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To the Funhouse: W. G. Sebald's Playful Intertextuality

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ABSTRACT

To the Funhouse: W. G. Sebald's Playful Intertextuality  
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*To the Funhouse: W. G. Sebald's Playful Intertextuality* examines intertextual and intermedial techniques of narrative composition in the works of W. G. Sebald (1944-2001) as a creative and ludic methodological device that confronts and disrupts modes of articulating memory and bearing witness in literature. As one of the most acclaimed contemporary German authors, Sebald is widely respected for his careful treatment of 20<sup>th</sup> century European history, especially the Holocaust and its impact on the German and Austrian literary landscape and psyche. In my dissertation I propose, however, that Sebald's prose texts are more playful than has been recognized and move, instead, beyond the depiction of trauma, suffering, and melancholia. My project suggests that Sebald's practice of intertextuality and intermediality constitutes a unique and playful method of articulating hope through a complex layering of fragments of literary and visual historical testimonies, and that serves as a critique of linear epistemology. In addition to fluctuating between fiction and nonfiction and crossing borders between genres and media, Sebald's texts assemble embellished, falsified, or stolen quotations into a disorienting intertextual funhouse in which the works of forerunners are placed as if in a hall of mirrors, which reflect and distort the original sources from literature, biography, film, journalism,

historiography, painting, and photography. By examining his allusions to playful writers, or “precursors,” such as Vladimir Nabokov and John Barth I suggest that he is a carnivalesque trickster. Sebald’s borrowings from a variety of cultural productions are a response to the crisis of representation in literature since WW II and a comment on and enactment of a complexly layered postmodern historiographical process, a kind of performative literary architecture that is hyperaware of its forerunners and at the same time questions the concept of precursors itself. My dissertation argues that Sebald’s texts represent a turning point in the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (overcoming of the past) in contemporary German writing, and propose writing as a form of therapy that reconstructs the modern individual as a mosaic of fragments.

**Chapter 1:** “Die Buchstabenbrücke aus dem Unglück in den Trost.” Border Crossings in *Schwindel. Gefühle*.

The study begins with an analysis of Sebald’s first prose text, *Schwindel. Gefühle*., and with a comparison between it and two preceding collections of Sebald’s critical essays, *Unheimliche Heimat* and *Die Beschreibung des Unglücks*. I argue that Sebald’s development as a creative writer is rooted in his work as a literary critic. *Schwindel. Gefühle*. plots an escapist, if imaginary, Italy against the negative realm of Germany/Austria, which is pictured as the uncanny homeland Sebald had analyzed in *Unheimliche Heimat*, and associated with unhappiness. However, following a statement in the foreword to *Die Beschreibung des Unglücks*, Sebald uses melancholy as a form of resistance and transfigures his narrator’s death wish into a mental and textual exercise. This chapter furthermore examines pretexts by Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank, Albrecht Schaeffer, Franz Kafka, Adalbert Stifter, and Ingeborg Bachmann. My analyses show



that *Schwindel. Gefühle.* is a text defined by polarities and the boundaries between them and juxtaposes a religious worldview to a rational, modern mindset. The sense of loss of an uncanny *patria* is mitigated in the end by a reliance on art, specifically texts, as redemptive and creates a bridge of words to a fictive Bohemia that restores the sense of a homeland in the imagination.

**Chapter 2:** The Moth, the Dachshund, the Squirrel, and its Tricks: Reflections of Nabokov in *Austerlitz*

In my second chapter, I expand on the reaffirmation of life through art discernible in *Schwindel. Gefühle.* by turning to an analysis of the intriguing and intricate interweaving of Vladimir Nabokov's texts into *Austerlitz*. I describe the playful intertextual connections between *Austerlitz* and works by Nabokov (*Speak, Memory*, *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*, *Pale Fire*, and *Pnin*). In particular, I show that Sebald borrows animals from Nabokov's texts as metaphors for memory. In *Austerlitz* and in Nabokov's texts, the transcendence of time and space are paramount themes. Sebald incorporates magical elements and glossy memories from his forerunner, but also suffuses Nabokov's manner of remembering with a dimension of sadness, instantiating Borges's comment that "every writer creates his own precursor" and going beyond it by inviting a reassessment of the source text. In *Austerlitz*, through allusions to intertexts by Nabokov and the emulation of Nabokov's methodology, hope is articulated by the transformation of life into art. Consequently, I make the case that the end of *Austerlitz* leaves room for hope and closure. By copying Nabokov's style and borrowing his characters, Sebald reveals himself as a postmodern trickster.

### **Chapter 3:** Landscape with the Fall of Icarus: W. G. Sebald's Suffolk

The project next turns to Sebald's third work of creative prose fiction, *Die Ringe des Saturn*. Here I investigate painting and trace Sebald's movement from intertextuality to intermediality, especially to a painterly perspective. I also analyze the presence of the Icarus myth, which symbolizes, on the one hand, an escape from the labyrinth of past disasters, and, on the other hand, the moral fall of humankind caused by ambitions and technological advancements. With its focus on painting and conceptualization of eco-catastrophes, *Die Ringe des Saturn* reconnects to Sebald's first creative text, the prose poem *Nach der Natur*, which I document as an intertext throughout. Sebald's most melancholy text vacillates between a nostalgic 19<sup>th</sup>-century and a bitter 20<sup>th</sup>-century point of view, which emerges as one of several tensions that dominate this travelogue. Other tensions analyzed are the constant shifts of perspective and the narrator's ambiguous stance towards colonialism and imperialism. Sebald filters "Africa" and "China" through exclusively European texts, and constructs them as inaccessible, imaginary spaces without a present, which calls into question the text's ostensible concern with the legacy of colonial and imperial ventures. I demonstrate that *Die Ringe des Saturn*, rather than resolving these vacillations, turns away from the entrapments of texts and moves towards painting as a less fraught artistic representation of history.

