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Embodiments and Voices of Inseparable Identities in *The Book of My Lives* and *The Lazarus Project* by Aleksandar Hemon

Abstract: Aleksandar Hemon's books encapsulate a sense of ghostly, yet concrete belonging to disparate places, as he explores in various forms his own identity as an immigrant in the US. Hemon conveys the complex emotional and geographical displacement through a collage of frames and portraits depicting the relationality between past and present. This article looks into the representations of home, family, and distance in the memoir *The Book of My Lives* and *The Lazarus Project* through Ortega y Gasset's notion of *intrabody*, renewed by the contemporary philosopher Emanuele Coccia in the study *The Sensible Life*.

Keywords: Aleksandar Hemon; Memory; Space; Displacement; Memoir; Diaspora; *Intrabody*; Emanuele Coccia.

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The Cartography of Memories. Sarajevo and Chicago in Hemon's Prose

In the aftermath of the Yugoslav Wars, both literary and non-fictional texts have encompassed the reality of displacement and vulnerability that moulded into the existence of the oppressed people. Despite the fact that Aleksandar Hemon was not physically in Sarajevo when the Bosnian War started, the visualisation of this conflict (1992-1995) through mass-media lenses majorly contributed to the sedimentation and actualization of some memories, before leaving his country for a journalist exchange across the ocean.

Hemon had lived in Sarajevo from his birth until 1992, when he moved to the United States of America. He visits his native country after five years¹ and, upon returning to the US, writes about the paradox of how everything seemed to him both changed and identical to the time when he lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Accordingly, he notes the impossibility of an absolute transcription of his ideas about personal and socio-political aspects in the

adopted language, English. From memories that evoke the image of his mother to stories about estrangement, Hemon's prose delineates reality as perceived only through the permanent thought of having lost a space that meant home. The author's books suggest how one's life is permanently in a negotiatory state regarding truth, experience, and the questions helping to unfold the identity of an immigrant's life.

The Bosnian War became the lynchpin of Hemon's writings, along with the visceral transcription of personal loss that is evinced in his autobiographical essays, significantly the one about the death of one of his daughters; in *The Book of My Lives*, the death of Isabel forms the vision of life as an aquarium, fact that showcases the inaccessibility of total understanding of trauma and loss: "I could see outside, the people outside could see me inside (if they somehow chose to pay attention), but we lived and breathed in entirely different environments"². This perspective can be applied to the protagonists Hemon places inside fictional worlds, since they are constructed as transient in a society that they adapt to because of conflictual contexts. Thus, this paper will illustrate the correlation between voice and image in the attempt of mingling the past with the present as part of the status of immigrant characters.

The first book to be analysed is a memoir called *The Book of My Lives*, which displays the complex routes of socio-political experiences and personal trauma. The book comprises fifteen parts, with texts that were previously published in *The New Yorker* and *Chicago in the Year 2000*, and were revised for *The Book of My Lives* edition. It comprises chapters, such as "The Lives of a Flâneur", "Reasons Why I do

not Wish to Leave Chicago: An Incomplete, Random List". As the title states, Hemon's memoir focuses on the many facets of his life, seen altogether as a specter of existences, as he recalls numerous stories of his friends and acquaintances. Nevertheless, the main narrative vein is referring to the inadequacies and hardships that an immigrant witnesses and lives, along with various family problems.

The fictional book entitled *The Lazarus Project* aims to calibrate the protagonist's desire to understand what happened in the life of an immigrant after his death, because he himself is a Bosnian with English as the second language, living in Chicago. *The Lazarus Project* alternates two temporal coordinates, 1908 period and the 2000s. While it may feel like the story conveys nothing more but a shattered identity of a lost man, the book represents life as a depository for an affective fluid passing through the fissures of mundane and exceptional situations, as well as negative conjectures. In this prose, the inserted pictures are dark-hued and they suggest a general intimate feeling of being lost in a world of conflicts, highlighting the voices of marginal individuals. The images are placed at the beginning of each chapter, anticipating and synthesising the stories. The protagonist is Vladimir Brik who wants to write a book about the immigrant Lazarus Averbuch, as it seems that it is an unescapable presence for him, as well as it is the biblical Lazarus. In Hemon's book, the young Lazarus is a nineteen years old Russian Jew boy shot by the police chief in Chicago, George Shippy, because he was believed to be an anarchist. Therefore, the pursuit of Vladimir is about reaching the truth about the past and fulfilling a journey

