evidence of a conscious, intentional gaze, is himself merely paint and was once painted over.

And yet, we go on to read, between finding his original place in the middle (as the materiality of the artist’s medium) and shifting his stand to the left (where he appears as mimetic representation), he takes on a mysteriously kinetic and embodied presence (as though *real*): a fanciful story redelivers the dog to narrated time and the time of culture:

Meanwhile he has been *underway* and has brought in a sort of wooden sandal, from the fifteenth century or more specifically from the wedding picture hanging in the London National Gallery which Jan van Eyck painted in 1434... (“Like Day and Night” 92-93E, emphasis mine)

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Inzwischen ist er *unterwegs* gewesen und hat eine Art Holzsandale herbeigebracht, aus dem 15. Jahrhundert beziehungsweise aus dem in der Londoner Nationalgalerie hängenden Hochzeitsbild, das Jan van Eyck 1434... gemalt hat (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 186-87G, emphasis mine)

More is left hanging than the pictures: of marriage and war, of union and conflict. The dog makes something of a trip between the paintings of the two Jans. And doesn’t this explain the title of the painting which Sebald has chosen to obliterate: “Déjà vu oder der Zwischenfall”? What we contemplate is the citation of “La déclaration de guerre” (this is the *déjà vu*) *or* the announcement

of a small and almost unnoticed incident (Zwischenfall), perhaps the breaking out of a conflict of another kind, as the dog moves between (*zwischen*) one version of the painting and the next: “Meanwhile he has been underway.” (“Inzwischen ist er unterwegs gewesen...” “Like Day and Night” 92-93E, 186-87G). What marked the middle of Tripp’s picture (the dog) now finds its place at the left. The narrator tells of what happened in between (“inzwischen”) –between middle and left, between the 20th and 15th centuries *or* between continental Europe and London. In this story, the canine – which was formally conceived in minute strokes of color – takes form as in the machinations of a trick film, and comes, like one of its living, furry counterparts, to occupy and pass through time and space. It brings back a sandal, we read, either by returning to the concrete, three-dimensional world of an historically earlier time or by jumping the space of the Channel to the formal, two-dimensional realm of van Eyck’s painting in the London National Gallery. At the same time it figures as a creature for whom space and time are no object. The dog runs “with ease over the abysses of time, because for him there is no difference between the fifteenth and the twentieth centuries” (“mit Leichtigkeit über die Abgründe der Zeit läuft, weil es für ihn keinen Unterschied gibt zwischen dem 15. und dem 20. Jahrhundert” “Like Day and Night” 94E, 188G).

While the woman in white, something of a bride without a bridegroom after all, “ponders the history of her shoes and an inexplicable loss, [she] never guesses that the disclosure of her secret lies behind her – in the shape of an analogous object from a world long past” (“nachsinn über die Geschichte ihrer Schuhe und einen unerklärlichen Verlust, ahnt nicht, daß die Offenbarung des Geheimnisses hinter ihr liegt – in Form eines analogen Gegenstands aus einer längst vergangenen Welt” “Like Day and Night” 93-94E, 187-88G). The dog, having left its place in the middle of the canvas, and, having turned its back on the enigmatic image and image-puzzle (“Rätselbild” and “Bilderrätsel” “Like Day and Night” 94E, 185G) cited therein, has in the meantime become the bearer of a secret (“Geheimnisträger,” “Like Day and Night” 94E, 188G). But is the revelation of the secret, even to us, a certainty? Is the “inexplicable loss” (“Like Day and Night” 93E, 188G) of her shoe explained? Do we discover thereby whether or not her shoe has gone over into the possession of another (“in den Besitz eines anderen,” “Like Day and Night” 91E, 185G)? Doesn’t the dog remain, rather, as the text reads, simply the bearer of the secret rather than the agent of its revela-

tion? Isn't it this that contemplating the painting of van Eyck (and reading the narrator's ostentatiously faulty description of it) tells us?



Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait*.
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[The dog] brought in a sort of wooden sandal, from the fifteenth century or more specifically from the wedding picture hanging in the London National Gallery which Jan van Eyck painted in 1434 for Giovanni Arnolfini and the Giovanna Cenami affianced to him in a morganatic marriage “of the left hand,” as a token of his witness. “*Johannes de Eyck hic fuit*,” one is told, on the frame of the round mirror in which the scene, reduced to miniature format, can once more be seen, from behind. In the foreground, near the left lower edge of the picture lies that wooden sandal, this curious piece of evidence, beside a little dog that probably entered the picture as a symbol of marital fidelity. (“Like Day and Night” 93E)

[Der Hund] hat eine Art Holzsandale herbeigebracht, aus dem 15. Jahrhundert beziehungsweise aus dem in der Londoner Nationalgalerie hängenden Hochzeitsbild, das Jan van Eyck 1434 für Giovanni Arnolfini und die ihm in morganatischer Ehe ‚zur linken Hand‘ angetraute Gionvanna Cenami gemalt hat zum Zeichen seiner Zeugenschaft. *Johannes de Eyck hic fuit* heißt es auf dem Rahmen des Rundspiegels, in dem die Szene auf Miniaturformat reduziert von rückwärts noch einmal zu sehen ist. Im Vordergrund, nahe dem linken unteren Bildrand, liegt die hölzerne Sandale, dieses seltsame Beweisstück, neben einem kleinen Hündchen, das in die Komposition hineingeraten ist wahrscheinlich als ein Symbol ehelicher Treue. (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 187G)

Spending some time with the painting one sees that here it is not a question of a complexity which cannot be described in words (“von einer mit Worten nicht zu beschreibenden Komplexität,” “Like Day and Night” 91E, 185G). It is, on the contrary, a work that both calls for and performs the act of description. The convex mirror that inevitably draws the eye (while functioning as one) reduces the scene to a miniature format, as Sebald tells us. In this it plays the same role as Tripp’s second painting, considerably reducing the larger, initial image and introducing the figure of the observer. In Van Eyck’s painting, although Sebald neglects to remind us of it, the mirror not only lets us see the initial scene again, this time from behind, it also adds what is presumably the image of van Eyck, as a sign of his having been witness to the event (“zum Zeichen seiner Zeugenschaft”) and adds as well alongside the painter, another observer at his side. Whereas Sebald speaks of one sandal, in van Eyck’s painting there are, of course, two. Whereas van Eyck has signed *Johannes de Eyck fuit hic*, Sebald inverts the word order to *hic fuit* – putting in question precisely the hereness of the “was,” in a statement that is said to fix it in place: *Johannes de Eyck was here*. Sebald tells us that the declaration is to be found “on the frame of the round mirror” when it is, in fact, outside that frame, prominently and elegantly displayed on the wall.¹⁴

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If the photographic image turns reality into tautology, this is not the case as the narrator describes van Eyck’s painting. Let us just say in passing, in place of a more thorough reading of Sebald’s gloss which shifts things around so ob-

¹⁴ Could this be a case of those divergences and differences which distinguish art from photography of which Sebald spoke earlier in the essay (“Like Day and Night” 84-85E, 178-179G)?

viously, that the more subtle lesson to be learned here is less that of the narrator's divergences and differences from the wedding picture as the object of his description than the nature of the union that van Eyck actually celebrates. One wonders how it could be anything but intentional that what we witness van Eyck witnessing (or creating) is "a morganatic marriage 'of the left hand'" ("Like Day and Night" 93E, 187G). This was a marriage with the provision that the passing on of the husband's property or title was, from the beginning, out of the question. It is a relation in which all inheritance, even that of a wooden sandal, simply could not take place. The ritual sign of this declared impossibility was the offering of the left hand instead of the right: it is echoed in Tripp's second painting by the substitution of the left, not quite "analogous," sandal from van Eyck for the missing, right leather shoe. Were the weary lady to slip on its replacement, she would hobble unevenly, at best. It disturbs the desire to create a couple, to form a pair.