### **Chapter 4:** Falsification as Disruptive Method in *Austerlitz* and *Die Ausgewanderten*

*Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz* are closely related, and Jacques Austerlitz shares attributes with the four emigrants from *Die Ausgewanderten*, therefore my dissertation ends with a chapter that analyzes both of these texts. The presence of falsified diaries in "Max Aurach" and "Ambros Adelwarth" anticipates the central theme and narrative strategy of forgery in *Austerlitz*, which

contains appropriated Holocaust memoirs (by Saul Friedländer and Susi Bechhöfer). The metaphor of a funhouse, which Sebald playfully suggests in “Ambros Adelwarth” through intertextual similarity of the story to John Barth’s paradigmatic postmodern text “Lost in the Funhouse,” develops into Sebald’s complex model of a hall of mirrors in *Austerlitz*. Like Max Aurach, Jacques Austerlitz is a composite character whose experiences derive from genuine traumatic memories of survivors, an act of borrowing at odds with playful postmodern techniques of composition. My project analyzes whether Sebald’s use of Holocaust memoirs is ethical and arrives at the conclusion that he deliberately engages with the themes of appropriation and falsification by playfully transfiguring them into a formal, semantic, and literary metaphor. *Austerlitz* and “Ambros Adelwarth” comment on inadequate and derivative processes of remembering and demonstrate that historiography is an undertaking that necessarily contains lacunae and errors. In this chapter I also analyze intertexts by Walter Benjamin and Vladimir Nabokov, among others, and films by Orson Welles and Fritz Lang, and suggest that a carnivalesque reading of *Austerlitz* and *Die Ausgewanderten* is best suited for taking account of the provocative disruptions these texts create.

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Dedicated to  
Egon Kuzmany and Nick Schowengerdt

## ABBREVIATIONS

Works by W. G. Sebald:

|                                      |     |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| <i>Nach der Natur</i>                | NN  |
| <i>Schwindel. Gefühle.</i>           | SG  |
| <i>Die Ausgewanderten</i>            | AW  |
| <i>Die Ringe des Saturn</i>          | RS  |
| <i>Austerlitz</i>                    | A   |
| <i>Die Beschreibung des Unglücks</i> | BU  |
| <i>Unheimliche Heimat</i>            | UH  |
| <i>Logis in einem Landhaus</i>       | LiL |
| <i>Campo Santo</i>                   | CS  |
| “Aufzeichnungen aus Korsika”         | AK  |

Works by others:

|                                          |    |
|------------------------------------------|----|
| <i>Speak, Memory</i>                     | SM |
| <i>The Real Life of Sebastian Knight</i> | SK |
| <i>Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire</i>     | SV |

## INTRODUCTION

“Blicken zwei Spiegel einander an, so spielt der Satan seinen liebsten Trick und öffnet hier auf seine Weise (wie sein Partner in den Blicken der Liebenden tut) die Perspektive ins Unendliche.” (Walter Benjamin)

### I. TO THE FUNHOUSE

A funhouse, “a building in an amusement park that contains various devices designed to startle or amuse” is disorienting and catches visitors by surprise (Webster’s Dictionary). Intertextuality, the defining mode of W. G. Sebald’s writing style, and the meandering, unexpected paths it takes readers on, functions in a similar way and hence the funhouse is an appropriate metaphor and guiding image for this study. In Sebald’s prose texts, which are already disorienting because they cross borders of genre and media, intertexts are the devices that “startle or amuse” readers and that confront them with unexpected, playful turns to magical imagery. My project suggests that Sebald constructed his texts as intertextual funhouses, in which the works of forerunners are placed as if in a *Spiegelkabinett*, whose mirrors reflect and distort the original sources from literature, film, journalism, historiography, painting, or photography in a ludic, postmodern manner. As I trace the arc of Sebald’s intertextual methodology through his oeuvre of creative prose texts, I argue that it develops from a two-dimensional mirroring to complex three-dimensional refractions. Whereas Sebald’s early works reference the texts of forerunners without distortion, his later works twist the meaning of quotations and become increasingly intermedial. The setting of funhouses in amusement parks points to the carnivalesque aspect of Sebald’s prose texts. Previous scholarship has largely treated Sebald’s narratives as an archive of pain and suffering, and foregrounded their response to the Holocaust.<sup>1</sup> The intertextual method Sebald

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. for instance Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh, eds.: *W. G. Sebald: History, Memory, Trauma*, Carolin Duttlinger: “Traumatic Photographs: Remembrance and the Technical Media in W. G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz*,” Dora Osborne: “Blind Spots: Viewing Trauma in W. G.



develops by blurring boundaries and constructing scenes with borrowed materials is particularly well suited to simultaneously creating and breaking illusions and to constructing and dismantling artifice. The apt French term for funhouse is “palais de rire,” but funhouses and the carnivalesque are not solely fun, as Cosmo Solomon’s hallucination when watching *Dr. Mabuse – Der Spieler* in *Die Ausgewanderten* suggests. Cosmo describes the film as “ein Labyrinth [...] in dem er gefangen und durch Spiegelverkehrungen verrückt gemacht werden sollte” (AW 141). John Barth’s paradigmatic postmodern character Ambrose in “Lost in the Funhouse” likewise discovers that funhouses are “a place of fear and confusion” (72). Funhouses are ambivalent and instantiate one of Julia Kristeva’s characterizations of Menippean discourse that carnivalesque texts induce a serious form of laughter that is at once tragic and comic (cf. Kristeva 80). My dissertation shows how the intertextual relationship between Sebald and Vladimir Nabokov in particular creates a more hopeful reading of Sebald’s texts that transcends melancholy.