into his own existential crisis. Vladimir obtains a grant and goes to Sarajevo with his photographer friend named Rora Halilbašić, whom he knew from high school years, and who experienced the lengths of the Bosnian War. They embark on a sinuous trajectory through both space and time, as the places they travel through are mostly unknown for them. Passing through Bucharest and having experienced a sojourn at a hotel with a ghastly tone, they arrive in Chisinau, and then in Sarajevo.

Hemon's literature displays vulnerability as even the narrations are fractured in multiple moments, but a unitary voice surpasses in every aspect only with the help of other accounts on what really happened previously. The idea is to recreate the disjointed past, from a personal and societal point of view. Other publications of the Bosnian born writer include *The Question of Bruno* (2000), *Nowhere Man: The Pronek Fantasies* (2002), and *Love and Obstacles* (2008), with stories that reunite the oscillating image between two geographical territories that denote the symbolic poles of Hemon's biography: Sarajevo and Chicago. The stories from *The Question of Bruno* express the aspects of the Bosnian crisis periods, one relevant example being the approach of documenting the ethnical war by recording the events, in which a young woman tries to understand the citizens' turmoil. In a similar manner, the identity of the young protagonist from *Nowhere Man* translates the intricate journey of evolving from a child in Sarajevo to a student in Ukraine, and then a part of the US, as an immigrant. What is more, *Love and Obstacles* gathers short stories in which, for instance, the reader is able to feel the grim atmosphere that overtook Sarajevo

once the shutting off of the electricity announced the onset of the Bosnian War.

While the irony of Hemon's narrative voice had been underlined and appreciated in reviews, there has been a negative critical response about the style and the ruptures in the narrative flow, with the lack of a nuanced historical context regarding the American background³. Even so, it is still provoking to see whether these mechanisms of exposing a story constitute a flaw or are merely a reflex of duplicating the experiences of an adapting voice to different moments and interactions with various nationalities.

The *Intrabody* – Transgressing the Physical Realm through Memories

In the following pages, I will analyse *The Books of My Lives* and *The Lazarus Project* through the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset's notion of *intrabody*, renewed by the contemporary philosopher Emanuele Coccia in *The Sensible Life*. Among other interests, Coccia studies aesthetics and normativity, focusing on the valences of images in the contemporary world. In the *Sensible Life*, Coccia explains that a "micro-ontology"⁴ can be created within the space of interaction between beings, their ways of having a lived experience in the world and other presences around. As a result, the *intrabody* constitutes an immaterial sphere of existence, with the particularity of constantly changing sensations. For example, when people recall a significant moment through mental visualisation or by looking at a picture, the medial quality of their perception creates a state in which they are aware of a larger experience than it appears. This means that, individuals are

still inhabited by past moments that turn into the present, resulting from the intersection of thoughts, images, and space. Correspondingly, I utilise the notion of the *intrabody* as a mechanism of understanding how diaspora writers merge in a constant state of finding a lost voice that represents them and is still there, in the foreign place where they live. The lack of certain contours belonging to an immigrant life can be understood through this notion that connects the invisible experience – the interior universe of joy, grief, and the other liminal states – with a concrete reality which is only a vehicle for building up this intrinsic body of memories:

Ortega calls intrabody (*intracuerpo*) the reality and the consistency of the body of which we are composed, as it is perceived from inside ourselves of us (*desde dentro*). Unlike the exterior body, the intrabody has no color or defined form; it is not a purely visual object.⁵