What the dog carries over both challenges and testifies to the prohibition against such activities, against delivering it "into the possession of another." The sandal's anomalous appearance definitively explains the van Eyck as the source of Tripp's citation. The figure of the dog in Tripp's painting is a witty stand-in for the conventional rhetoric of art history, which would explain the appearance of Arnolfini's left sandal as a citation or allusion to the 15th century masterpiece and as a testament to Tripp's stunning skills of mimicry.¹⁵ But the story of the dog in Sebald's essay "Like Day and Night" is, after all, not an answer to the questions apparently posed by the "real life" setting of the painting, or, rather, by Sebald's fabula – not an answer, for example, to the query: "Did the shoes pass into the possession of another person?" Nor does it explain the "inexplicable

¹⁵ In an interview of 1993, the same year that the essay on Tripp was first published, Sebald made the following remark which suggests that the citation of van Eyck by Tripp is also metaphorical for his own work.

Moreover, in the case of painters, for example, to my mind, it is a long cultivated virtue that they refer to one another in their works, that they take over themes from a colleague in their own work as a gesture, so to speak, of reverence. And that is something that I also enjoy doing as a writer.

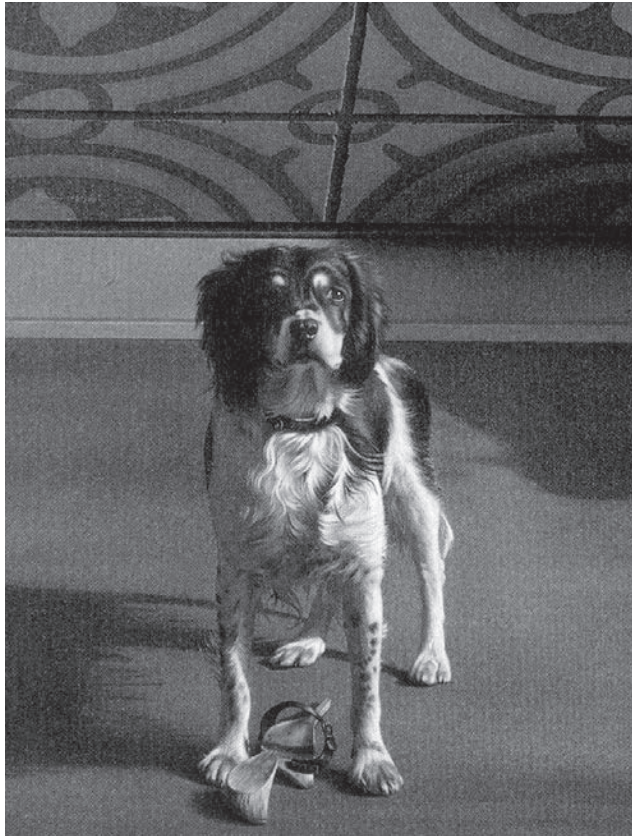
Außerdem ist es bei den Malern zum Beispiel eine seit langem gepflogene Tugend, meines Erachtens, daß sie sich in ihren Werken aufeinander beziehen, daß sie Motive aus dem einen Werk eines Kollegen in das eigene Werk übernehmen, sozusagen als Geste der Ehrerbietung. Und das ist etwas, was ich also auch sehr gerne mache als Schreibender. ("*Auf ungeheuer dünnem Eis*" pp. 97-98).

loss” which, we read, the red-haired woman ponders. The “secret” of that loss is nowhere revealed.

Still, the dog is the locus of knowledge: he knows a great deal more precisely than we do (“[er] weiß manches genauer als wir” “Like Day and Night” 94E, 188G). What he knows, like his movement, is marked as an abyss between left and right and is evidenced in a strange double-gaze. Sebald’s last image, a cropped citation of the second, smaller painting places the dog once again in the middle of the frame.