Sebald’s texts enact a tension between trauma and a postmodern carnivalesque methodology and, like funhouses, simulate reality in which readers become, like participants in a carnival, both spectators and actors (cf. Kristeva 79), complicit in generating meaning that varies according to the amount of intertextual references that are recognized. On the surface, Sebald creates documentary autobiographical texts, but the experiences of his narrators and characters are often revealed as derivative, borrowed from the memoirs and inventions of other authors, and elements of fiction and reality are constantly blurred. While I agree that Sebald is a subtle and superb recorder of trauma, I demonstrate that his choice of intertexts by playful authors, such as Nabokov and Jorge Luis Borges, allows for a more optimistic reading, and for resituating him as

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Sebald’s *Austerlitz*,” Anne Whitehead: “The Butterfly Man: Trauma and Repetition in the Writing of W. G. Sebald,” Rüdiger Görner, ed.: *The Anatomist of Melancholy: Essays in Memory of W. G. Sebald*,” to name just the tip of the iceberg. The majority of scholarship on Sebald I surveyed for this study focuses on the negativity of his work.

a postmodernist trickster, a quality that has not been adequately recognized by other critics. References to postmodern writers and postmodern modes of narrative composition in Sebald's oeuvre highlight the author's concurrent, deliberate interlinking of form and content and the self-referential discourse on writing. Sebald's technique of embellishing and falsifying sensitive pretexts such as Holocaust memoirs (e.g. by Saul Friedländer) challenges Kristeva's conception of a mutually beneficial form of intertextuality. The idea of history being inserted into text and thereby reinserted back into history becomes problematic when the specific historical context is the Holocaust and when the memories of survivors are appropriated. My project posits that this method provocatively questions and critiques pretensions to the objectivity or singular meaning of any text or image, and deconstructs notions of originality and ownership.

The funhouse metaphor is also useful when thinking about another aspect of Sebald's prose. Funhouses in amusement parks are designed as attractions that people walk through (rather than ride), which is indicated in the German and French words for the general category of these facilities: "das Laufgeschäft," "le walkthrough." A recurring theme and image in Sebald's texts is traveling, especially walking, as a metaphor for writing and other forms of artistic creation, learning, or remembering. Peripatetic movement that parallels an artistic process of composition has a long tradition in the European literary context in the recurring figure of the pilgrim, wanderer, or *flâneur*, and more recently that of exile or migrant. Intertextuality can also be understood as a way of walking through the texts of others. In "Death of the Author," Roland Barthes writes that "the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced" (147). Sebald's narrators and the subjects of their narration are portrayed in constant movement, ranging over the landscape and through cities as Sebald "walks through" the works of his precursors and European history, borrowing and rearranging quotations and images in his own texts.

Correspondingly, I have taken the concept of walking as a guiding principle for analyzing the different aspects and forms of intertextuality and intermediality I locate in Sebald's oeuvre, and I take account of several of Sebald's specific forerunners in the tradition of literary walks, such as Peter Handke and Walter Benjamin. Beyond the German influence, I examine the tradition of British romanticism as influential for Sebald's understanding and narrative practice of walking.

## II. INTERTEXTUALITY AND INTERMEDIALITY IN W. G. SEBALD

The intertextual mode of composition is a defining feature of W. G. Sebald's prose, as Susanne Schedel, J. J. Long, and Peter Schmucker, among many others, have shown extensively.<sup>2</sup> In addition, all of his texts thematize the act of writing and call attention to their own composition, which in itself constitutes a playful kind of mirroring. Sebald's intertextual process is akin to metonymy, whereby visual and textual quotations substitute for a larger cultural or literary source. Sebald uses excerpts from a variety of literary periods – e.g. a *Biedermeier* version of romanticism in the case of Adalbert Stifter, modernism in the case of Franz Kafka, proto-postmodernism in the case of Nabokov – and weaves them into pseudo-documentary texts that, in a carnivalesque manner, simultaneously hide and reveal their undergirding of postmodern patchwork. Reconfigured and embellished quotations and allusions are placed in a new and often counterintuitive setting, providing, for example, glimpses of Nabokov in a realist framework, snippets of Stifter in a gothic, Freudian setting, or use Kafka's tormented stories and fragmented diaries as a guide for a cohesive travelogue. These new texts break open at various junctures, revealing the originals' aesthetic or formal characteristics, such as the narrator's feverish episode of Kafkaesque/Freudian paranoia, and the Stifterian complex syntax and minute descriptions that

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. also essays by Marcel Atze, Russel J. A. Kilbourne, and Martin Swales, although most publications on Sebald incorporate some intertextual connection or present intertextual case studies.

remain at the same time uneasily terse and emotionally deprived in *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, or the sudden Nabokov-like exaggerated cherishing of memory in the Andromeda Lodge and Prague sections of *Austerlitz*, in which the past is an otherwise bleak and painful territory. Sebald thus presents literary case studies in the sub-layers of his own texts. The act of repositioning Nabokov in contemporary Paris, transposing Stifter to Bavaria in the 1950s, or merging the narrator with Kafka while walking the streets of Venice in the 1980s functions as an extended commentary that continues, in a creative format, Sebald's analysis of these writers begun in his academic essays (cf. BU, UH, CS).

While Sebald's primary literary forerunners are German, Austrian, and Swiss, his oeuvre refracts literary, artistic, and cinematic works from a context that goes far beyond German language literature and draws from a British, French, Italian, Russian, U.S.- and South American context. The intertextual method of composition puts previously unrelated materials and voices into dialogue with each other and allows for new angles of interpreting literary history. Taking Sebald's narratives as a staging ground for unusual encounters, I examine the themes of paranoia, suicide, memory, time, walking, colonialism, and forgery in his texts and those of his "precursors." The borrowing of characters and passages from other authors is also a form of restitution or perhaps resuscitation, as texts and images are given back to literary history in transfigured form. "Die Spuren, die Robert Walser auf seinem Lebensweg hinterlassen hat, waren so leicht, daß sie beinahe verweht worden wären," Sebald writes at the beginning of "Le promeneur solitaire – Zur Erinnerung an Robert Walser" (LiL 129). Sebald's quotations from other authors make their traces re-readable, illuminate their memory, and bear witness to a vast and varied transnational literary past. In their hybridity Sebald's narratives cannot be fixed, and through their interaction with other media (texts as well as visual works of art such as paintings

and photographs), they liberate the voices of others from a fixed interpretation as well. As the quote above suggests, Sebald “outsources” hints to his intertextual methodology to extra-diegetic or paratextual materials, such as interviews or essays. His indebtedness to authors like Handke, Walser, or Hugo von Hoffmannsthal is recognizable because of specific images or themes he mentions in his essays on these writers. Sebald’s academic essays thus become intratextual forerunners and part of the dialogue staged in his creative writing between literature and literary criticism. In addition to providing some tags in his narratives – linguistic or graphic-visual signs that flag an intertextual inscription in order to alert readers to its existence – Sebald left many borrowed passages unmarked. The playful aspect of hiding intertextual allusions is crystallized in Sebald’s frequent tips of the hat to Nabokov, an author who delighted in creating patterns and challenged his readers’ ability to decode obscure references. In *Speak, Memory*, for instance, Nabokov chides reviewers because “only one of them noticed [his] ‘vicious snap’ at Freud in the first paragraph of Chapter Eight, section 2, and none discovered the name of a great cartoonist and a tribute to him in the last sentence of section 2, Chapter Eleven.” He adds: “It is most embarrassing for a writer to have to point out such things himself” (15). Similarly, intertexts and images in Sebald’s prose texts often remain unattributed, an act of omission that invites readers to play along and decode the pattern, and that signals the thematization of concepts such as plagiarism and forgery.