Specifically, Coccia reiterates the double nature of human's corporality. On the one hand, the body is perceived from an extrinsic perspective when people see themselves in a mirror or when the body is captured in a photograph. On the other hand, there is an intrinsic quality to each body that moves, receives stimuli, or is part of any physical activity. These two main arches of our corporal existence combined together create a *sensible life*, in Coccia's words, thus a sensorial unity which defines our identity. To put it differently, a person experiences various emotions associated with certain places, things, or inanimate elements, so *the intrabody* reflects the conjunction between these presences:

From the point of view of the one who lives, the body never exists as a simple object that takes up space, but it breaks down into an uninterrupted series [...]. This is the intrabody; this is the stream of sensible matter in which we exist.⁶

This shift in perceiving one's dialogue with the exterior is similar to Hemon's process of adapting to a foreign language in an entirely different space from Sarajevo, and of being part of a diaspora. As a consequence, the *intrabody* in the autobiographical book conveys Hemon's attempts to place himself in Sarajevo before the siege, while he is part of diaspora in Chicago.

Vulnerability and the *Intrabody* – *The Book of My Lives*

Throughout Hemon's memoir, individual feelings are interlinked with those of a collective presence, such as Sarajevo's population. In connection to this, I will now focus on the autobiographical value of the Bosnian writers' texts.

Two functions of autobiography have been identified by Jerome Bruner⁷: the first consists in strengthening the self – by renouncing tradition or assimilating it, and the second in marking key points (which leads to the reconsideration of the protagonist's life – called *turning-points*), through which is crystallised the major change that gives a specific course to the narrator's existence. Also, with reference to the typology of autobiography, John A. Robinson explains the idea of "autobiographical memory"⁸, which is generally composed of two elements, namely *narrative-discourse* (verbal narrative), along with the image

and *emotional ensemble* (imagery)⁹. In the autobiography, the speech often contains an abundance of metaphors and figurative language, which also demonstrates how human memory can develop into a memory of a time restructured through a specific spectrum of perspectives.

Similarly, Coccia defines the *intrabody* as an amalgam of sensorial aspects and traces of one's presence into areas that have the ability to engrave the minutiae of each and every existence, as described in the following passage:

the body never exists as a simple object that takes up space, but it breaks down into an uninterrupted series of imaginations and perceptions, in a corporeal current made of light or shadow, of dull or lively sensations.¹⁰

In other words, when talking about an *intrabody*, we understand a transgression of the physical boundaries by adding spatial and cognitive experience to form the unit of a sensitive presence in the world. In *The Book of My Lives*, Hemon explains one major difference between Sarajevo and the USA. It consists in the cumulative effect of the first, meaning that people are able to befriend each other and to assimilate personal notions that consolidate the relationship. In Sarajevo, Hemon writes, people talked about the dead ones and passed on the knowledge about previous generations to the actual ones. This process creates a more united group, in which strangers become supportive, causing Hemon to notice that Sarajevo is a place of symbiosis between what is felt and what is verbalized amongst people, as the following passage suggests:

The borders between interiority and exteriority were practically non-existent. If you somehow vanished, your fellow citizens could have collectively reconstructed you from their collective memory and the gossip accrued over the years. Your sense of who you were, your deepest identity, was determined by your position in a human network, whose physical corollary was the architecture of the city. Chicago, on the other hand, was built not for people to come together but for them to be safely apart.¹¹

For Hemon, Chicago becomes a space of finding his voice in a familial and professional setting, thus this city is characterized by his achievement of writing in publications, having his past restored through his books and being part of a family.