Attentively his left (domesticated) eye is fixed on us; the right (wild) one has a trace less light, strikes us as averted and alien. And yet it is precisely by this over-shadowed eye that we feel ourselves seen through. (“Like Day and Night” 94E)

Detail of Jan Peter Tripp, *Déjà vu oder der Zwischenfall* (*Déjà vu or the Incident*).
Copyright © Jan Peter Tripp. Reprinted by permission of the artist (in “As Day and Night,” 94E).



Aufmerksam ist sein linkes (domestiziertes) Auge auf uns gerichtet; das rechte (wilde) hat um eine Spur weniger Licht, wirkt abseitig und fremd. Und doch fühlen wir uns gerade von diesem überschatteten Auge durchschaut. (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 188G)

In the essay we find a previous history of this state of affairs, which, while not solving the riddle of the dog might help us to frame that cropped image of it from another perspective. Under the aegis of *Hinterlassenschaft*, of what might be left behind, it is again a question of an inheritance of sorts, and of painting and the observer in relation, this time, to the *nature morte*. Citing Merleau-Ponty, Sebald writes:

The *nature morte*, for Tripp ... is the paradigm of the estate we leave behind. In it we encounter what Maurice Merleau-Ponty ... called the *regard préhumain*, for in such paintings the roles of the observer and the observed objects are reversed. Looking, the painter relinquishes our all too facile knowing; fixedly/unrelatedly,¹⁶ things look across to us. “Action et passion si peu discernable ... qu’on ne sait plus qui voit et qui est vu, qui peint et qui est peint.” (“Action and passion so little separable ... that one no longer knows who is looking and who is being looked at, who is painting and who is being painted.”) (“Like Day and Night” 80E)

Die *nature morte* ist bei Tripp ... das Paradigma unserer Hinterlassenschaft. An ihr geht uns auf, was Maurice Merleau-Ponty ... den “regard préhumain” genannt hat, denn umgekehrt sind in solcher Malerei die Rollen des Betrachters und des betrachteten Gegenstands. Schauend gibt der Maler unser allzu leichtfertiges Wissen auf; unverwandt blicken die Dinge zu uns herüber. “Action et passion si peu discernable ... qu’on ne sait plus qui voit et qui est vu, qui peint et qui est peint.” (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 174G)

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Our *knowing* is ill-considered, frivolous, and must be relinquished (unlike that of the dog). Perhaps this is because, as observers, (and isn’t this what the dog sees through?) we foolishly presume to know what Tripp (and art) are about. Sebald, too. For is not much of the essay “Like Day and Night” a series of ever shifting takes on Tripp’s work, perspectives that are implicitly cited, if not precisely kept in view, and ironically undone by the closing passage?

¹⁶ The English translation has the odd but interesting choice of “unrelatedly” here.

In thinking of Tripp, this is what Sebald tells us all along: we cannot avoid the question of realism and of fidelity to reality: *Wirklichkeitstreue*.

What seems to me worth considering in it is only the assumption ... according to which the inherent quality of a picture by Tripp, just in view of what one might believe to be its purely objective and affirmative nature, probably cannot be attributed to that identity with reality which all its viewers admire without fail – or to its photographic reproduction – but to the far less apparent points of divergence and difference. (“Like Day and Night” 84E)¹⁷

Bedenkenswert daran scheint mir einzig ... die ... Vermutung, wonach die inhärente Qualität eines Bildes von Tripp, gerade in Anbetracht seiner, wie man meinen könnte, rein objektiven und affirmativen Beschaffenheit, sich wahrscheinlich nicht bestimmen läßt in der von allen Betrachtern unfehlbar bewunderten Identität mit der Wirklichkeit (oder ihrem photographischen Abzug), sondern in den weit weniger offensichtlichen Punkten der Abweichung und Differenz. (“Wie Tag und Nacht” 178G)