In the context of German postwar literature, intertextuality and intermediality represent a means to expand articulation, and consequently conceptualization, of an era and a generation that have struggled with representation and speechlessness. The strategy of combining a multitude of narrative voices and visual quotations is a productive way of destabilizing a whole, and hence totalizing, narrative. Textual and visual quotations in Sebald’s works function as tags that point

to the unreliability of memory and language. While intertextual allusions open up the narrative and are an invitation (to those in the know) to spend time in the expanded “erzählte Zeit” of the text, the destabilizing tags of “forged” textual and visual evidence cause doubt about the reliability of the narrator’s voice and about the authenticity of the quotations. Sebald’s fragmented and sometimes seemingly randomly assembled narratives constitute a form of historical representation that paradoxically creates a more acute view of the past through a distancing effect. The ambivalent role of borrowed texts and images raises further issues of responsible witnessing and legitimization. Against the backdrop of a corpus of German postwar literature that has come under scrutiny for the ways in which it articulates history (or fails to do so), concerns with authenticity or the technique of “fake” evidence (such as in the form of mislabeled images or unattributed textual borrowings) is especially interesting and controversial. My project posits that intertextual literature operates through a technique of self-conscious borrowing that playfully questions and critiques pretensions to objectivity or the singular meaning of any text or image, thereby deconstructing the notion of originality.

Sebald intimates on more than one occasion that he experienced a special affinity to particular authors. Pondering the strange biographical similarities between himself and Robert Walser, Sebald comments:<sup>3</sup>

Ich habe immer versucht, in meiner eigenen Arbeit denjenigen meine Achtung zu erweisen, von denen ich mich persönlich angezogen fühlte, gewissermassen den Hut zu lüften vor ihnen, indem ich ein schönes Bild oder ein paar besondere Worte von ihnen entlehnte, doch ist es eine Sache, wenn man einem dahingegangenen Kollegen zum Andenken ein Zeichen setzt, und eine andere,

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<sup>3</sup> Other examples are the similarities of the autobiographical narrator to Michael Hamburger and Friedrich Hölderlin in RS (216-24), and to Kafka in “All’estero” and “Il ritorno in patria” in SG (throughout).

wenn man das Gefühl nicht loswird, daß einem zugewinkt wird von der anderen Seite. (LiL 139)

Borrowing images and passages from other writers is not only a deeply personal, but at times mystical matter for Sebald, and the act of writing becomes a form of communicating with one's literary precursors. The transcendental notion of being connected to the world of the dead, or a community of forerunners, through their writing, is also explored in the Corsica chapters in *Campo Santo* where the separate existence of a world of the living and an inaccessible afterworld, or rather *otherworld*, is questioned. Sebald's texts imagine an alternate world through art, a concern that connects him further to Nabokov, who pursued this theme in many of his works (visible for instance in the creation of an alternative history through the mirror world "Antiterra" in *Ada*). Sebald treats the array of authors who inspired him with a sense of wonder, and the passages of other authors appear in his texts like gems gathered together from various treasure troves of literary history (cf. chapter 4, where I compare intertexts to false diamonds). It seems that once an affinity to other authors has been declared (in the form of writing about their work in a nonfictional format), the necessity to provide citations evaporated for Sebald. This also applies to his use of images. A cropped photograph of Walser, for example, finds its way into "All'estero" in SG, where it is passed off as the narrator's grandfather (46). Sebald had a close relationship with his own grandfather, and includes in *Logis in einem Landhaus* several photographs proving the two men's uncanny similarity (136-37).<sup>4</sup> What Sebald's themes of forgery and creative thievery playfully demonstrate is that historiography is a fraudulent undertaking that necessarily contains lacunae and errors that result from selective inclusions.

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<sup>4</sup> Incidentally, the Walser chapter in LiL ends with a (verbal) image from Nabokov, a childhood memory from *Speak, Memory*, which Sebald brings into correlation with Walser. Nabokov's memory of a children's book becomes a characterization of Walser and of Sebald's relationship to his grandfather, Walser, and Nabokov and exemplifies the multilayered scaffolding of forerunners in Sebald's text (166-67).

Sebald's intertextual works – fragmented, seemingly randomly assembled, subjective narratives that elude classification – constitute a paradoxically more “faithful” form of representing history and the micro-histories of those caught in its cogs, one closer to the subject and at the same time distanced and anti-authoritarian.

In addition to inheriting diaries and self-referentially documenting the process of rewriting them, Sebald's narrators often come into possession of photo albums or boxes of photographs, some of which are then ostensibly reproduced in the narrative, expanding it by a visual dimension and challenging the boundaries of the text. This tactic and the fact that photographs reference tangible reality raise a certain expectation of authenticity. Often seemingly included as supplementary evidence to the narrative, the reproductions of images can also destabilize meaning more than they uphold it. Pictures in Sebald do not always illustrate the narrative but sometimes turn out to be unrelated, revealing either text or photograph as “forged,” or seem to be included because they point to an intertext. An example is the image of a butterfly display case in *Austerlitz*, which ostensibly illustrates the interior of Andromeda Lodge, but really depicts an exhibit in the Zoological Museum St. Petersburg and derives from a Swiss magazine in which Sebald had first published his essay on Nabokov (A 126, *Du* 23). The “stolen” image gives away the presence of intertexts by Nabokov in *Austerlitz* and reveals Andromeda Lodge as a fictional setting. The authentic character of Sebald's texts is thus undermined at the same time as it is constructed and photographs represent contested sites of meaning. Doubtful authenticity and unreliable evidence, once recognized as such, create a more vigilant reader. This is a distancing technique, akin to a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*. Like borrowed quotations, visual materials and ekphrasis prolong the act of reading as readers mentally leaf through the catalogue of their “musée imaginaire” – a term coined by André