It is essential, then, to see the traumatic dimension of his life when his daughter Isabel died. A sensorial element seems to have anticipated the tragic event, because another daughter used to have an imaginary friend, called Mingus, who acted as a panacea for the sorrow that weighted down the family because of Isabel's tumour, as presented in the essay "The Aquarium":

Meanwhile, Mingus allowed Ella to practice and expand her language, while providing her with company and comfort Teri and I were barely able to provide. On the mornings when I drove her to school, Ella would offer run-on tales of Mingus, the recondite plots of which were sunk deep in her verbal torrent.¹²

This description of how an invisible presence contributes to enlarging a child's communication is essential for denominating the *intrabody* of Hemon's family. When the need of adjustment in times of illness and incertitude appears, people choose to heal through voicing their fears and experiences, and in this example, Mingus is an alternative identity of a bereaved life. The concept of the *intrabody* is best illustrated by the next phrase: "Isabel's indelible absence is now an organ in our bodies whose sole function is a continuous secretion of sorrow".¹³ Hence, the faith of a child is being embodied into the other members of the family who carry around the weight of death.

Another relevant chapter that illustrates the notion of the *intrabody* is "The Tibetan Goalie". It presents Hemon's shared experience with other immigrants. The soccer field by a lake in the US is where Hemon and friends, named after their native countries, gather to play. Sport becomes a catalyst of creating a territory of openness to communication and intimacy. At the end of the chapter, Hemon explains the ambiance that occurred once the rain started and some of his friends chose to stay on the field and continue the game: "And all you are left with is a vague, physical, orgasmic memory of the evanescent instant when you were completely connected with everything and everyone around you".¹⁴

Furthermore, the experience of diaspora can be linked to Mihai Spăriosu's perspective upon exile, as a liminal experience, which he associates with the experience of utopia, in an etymological sense, because "Viewed in this light, exile becomes also a form of utopia or, properly speaking,

atopia, if one uses this term in the original, etymological sense of 'nowhere' (a meaning of utopia highlighted in Samuel Butler's anagrammatic title of his 1872 novel, *Erewhon*)"¹⁵. The similarity is motivated by Spăriosu by the fact that both exile and patterns of ideal societies appear in the history of mankind when people project scenarios about the past or the future. For the exiled people, the act of wandering becomes a meditative state which draws a connection between the foreign place and home, through walking. In an *atopia*, as Spăriosu explains, characters are often confused and various depicted territories appear without clear separations or traits. As a result, crossing unknown regions or trying to understand the transition from one space to another represents a reaction related to the need of control in a world whose shapes and inhabitants seem to oppose the concept of home. This may be the same reason Hemon feels to connect with Chicago on a much deeper level: "I don't know if I would've used the word back then, but now I'm prone to reimagining my young self as one of Baudelaire's *flâneurs*, as someone who wanted to be everywhere and nowhere in particular, for whom wandering in the city was the main means of communication with it."¹⁶ What is more, he makes a list of twelve positive elements related to Chicago. He reversed the need of an estranged person of being in a native place with an honest confession about how the US became an emotional anchor as well.

In *The Book of My Lives*, the expositions of the episodes do not follow life chronologically, the discourse includes analepsis and prolepsis, forming a collage of frames and portraits which end with

the image of a transparent object build up by others' words that almost suffocate Hemon because of his inability to save his ill daughter.

The Voiced Stories of the Past – *The Lazarus Project*

This segment of the paper aims to continue the illustration of the *intrabody* notion in regard to the novel *The Lazarus Project*. The two intertwined stories reveal sorrow, loss, and the value of family through photographs and chapters that engrave the past into the present. Lazarus carries the weight of his Jewish identity during his youth years in the USA and then becomes a character *in absentia*, after he is killed by the chief of police in Chicago, despite the lack of evidence about him being part of anarchic groups. Besides the two interwoven main stories, another analysed presence is that of Iuliana, a relative of Lazarus Averbuch in Chisinau, where the grave of her family is situated, and where Brik contemplates the power of death.