If the narrator dismisses such fidelity to reality in Tripp’s art as completely off the mark, for most of the essay, nevertheless, it remains his point of departure. Thus art may call for ambiguity and polyvalence and for the transcendence of that which seems to be the case, but Tripp’s art is repeatedly viewed, less as a radical departure from, than as modification of, the faithful replicating material of the photograph: with additions, interventions, divergences and differences (“Hinzufügungen,” “Eingriffe,” “Abweichungen und Differenzen” “Like Day and Night” 84-85E, 179G). His claims notwithstanding, the narrator, nevertheless, fundamentally maintains the assumption of this art’s almost-fidelity to and even identity with reality (“Wirklichkeitstreue” and “Identität mit der Wirklichkeit” “Like Day and Night” 80E, 174G and 84E, 178G) with which Tripp’s work inevitably lures every observer: for what Sebald writes, at least early in the essay, is that just a small shift needs to take place: “Something is shifted to another place” (“Etwas wird an eine andere Stelle gerückt” “Like Day and Night” 84E, 179G).

¹⁷ The almost identical phrase, but in the plural, divergences and differences (“Abweichungen und Differenzen”) appears a page later.

Still, towards the end of the essay there is a shifting sense of shifting (*Rücken*) that gets quite out of hand. The “Déclaration de guerre,” we read, closes itself off in a private realm, but, when cited in a second work: “the painter *shifts* his puzzle-image at least a bit further into the public sphere” (“*rückt* der Maler sein Rätselbild ein Stückchen weiter wenigstens in die Öffentlichkeit” “Like Day and Night” 92E, 185G, emphasis mine). This shift in the name of openness and revelation is immediately followed by the shift of the shoe in the hand of the woman in white, the shift of the dog from the middle to the left, the shift of the dog in and out of the frame, and the shift of van Eyck’s sandal into Tripp’s picture – shifts that cannot simply be grounded in a fidelity to reality. The outlandish tale that Sebald finally creates responds to his essay’s initial naiveté. So does the title of Tripp’s second painting, which Sebald keeps secret: “Déjà vu oder der Zwischenfall” (“Déjà vu or the Incident”). The title gives us a choice – or perhaps rather insists on our seeing double. The second painting presents art as “Déjà vu.” The painting of the two shoes, “Déclaration de guerre” which we see imaged in this second work, previously had a place in a more immediate realm. “Déjà vu or the Incident,” because it contains a replica of the first painting, announces its fidelity to a reality outside its canvas (“Déclaration de guerre”) that is passed from this world over the threshold to that of art. It is the passage to death (*nature morte*) of which we have already read – passing over the border on the way to the other side (“über die Grenze. Auf dem Weg nach der anderen Seite” “Like Day and Night” 86E, 180G).

Moreover, one can think of the shoe on the woman’s foot (or the missing shoe for that matter) as one of the original pair in the “La déclaration de guerre”: they are the same as those she contemplates on the large picture (“es sind die selben, die sie betrachtet auf dem großen Bild,” “Like Day and Night” 92E, 186G). In this sense, once again, not only what we see, but also what she sees in the “Déclaration de guerre” is: “Déjà vu.” The painting is a matter of *Wirklichkeitstreue* as a replica of objects of the world, the painting, the woman’s shoe(s).

“Déjà vu oder der Zwischenfall” (“Déjà vu or the Incident”): what the canvas and Sebald’s storytelling also makes of this incident (*Zwischenfall*) is the *inzwischen*, the intervening time, the time that falls between, of the outrageously elaborated adventure of the dog underway (*unterwegs*) through time and space. In this little story of a little trip Sebald thereby claims to present as explanation for the woman’s loss that which is both beside the point and impossible.