Malraux that describes a mental personal storehouse of images – in order to decode the narrative. Photographs also provide a metaphor for intertextual composition. Passages from forerunners are inserted like snapshots of other authors' texts into the "album" of the new text. Whereas the materiality of photographs forestalls their integration into text, references to film in literature are complicated precisely because they have been wrested from the movement that defines the medium and transferred into textual form. Sebald's texts include numerous allusions to films, which, similar to ekphrastic descriptions, play out in language. Stills, in which movement has been arrested, such as the image captured from *Der Student von Prag* in SG (167), constitute exceptions but fall closer to the category of photography. While allusions to particular movies are important in Sebald's oeuvre, as his periodic comments on film and film making underscore, they are not interwoven into the narrative as seamlessly as his quotations of written material. Intermediality expands the space of the text but also imposes restrictions and in Sebald's work visual media are either subordinated to text because of quantity (far less images than text) or quality (grainy snapshots), or become text. Sebald's quotations from films and references to film as a medium exemplify his varied arsenal of artistic references and demonstrate the wide field of culture he sifted through for the creation of his texts, but he was (literally) first and foremost a literary scholar.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the focus of this study is on intertextual connections, although I analyze allusions to specific films in *Die Ausgewanderten* in chapter 4, and suggest in chapter 3 that in RS Sebald emulates the techniques of painting by creating tableaux in which the narrator assumes the role of a painter.

References to paintings in Sebald's work, although they also become mostly visible through writing, are rich and multifaceted. His prose texts include few actual reproductions of

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<sup>5</sup> Sebald had a Ph.D. in German literature and taught at the University of East Anglia.

paintings and rather tend to present ekphrastic descriptions (exceptions are the frescoes by Pisanello and Giotto in SG and the Rembrandt painting depicted in RS),<sup>6</sup> but Sebald also obliquely engages in a fascinating discourse on painting on the level of his intertexts. For example, Victor in Nabokov's *Pnin*, and Lefeu in Jean Améry's *Lefeu oder der Abbruch* are painters. Neither work is directly mentioned but both are source texts for *Austerlitz*, where they emerge in luminous verbal images.<sup>7</sup> References to paintings transcend genre in Sebald's writings. In addition to alluding to specific (mostly canonical European) paintings, he created a fictional painter based on a real one (Max Aurach in AW who was inspired by the contemporary German-British painter Frank Auerbach), wrote a fictionalized biography of a German Renaissance painter in the form of a poem (Matthias Grünewald in *Nach der Natur*), wrote about a painter in his academic essays (Jan Peter Tripp and Tripp's influence on his emergence as a writer in LiL and CS), about writers who painted (Adalbert Stifter and Gottfried Keller in LiL), and about writers who used ekphrasis as an integral part of their own compositions (Peter Weiss and Wolfgang Hildesheimer in CS). Sebald's ruminations on Stifter's color palette in the essay "Versuch über Stifter" find expression in the earthy tones of his texts, which are so sparingly dotted with vibrant colors. In *Austerlitz*, whose protagonist is happiest when the world dissolves before his eyes "in einem perlgrauen Dunst" (143), reminiscent of the Stifterian "Dematerialisierung der Welt" (BU 24), the image of red flowers in a childhood recollection is like a visual shout in a narrative composed in sepia. Austerlitz's memory of the flowers also has a synesthetic Nabokovian quality, which renders this episode in Sebald's last text both intertextual and intermedial. *Logis in einem Landhaus* (1998), which was published between *Die*

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6 Cf. SG 87 and 96, RS 24-26.

7 Cf. my own elaborations on Nabokov and Sebald in chapter 2 and Irene Heidelberger-Leonard's essay "Jean Améry's Werk – Urtext zu W. G. Sebalds *Austerlitz*?" for an account of Sebald's (textual) borrowings from Améry.

*Ringe des Saturn* (1995) and *Austerlitz* (2001), gives an inkling of the direction Sebald's prose narratives might have taken: a collection of essays on German-language writers, LiL merges literary criticism with biography and personal commentary and contains numerous reproductions of paintings, many in color and generally of higher quality than the photographs in the prose texts, to present an unbound, intermedial form of scholarship liberated from conventions. Continuing a path Sebald could not walk down himself, his legacy has inspired multimedia productions and publications in recent years, such as the posthumous *Unerzählt*, a book of drawings by Jan Peter Tripp "captioned" with poems by Sebald, the image-studded anthology *Searching for Sebald: Photography After W. G. Sebald*, which mixes scholarship and visual art projects, or the film *Patience (after Sebald)*, to name but a few.

### III. DEVELOPMENT OF INTERTEXTUALITY IN SEBALD'S WORKS

In BU, Sebald writes about the "Kategorie der Lehre und des Lernens" and "die immer wieder um ein Stück verlängerte Lehrzeit Peter Handkes" (BU 13). Austrian authors, he argues, seek out teachers (and appropriately, one of the Handke texts he investigates is *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire*). Similarly, Sebald seeks out other authors and their texts as teachers and selects one or more guide(s) for each of his narratives. In RS the narrator literally refers to himself as a "fahrender Geselle" en route to visiting the admired older writer and translator Michael Hamburger. The intertextual method is also a form of apprenticeship as Sebald emulates the style of his forerunners in addition to borrowing material from them. Admiration and affinity, as discussed above, have mystical qualities and at times the identity of the narrator becomes subsumed by the voice, style, and ideas of others, threatening to be crushed by the weight of forerunners. The amount of autobiography Sebald presents in his texts varies, parallels the

development of intertextuality, and warrants special attention, particularly since some critics conflate the author with the voice of his narrators.<sup>8</sup> In addition to presenting intertextual case studies of my own, my dissertation traces the development of intertextuality in Sebald's oeuvre of prose fictions, which I will now discuss in more detail with reference to the "teachers" each text follows and imitates, before giving an overview of each chapter.