Similar to the autobiographical essays from *The Book of My Lives*, through the burden of feeling displaced, *The Lazarus Project* explores ideas such as finding certainty, trying to accept the unjustness of some historical moments, and depicting history of generational traumas related to the Jewish population. As already mentioned, the protagonist's decision to travel to Eastern Europe in order to find out about what lays beneath the story of Lazarus represents the vectorial force of the book. I will now focus on the chapter in which Vladimir Brik and Rora, the protagonist from the contemporary time frame narration and his Bosnian friend, arrive in Moldova, at an institution

called Yeshiva. Here, they meet Iuliana, whom Vladimir asks about the Chisinau pogrom of 1903. She knows about Lazarus Averbuch and his sister, Olga, because her grandmother's maiden name was Averbuch. Everything else is lost, not a piece of elaborate information helped generations to restore the connection to the dead ones. Nonetheless, Iuliana accompanies them in the cemetery hoping they can find symbolic vestiges about their families. She tells her family's story and becomes an intermediary in Brik's narrative thread. After a short walk, Rora gets further on an alley to take photographs, while Iuliana's voice is still present somewhere in the air. Gradually, Vladimir finds himself alone and becomes aware of the imminence of death, thinking about Lazarus' fate. The cemetery gives him the necessary hiatus of life, and he realizes that his search may not be one that fills the void of knowledge, but an abandonment of the self, juggling between the disparities of diaspora life.

In light of the revelation related to the impossibility of finding the truth about Lazarus' life, Brik converts identity into a common experience and gathers together the lives of the dear ones as if they would form a unitary whole: "They were me. We lived the same life: we would vanish into the same death. We were like everybody else, because there was nobody like us"¹⁷. This aporia speaks about a universal feeling rendered by the fact that even though we experience life in an entirely different manner, we still have in common the end of it all, the moment of passing into nothingness.

The particularity of Hemon's characters has been observed in relation to a geographical aspect by Catharina Raudvere:

“His texts give voice to identities that are disconnected from territory, to identities that are not and were never predicated on territory.”¹⁸ For instance, even Lazarus was shot short after he arrived at the door of the officer, as if it was a threshold that he needed to pass in order to achieve the right to speak or denounce a misdemeanor. Furthermore, Lazarus’ presence is continually shaped by his sister, Olga, who writes letters to their mother without sharing the truth about Lazarus’s death, but fictionalizing it in a mild way. Excerpts of her message are inserted throughout Lazarus’ chapters and they symbolize another voice that camouflages truth in order to obtain solace.

Equally important to the problem of expressing one’s feelings in times of grief, as Olga mimics the truth in order not to hurt her family, is language in everyday life, in a diasporic context. In *Languages and Collective Identities*, the sociologist Gilles Ferréol explains that a person is defined by the spoken language¹⁹, since words resurface lived events differently, depending on the process of connecting discourse with feelings. Because of that, language becomes a prominent aspect in the life of people who had to move abroad; adjacent to this idea, in an interview, Hemon expresses how an immigrant’s vocabulary contains a multitude of means of communication:

There’s a notion of linguistics, the notion of, or concept of, ‘macaronic language’, and the Italian root is *mac-carone*. It’s the kind of language that is common among immigrants. For instance, the parents speak their native language, but they insert English words for things that are not part of their previous experience.²⁰

This duality of expression has the structure of a linguistic exile, resonating with Hemon’s statement: “Deeply displaced, I could write neither in Bosnian nor in English.”²¹; later, he finds that he can start writing in English, as he knew he could find a coherent voice, like other displaced authors did, such as Vladimir Nabokov, with whom he shares not only the life in the US, but also a certain fixation on the memory. This idea is related to the way autobiographies are highly fictionalized and include interventions such as poetic remembrances of the past through nostalgic tonalities, but through a journalistic approach as well, as in the passage:

There were few people in those pictures, but what I was doing felt very much like identifying corpses. Now and then I could recall the street or even the exact address; sometimes the buildings were so familiar they seemed unreal. There was, for example, the building at the corner of Danijela Ozme and Kralja Tomislava, across from which I used to wait for Renata, my high school girlfriend, to come down from Džidžikovac.²²

Here, the narrator externalizes the link between space and memory and transfers the images into a sensorial geography, since people’s pictures still impregnate certain areas in Sarajevo when seen by the viewer.