Mimetic language had already met its match when confronted with the “Déclaration de guerre,” as an image of such complexity, we were told, that it cannot be described in words. Shifting that image into Tripp’s second painting seemed a move toward bringing it into a more public sphere. The scene of the woman contemplating the “Déclaration de guerre” pretends to speak of, or even partially explain, the relation between what is inside and what is outside of art. It hints at but fails to fully account for a conventional economy of art. The narration of the essay, however, then takes an entirely different tack with regard to “Déjà vu or the Incident” in the totally far-fetched story of the dog which violates all norms of time and space. The story conjures “reality” (but then who is to say that the dog really *is*?) out of the material and materiality of “art,” rather than the other way around. This purely paint-of-a-dog, shifting in and out of the frame of the picture, moves miraculously and indifferently through the no longer meaningful parameters of time and space, or so the narrator was informed (“so habe ich mir sagen lassen” “Like Day and Night” 92E, 186G). And, through no act of imitation, he does what no “real” dog could do; he brings van Eyck’s sandal into Tripp’s frame, carrying it both like a secret (*Geheimnis*) and a real thing. This is at once a testimony to (Tripp’s) exemplary mimetic, artistic accomplishment and/or a writerly tale of a painter forced to give up his own all too frivolous knowing (“allzu leichtfertiges Wissen,” “Like Day and Night” 80E, 174G).

And yet, the paintings are cited, to begin with, in order to explain that “Remembrance is basically nothing but a citation” (“Das Andenken ist ja im Grunde nichts anderes als ein Zitat” “Like Day and Night” 90E, 184G): and that citation sends us scurrying out of our present context into storied time and the time of culture. It is a test of all that we know: texts, images, the world. Sebald’s tale both mirrors life, and creates it: it is both *déjà vu* and that which comes to invent the no man’s land of an incident, a *Zwischenfall* that falls in between. It tells us that between the dog’s obliterated, painted-over place in the middle of the canvas and his final place at the left as representation, the illusory creature created in colors entered into lived, (three-dimensional) space or back in time, or, more outrageously, into another work of art to rob it of an object/image.

“Like Day and Night” poses at first as a critical commentary on the work of Jan Peter Tripp: with its description of individual works,¹⁸ the ritual invocation of well-recognized theoretical voices (Ernst Gombrich, Merleau-Ponty, Eco), and the historical account of the development of the artist’s oeuvre. Still the reader senses all along that something else is at play. The essay puts forth some of the most outrageous fictional moments in Sebald’s work and some of the most interesting metacritical thought-as-practice. “Like Day and Night” performs. It frolics about, though not frivolously, among different modes of discourse – criticism, theory, fiction; among different takes on the object of its observation – as works of art, the materiality of those works, their formal qualities, or the doings of living individuals portrayed in them. It jumps about as well between opposing accounts of its own position – as observer and observed. Thus all the frames that mark off art from reality are both perfectly intact and utterly blasted. This is no less true for the imaginary plane which (as with all paintings) separates “Déjà vu” from the locus of its observer. What might it mean that across that divide the alien eye of that same dog seems to see right through us? With the dog’s domesticated eye directed at us, we become the object of the painting’s gaze, and feel thereby, perhaps, assured of our reality and existence. With the gaze of his wild right eye, the eye that sees right through us, we are made to feel that the revelation of any secrets will, if anywhere, inevitably take place behind our backs. Or is it that we, precisely in our search for such revelation, by way of a too facile knowing, are inevitably seen through, at best irrelevant, or, perhaps, not even there?

¹⁸ There are elements of literary criticism in many of Sebald’s works. Sebald says this himself with respect to the sections on Stendhal and Kafka in *Vertigo*. But we also find descriptions of literary and art works in *After Nature*, in *Vertigo*, in “Air War and Literature,” in *Rings of Saturn* as the narrator speaks of Rembrandt’s famous painting, of Browne’s *Garden of Cyrus*, and of Grimmelshausen’s *Simplicissimus* and various post-war writers.