In the prose poem *Nach der Natur* (1988), which needs to be mentioned because it was Sebald's first published creative work and recurs as an intertext in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, the first two sections are devoted to different historical figures, the 16<sup>th</sup> century painter Matthias Grünewald and the 18<sup>th</sup> century scientist Georg Wilhelm Steller, and autobiographical material is appended as a third section. This last part, "Die Dunckle Nacht fährt aus," is striated with literary references, for example to Kafka, but in an inorganic manner that is dictated, perhaps, by the aphoristic form of poetry. In *Schwindel. Gefühle*. (1990) Sebald expands beyond a German context and transitions to presenting the biographies of writers: Stendhal and Kafka, with two distinct pseudo-autobiographical sections interleaved with the biographical chapters. A figure from literature and guide in the form of a ghost, Kafka's ghostly Hunter Gracchus, leads through the text. In SG, identification through apprenticeship is extreme as the narrator textually merges with Gracchus, which means becoming the Kafkan text. The other guide Sebald follows is Sigmund Freud, whose presence simultaneously hints at the profound uncanniness of modern existence, of which paranoia is a consequence, and suggests the possibility of healing through therapy (and arguably provides a tongue in cheek comment on the Freudian concept of transference). *Schwindel. Gefühle*. consists of two-dimensional reflections and binary concerns.

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<sup>8</sup> Deanne Blackler in *Reading W. G. Sebald: Adventure and Disobedience*, for instance, does not differentiate between Sebald and his narrators, a distinction I like to keep sharp in my reading of Sebald (and indeed of literature in general). Even autobiographical aspects of "Sebald" are transfigured into fiction when incorporated into the pseudo-documentary construct of his texts. Furthermore, no official biography on Sebald has been published to date, so knowledge of his personal life derives either from interviews or from the fictional prose texts.

Intertexts (as well as characters and structural parts of the narrative) are mirrored and appear as doppelgangers that repeat the original without significantly altering it. Method always corresponds to theme in Sebald's writing, and SG addresses oppositions (home or abroad? life or death?) that are resolved through a therapeutic reliance on texts and writing, specifically intertexts.

Sebald's second prose text, *Die Ausgewanderten* (1992), features the biographies of four men, who have a counterpart in persons the author encountered in his life, and a narrator (or four narrators who closely resemble each other) who interacts with the "emigrants," telling their story at the same time as aspects of his own. In AW, Sebald moves beyond a continental European to a British context, and further: two of the stories are set in England, and one in the United States. The guide who links the stories is Vladimir Nabokov, as a writer turned into a ghost (instead of a fictional ghost like Gracchus). Intertextuality in this work expands into multidimensional reflections as characters who derive from Sebald's past, i.e. from history, are placed in a rich environment composed of intertexts. Particularly the last two stories, "Max Aurach" and "Ambros Adelwarth," anticipate the funhouse-like incorporation of anterior material in *Austerlitz*. In AW, the autobiographical is not separated any longer from the fictive or borrowed material, pseudo-documentary elements are constantly interwoven with fiction, and the intertexts are buried deeper – indeed at times inaccessible, such as the embellished Luisa Lanzmann "diary." The presence of Nabokov as a "teacher" announces playfulness and artifice: the narrator's concerns about the representability of Holocaust memoirs are embedded in Sebald's falsified and embellished diary of a Jewish woman who survived WW II.

*Die Ringe des Saturn* (1995), Sebald's third prose text, presents a travel journal ostensibly rooted in Sebald's biography and (autobiographical) pretexts composed by the author.

The setting is Suffolk and the intertexts are mostly from a British context. Two “teachers” from different centuries recur throughout the text, Sir Thomas Browne and Jorge Luis Borges, who expands the transnational scope of the text further. Peripatetic movement and the conceit of a pilgrimage also function as guiding principles. The narrator visits sites of importance to other writers’ biographies and weaves biographical pretexts into the description of his journey. More overtly than the other texts, RS articulates a narrator’s search for knowledge and understanding to be gleaned from literature and historiography (with a nod to a pilgrim’s prostrate position before God). RS is Sebald’s most autobiographical text in the sense that it is “about” the narrator’s experience. The reliance of RS on an intertext of the author’s own writing, and autobiographical material presented therein – *Nach der Natur* – exemplifies the text’s autobiographical constraint. In RS, Sebald pursued a theme begun in AW, exploring in more detail the metaphor of painting that also runs through “Max Aurach.” The perspective of landscape painting, applied to history and historiography alike, opens into a space where ekphrasis, texts, and photographs abut each other and interact in a manner that is defining for the text’s structure and narrative stance. Different than in AW, intertexts in RS are rarely mentioned independent of their source and are arranged in a cartographical manner to present a literary geography of Europe in its transition from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The narrator’s movement in and out of interacting with other texts/writers is more fluid, but this text also presents a turning away from writing as therapy and is Sebald’s most intermedial work.

*Austerlitz* (2001) is the text most closely resembling a novel and the only one that features a fictional protagonist,<sup>9</sup> Jacques Austerlitz, whose tale is told by a narrator similar to the

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<sup>9</sup> Austerlitz is a fictional character in the sense of not deriving from a specific person of Sebald’s personal life or historical context (or rather, not just a single one). Max Aurach, although an amalgamated character as well, is identifiable by a painting reproduced in the German edition of AW (240), and other details, as a fictionalized version of the painter Frank Auerbach. In fact, the resemblance was too close: for the English

autobiographical voice of the previous texts. The guide Sebald follows in his last text (or, to be precise, the guide I focus on) is again Nabokov, who is, however, present through his *texts* rather than as a ghost, and who remains unreferenced. With a trickster like Nabokov as a teacher, *Austerlitz* exemplifies how the protagonist becomes the narrator's and, as I will show, the author's mouthpiece. At the end of Sebald's career (and life), autobiographical aspects are subordinated to the concerns of a character, a development complicated by the (for a German author particularly) problematic presentation of a Jewish Holocaust survivor who oscillates between authenticity and artifice. Integrating aspects of a synoptic gaze, *Austerlitz* builds on the intermedial features of RS but develops beyond it by expanding on (and reaching back to) themes from AW, with Jacques Austerlitz functioning as a fifth emigrant.<sup>10</sup> In *Austerlitz*, a text about an architectural historian, intertextuality becomes architectural, as is visible in the Chinese box structure of the narrative. In Sebald's fourth and last text, intertexts reflect each other in the manner of a *mise en abyme* but also refract into a multitude of fragments. This mirroring pattern influences Sebald's narrative stance. More than reflections of an original, his narrator and protagonist are reflections of each other, an effect that, thematically, blurs the boundaries between witness and testifier, and structurally, merges precursor and follower.