Image and sound woven together come to be a sort of a refuge from oblivion. Similarly, in *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said explores how exile has been thematized in modern culture, even though it is an element of ancient origins, contrasting modern exile with that of the romantic period, and concluding

that the first is complementary to a period of extended immigration. This idea is further completed by a latent space: “just beyond the frontier between *us* and the *outsiders* is the perilous territory of not-belonging: this is to where in a primitive time peoples were banished, and where in the modern era immense aggregates of humanity loiter as refugees and displaced persons”²³. Consequently, the image of the loiterers appears in texts from diaspora, and it is seen in Hemon’s statement regarding the status of the immigrant. This can frame the nucleus around which the autobiographical expositions are attached, because:

The situation of immigration leads to a kind of self-othering as well. Displacement results in a tenuous relationship with the past, with the self that used to exist and operate in a different place, where the qualities that constituted us were in no need of negotiation. Immigration is an ontological crisis because you are forced to negotiate the conditions of your selfhood under perpetually changing existential circumstances.²⁴

During such walks in a foreign city, the mind generates reflections and a sort of duplicate for one’s feeling, as the present submerges under the torment of the accumulated memories. Hemon’s book illustrates at a macro level the idea of a territory to be traversed, with his two friends, in search of Lazarus Averbuch.

Immortalized Experiences – Photography in *The Lazarus Project*

The use of images in *The Lazarus Project* is symptomatic for the tendency of calibrating a traumatic event with a

complementary image as seen before by another diasporic writer, W. G. Sebald, as I shall explain further. Born in Bavaria, W. G. Sebald moved to United Kingdom, where he became a lecturer. His books transcribe the need to understand and accept the past, while moving forward into a decayed world. With that, Sebald builds an obscure atmosphere, in an attempt to capture the grief of losing the loved ones in the context of the Holocaust. Moreover, the link between Hemon and Sebald was previously remarked, since Hemon received W. G. Sebald Award in 2011²⁵.

An image detaches itself from the human self, and from this process results the protean, foreign body of the photographs. The image hides, having a character of simulation that Susan Sontag outlines (in *On Photography*²⁶), and that recalls one of the features formulated by R. Barthes: “the photograph is the advent of a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity”²⁷. As a result, I will analyze how image conveys stories, following the influence of W. G. Sebald²⁸ on Hemon. Therefore, the interferences regarding the insertion of the image in the literature create a fiction syncopated by the visual that intervenes in the narrative flow. Fiction thus becomes a hybrid of memories and objective history. For example, the pictures in *The Lazarus Project* emphasize the autobiographical side of Hemon’s prose: “In a dynamic that echoes the author-narrator duality, these images were in fact photographed by Hemon’s friend, Velibor Božovic, himself a Bosnian.”²⁹ The other images, tracing Lazarus’s condition and Chicago related topics, are also part of a real archive: “For the Lazarus chapters, the photos are historical, taken largely for the Chicago Daily News between 1904 and 1919”³⁰.

The descriptions of the itineraries undertaken by the narrators in Sebald's prose are interrupted by photographs that slow down the pace of reading and contribute to an attentive situation in the fictional space. The difference has been observed: "One is Hemon's references to popular culture in his strive to grasp the spirit of Sarajevo in the 1980s and Chicago some 30 years later, and he is much closer to irony and wit than Sebald."³¹ Both Sebald and Hemon use black and white pictures to ensure the feeling of confusion and underline the need of reconnecting to home and family. In this sense, in Sebald's *Austerlitz*³², a picture of the protagonist in his childhood performs the same rupture in the narration as it is the case with Lazarus' image in *The Lazarus Project* – the reader is symbolically invited to reimagine the portrait of the characters, by assimilating the story and the images. These exemplify the content of the text or are a reference to the details that are introduced in certain sequences of the book. *The Lazarus Project* tells the story of two different spaces, brought together by trauma: a writer from Chicago who wants to write the story of an immigrant from Sarajevo. The obscure images at the beginning of the chapters help to alternate the plans, that of the character Lazarus and that of the author who thus returns, temporally, to the existence of a stranger and gets closer, geographically, to the Eastern European territory from which he comes, to research in detail the coordinates of such a life.

The last image in *The Lazarus Project* is mostly dark, with an epicentre of light coming from a lamp post or a house, configuring a street that the narrator remembers from his childhood. Brick writes about

feeling invisible in such a familiar place, with no one confirming his presence in that space. Nevertheless, the events of the past are ritualized through the *intrabody*, which acts as an intermediary of the character's memory, keeping the past events all together and bringing them to the surface in an impalpable yet powerful way: "I recalled my previous life, the life in which I had ridden a bike down this very street, and where the kids on their way to school pelted me with rocks"³³. More precisely, the *intrabody* doubles the primary existence by forming an image of what was previously felt. In the case of diasporic writers, the process of reliving or deconstructing the image of homeward environment becomes a means of accepting the distance between them and their native country or beloved people. Coccia's definition of the *intrabody* as an inherent aspect of each person is illustrative of how home is inextricable from an immigrant's life; diaspora writers express predominantly the underneath of their endless connection to their primary hypostasis, in Hemon's case, being a Bosnian:

Every one carries his intrabody in himself, in silent but inevitable company. It is the invariable character who intervenes at every scene of our life, without drawing the attention on him. And it is within the intrabody that the deepest roots of our character are found, in wakefulness or in sleep.³⁴

The Lazarus Project conveys a metaphorical vision of life set after settling in the "adopted" land, and also a permanent nostalgic oscillation in relation to the urban, familial and familiar spaces that

Hemon left behind. Ideas of movement and static points are also common, being illustrated by the long walks as a symbol for advancing and returning in the various spaces of existence and also in the different temporal coordinates that create the narrative discourse. As an example, when Brik and Rora arrive in Liov, Ukraine, stopping during their journey to Cernăuți, they accommodate at the Grand Hotel. At night, during a walk on a street with diffuse light, Brik remembers a moment when he brought home from church his grandfather who had ophthalmological problems and who got blind afterwards. The image from the beginning of the chapter shows a dimly lit small street which anticipates the state in which the protagonist finds himself. Nonetheless, the image becomes an indicator of the fragile frontiers between generations, in the way that darkness makes the protagonist associate Liov with Lazarus's hopelessness, as later on in the chapter there is a passage about him: "And I could see then that Lazarus griped to Olga about the meaninglessness of his egg-packing job, and she implored him to be patient, begged him not to write to Mother about it and worry her with his disappointments"³⁵.

The fictional thread converges with the real one and often creates the frames of a universe of infinite perceptions and openings to alternative lives. We also find such images in Hemon's texts, where the diegesis is strongly impregnated with the pigment of amalgamated intrusions as in a dream. Photographic art as an instrument that intervenes in literature is significant for the exploration and unification of several territories to form a map with dynamic borders.

Conclusion

Aleksandar Hemon's texts constitute a testimony of a tragic moment, the Bosnian War, in which people were divided between three parts: Bosnian, Croat, and Serb. The moment still marks the inhabitants who moved to the United States, as the impossibility of being a part of what they believed in weighs on their personhood. Although Hemon had left Sarajevo without knowing surely that the war was about to break out, he is part of a diaspora that feels the inevitable connection with home, which he writes about both in essays and in literature. Therefore, Hemon's attempt is reiterating past events and trying to understand the socio-political contexts that shape individuals. There is a multiplicity of voices that reflects the fragmentation of an immigrant's identity.

Indebted to Ortega y Gasset through the concept of the *intrabody*, Emanuele Coccia's chapter from his study, *Sensible Life*, contributes to a better understanding of how sensorial experiences insinuate into the life of the ones who are afar from home, by building a presence imbued with images, both real and projected, as a result of longing for security. The *intrabody* connotes that there is an inseparability of physicality and memories, and in the context of diasporic experiences, the notion exemplifies the double account of displacement. One can feel home in a foreign place, but also one carry the poignant presence of the native country, so that storytelling becomes the vessel of integrating different spaces and events into the complex identity of diaspora. Ultimately, an *intrabody* is a cumulation of experiences in places where people are not present anymore, as it is the case with the cities that Brik and Rora visit

in *The Lazarus's Project*, and Sarajevo in *The Book of My Lives*.