#### IV. CHAPTER SUMMARIES

**Chapter 1:** "Die Buchstabenbrücke aus dem Unglück in den Trost:" Border Crossings in *Schwindel. Gefühle*.

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translation, following concerns by Auerbach, Sebald altered the name of the character to "Max Ferber" and omitted the painting (cf. Jaggi "Recovered Memories").

<sup>10</sup> Susanne Finke first used this term to describe *Sebald* as the fifth emigrant in her essay "W. G. Sebald – der fünfte Ausgewanderte."

My dissertation begins with an analysis of Sebald's first prose text, *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, and with a comparison between it and two preceding collections of Sebald's critical essays, *Unheimliche Heimat* and *Die Beschreibung des Unglücks*. I argue that Sebald's development as a creative writer is rooted in his work as a literary critic. *Schwindel. Gefühle.* plots an escapist, if imaginary, Italy against the negative realm of Germany/Austria, which is pictured as the uncanny homeland Sebald had analyzed in *Unheimliche Heimat*, and associated with unhappiness. However, following a statement in the foreword to BU, Sebald uses melancholy as a form of resistance and transfigures his narrator's death wish into a mental and textual exercise. SG is marbled with uncanny encounters and I demonstrate that Freud's essay "The Uncanny" is a precursor text integral to the text's composition. This chapter furthermore examines pretexts by Otto Rank, Albrecht Schaeffer, Franz Kafka, Adalbert Stifter, and Ingeborg Bachmann. My analyses show that SG is a text defined by polarities and the boundaries between them and juxtaposes a religious worldview to a rational, modern mindset. The sense of loss of an uncanny *patria* is mitigated in the end by a reliance on art, specifically texts, as redemptive and creates a bridge of words to a fictive Bohemia that restores the sense of a homeland in the imagination.

## **Chapter 2:** The Moth, the Dachshund, the Squirrel, and its Tricks: Reflections of Nabokov in *Austerlitz*

In my second chapter, I expand on the reaffirmation of life through art discernible in SG by turning to an analysis of the intriguing and intricate interweaving of Vladimir Nabokov's texts into *Austerlitz*. The presence of the "butterfly man" Nabokov in AW has been thoroughly documented.<sup>11</sup> Yet moths flutter from *Die Ausgewanderten* to *Austerlitz*, bringing Nabokov in

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Curtin and Shrayner, and Oliver Sill.



their wake and consequently, this chapter moves – nonchronologically – from Sebald’s first text to his last. My dissertation contributes to scholarship in detailing playful intertextual connections between *Austerlitz* and works by Nabokov (*Speak, Memory*, *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*, *Pale Fire*, *Invitation to a Beheading*, and *The Eye*). In particular, I show that Sebald borrows animals from Nabokov’s texts as metaphors for memory. In *Austerlitz* and in Nabokov’s texts, the transcendence of time and space are paramount themes. Sebald incorporates magical elements and glossy memories from his forerunner, but also suffuses Nabokov’s manner of remembering with a dimension of sadness, instantiating Borges’s comment that “every writer creates his own precursor” (72) and going beyond it by inviting a reassessment of the source text. In *Austerlitz*, through allusions to intertexts by Nabokov and the emulation of Nabokov’s methodology, hope is articulated by the transformation of life into art. Consequently, I make the case that the end of *Austerlitz* leaves room for hope and closure, which is an unusual reading of this text. Brian Boyd’s statement that Nabokov writes “ludically allusive metaphysical metafiction”<sup>12</sup> applies, by extension, to Sebald as well, and copying Nabokov’s style reveals Sebald as a postmodern trickster.

### **Chapter 3:** Landscape with the Fall of Icarus: W. G. Sebald’s Suffolk

I next turn to Sebald’s third work of creative prose fiction, *Die Ringe des Saturn*. As my chapter title suggests, I investigate painting and trace Sebald’s movement from intertextuality to intermediality, especially to a painterly perspective. I analyze the presence of the Icarus myth, which symbolizes, on the one hand, an escape from the labyrinth of past disasters, and, on the

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. *AdaOnline*. Annotation to Part One, Chapter 13, 77.02-05.

other hand, the moral fall of humankind caused by ambitions and technological advancements. With its focus on painting and conceptualization of eco-catastrophes, RS reconnects to *Nach der Natur*, which I document as an intertext throughout. Sebald's most melancholy text vacillates between a nostalgic 19<sup>th</sup>-century and a bitter 20<sup>th</sup>-century point of view, which I see as one of several tensions that dominate this travelogue. Other tensions I analyze are the constant shifts of perspective and the narrator's ambiguous stance towards colonialism and imperialism. Sebald filters "Africa" and "China" through exclusively European texts, and constructs them as inaccessible, imaginary spaces without a present, which calls into question the text's ostensible concern with the legacy of colonial and imperial ventures. I demonstrate that RS, rather than resolving these vacillations, turns away from the entrapments of texts and moves towards painting as a less fraught artistic representation of history. In this chapter my methodology differs, because the concern of articulating Sebald's idiosyncratic and anachronistic representation of imperial and colonial spaces was more urgent than investigating intertextual connections, which, as mentioned above, are more overt in this text. Relying on scholars who have, for example, documented the intertextual connection to Joseph Conrad and Roger Casement in detail,<sup>13</sup> I instead offer a more critical reading of RS, in order to counterbalance the at times hagiographic proportions of Sebald reception.