In Aleksandar Hemon's texts, one of the most essential elements is the inseparability of voices and images creating a constantly evolving body of memories. The

intrabody reflects the two fused selves of a writer who searches for reconciliation between cultures, such as the American and the Eastern European, in the attempt to overlay absence with language and representations of people that shaped his identity.

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NOTES

1. "I had no way of knowing at the time that I'd return to my hometown only as an irreversibly displaced visitor. I was twenty-seven (and a half) and had never lived anywhere else, nor had any desire to do so." Aleksandar Hemon, *The Book of My Lives*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013, pp. 81-82.
2. *Ibidem*, pp. 146-147.
3. James Lasdun, "Two go mad in Europe", in *The Guardian*, Sep 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/sep/06/fiction>
4. Emanuele Coccia, *Sensible Life. A Micro-Ontology of the Image*, translated by Scott Alan Stuart, New York, Fordham University Press, 2016, p. 26.

5. *Ibidem*, p. 67.
6. *Ibidem*, p. 69.
7. Jerome Bruner, "Self-making and world-making", in Jens Brockmeier, Donal Carbaugh (ed.), *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture* (Studies in Narrative I), Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001, pp. 31-32.
8. John A. Robinson, "Perspective, meaning, discovering", in David C. Rubin (ed.), *Remembering Our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory* *Autobiographical Memory*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 212.
9. *Ibidem*.
10. Emanuele Coccia, *Ibidem*, p. 69.
11. Aleksandar Hemon, *The Book of My Lives*, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-130.
12. *Ibidem*, p. 148.
13. *Ibidem*, p. 153.
14. *Ibidem*, p. 106.
15. Mihai Spărioiu, *Modernism and Exile - Play, Liminality, and the Exilic-Utopian Imagination*, USA, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 30.
16. Aleksandar Hemon, *The Book of My Lives*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
17. *Ibidem*, *The Lazarus Project*, New York, Riverhead Book, 2008, p. 189.
18. Catharina Raudvere (ed.), *Contested Memories and the Demands of the Past. History Cultures in the Modern Muslim World*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 192.
19. Gilles Ferréol, Guy Jucquois, (dirs.), *Dictionnaire de l'altérité et des relations interculturelles*. Paris, Armand Colin, coll. « *Dictionnaire* », 2005.
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21. Aleksandar Hemon, *The Book of My Lives*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
22. *Ibidem*, p. 134.
23. Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile*, London, Granta Books, 2012, p. 177.
24. Aleksandar Hemon, *The Book of My Lives*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
25. <https://pen.org/literary-award/penw-g-sebald-award-for-a-fiction-writer-in-mid-career/>.
26. Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, Penguin Books, 2001.
27. Roland Barthes, *Camera lucida. Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, New York, 1982, p. 12.
28. See W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz, The Emigrants, The Rings of Saturn*.
29. Timothy Boswell, "The Audacity of Despair": An Interview with Aleksandar Hemon, in *Aleksandar Hemon Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2015, p. 218, pp. 246-266.
30. Alexander Nunes and Sebastian Cruz, "Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*: A Book Review", [www.medium.com](https://www.medium.com/writing-with-photographs-book-reviews/the-lazarus-project-a-book-review-5075162f5f08), 2017, <https://www.medium.com/writing-with-photographs-book-reviews/the-lazarus-project-a-book-review-5075162f5f08>.
31. Catharina Raudvere, *op. cit.*, p. 188.
32. W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, London, Penguin Books Ltd., 2002.
33. Aleksandar Hemon, *The Lazarus Project*, New York, Riverhead Books, 2008, p. 217.
34. Emanuele Coccia, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
35. *Ibidem*, p. 65.