#### **Chapter 4:** Falsification as Disruptive Method in *Austerlitz* and *Die Ausgewanderten*

Because I view *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz* as closely related, and because Jacques Austerlitz shares attributes with the four emigrants from AW, I end my dissertation with a chapter that analyzes both of these texts. The presence of falsified diaries in "Max Aurach" and

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Bruzelius 196-204, Fuchs 191-205, and Hutchinson 141-44.

“Ambros Adelwarth” anticipates the central theme and narrative strategy of forgery in *Austerlitz*. “Ambros Adelwarth” is a particularly rich example of Sebald’s complex use of intertextuality, and the text from which the title of this dissertation indirectly derives. The metaphor of a funhouse, which Sebald playfully suggests in “Ambros Adelwarth” through intertextual similarity of the story to John Barth’s “Lost in the Funhouse,” develops into Sebald’s complex model of a hall of mirrors in *Austerlitz*. Like Max Aurach, Jacques Austerlitz is a composite character whose experiences derive from genuine Holocaust memoirs (Saul Friedländer and Susi Bechhöfer). My project analyzes whether Sebald’s use of these materials is ethical and arrives at the conclusion that he deliberately engages with the themes of appropriation and falsification by playfully transfiguring them into a formal, semantic, and literary metaphor. *Austerlitz* and “Ambros Adelwarth” comment on inadequate and derivative processes of remembering and demonstrate that historiography is an undertaking that necessarily contains lacunae and errors. In this chapter I also analyze intertexts by Walter Benjamin, among others, and films by Orson Welles and Fritz Lang, and suggest that a carnivalesque reading of A and AW is best suited for taking account of the deliberate disruptions these texts create. My study ends with John Barth’s “Lost in the Funhouse,” which completes the journey to the funhouse announced by my title.

## V. METHODOLOGY AND GOALS

My primary research method was to perform close readings of Sebald’s texts with the goal of identifying and following oblique allusions to his literary (and other) forerunners. This involved a fair amount of literary detective work and led into many rabbit holes and dead end streets, but yielded the connections that form the basis of this dissertation. Once I discovered an intertext (film, or painting) I examined it alongside Sebald’s text and performed a comparative analysis.

In some cases, the source texts and intermedia pointed to yet more intertexts and media, for example the allusion by Freud in “Das Unheimliche” to *Josef Montfort* by Albrecht Schaeffer, both of which Sebald integrates into SG. In other words, my research also sometimes took the shape of a Chinese box. Multifaceted source texts like Benjamin’s *Passagen-Werk* and Nabokov’s works (that are intertextual themselves) deepened my understanding of Sebald’s philosophical and historiographical approach and helped to situate his intertextual and intermedial technique within a larger framework of 20<sup>th</sup> century literature and literary theory. Knowledge of Sebald’s own scholarship, which examines specific themes and texts by authors whose work he knew intimately, proved to be integral to performing an assessment of his transition from academic to creative writer. In addition to connections established by others, and intertexts that are identified in Sebald’s texts, the amount of connections to precursors from a variety of genres and time periods I discovered allowed me to confirm that intertextuality is indeed a defining feature of Sebald’s oeuvre.

During archival research in the German Literature Archive in Marbach, Germany, where a portion of Sebald’s personal library is kept in an air-conditioned vault, protected by vigilant librarians in white lab coats, I was able to examine a treasure trove of marginalia pointing to and confirming intertextual connections.<sup>14</sup> While the handwritten notes cannot, of course, represent conclusive evidence that any text was integral to the crafting of Sebald’s work, they do hint, however speculatively, at the author’s methodology. Sebald vigorously marked text passages about walking, memory, forgetting, melancholia, photography, storytelling, dreams, and transmitting history – themes and motifs that, on the surface at least, predominate in his own

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<sup>14</sup> During my visit in spring 2008, the Museum of Modern Literature in Marbach, which is affiliated with the Archive, was preparing a Sebald exhibition. Books needed for the exhibit were therefore unfortunately inaccessible – among others Sebald’s collections of Borges, Robert Walser, and Chateaubriand, as well as several works by Stendhal and Kafka (to mention just the authors I included in this dissertation).

writing. As the example of Saul Friedländer's memoir, which I examine in chapter 4, demonstrates, the passages Sebald highlighted or annotated often did find their way into his texts. At times, Sebald's marginalia sprawl across passages that bear such substantial thematic resemblance to his own texts that one can no longer just speak of inspiration. Questions I productively wrestled with throughout the writing process, such as where to draw the line between borrowing and plagiarism, when an unattributed quotation is a "tag" – a marker for intertextuality – waiting to be decoded, and when an idea has been stolen, arose through my research in Marbach. These questions and what they mean for Sebald's methodology and scope are also addressed in my concluding chapter.

My research draws on theories of intertextuality from formalism, postmodernism, and poststructuralism, such as Gérard Genette, Roland Barthes, John Barth, Mikhail Bakhtin, and, predominantly, Julia Kristeva, who is credited with coining the term "intertextualité" in 1967 (*Critique* 444). Because intermediality is a concept that has yet to find focused theoretical articulation, I relied on theories of photography by Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, and John Berger (all of whom Sebald read, as marginalia in his books in Marbach as well as direct references in his texts suggest), on film theory, specifically by Gilles Deleuze, as well as on visits to many museums in Berlin and Vienna to better assess the role of images and ekphrasis in Sebald's work. Theories of intertextuality have developed alongside the linguistic turn in literary criticism and philosophy and are closely related to the mistrust in the referentiality of language and the destabilization of the relationship between signifier and signified. Therefore, the work of deconstructionists, such as Jacques Derrida, as well as postmodern literary theory, as articulated by Linda Hutcheon and John Barth, proved to be influential for my understanding of the framework in which to place Sebald's oeuvre. The concept of Bakhtinian dialogism and the

carnavalesque, which Kristeva analyses in “Word, Dialogue, Novel,” deeply underlie my conception of Sebald’s intertextual methodology.

The goal of this dissertation is threefold. First, I hope to contribute to established Sebald scholarship, an area that is still growing, in documenting intertextual connections previously not recognized or not adequately analyzed in order to expand the knowledge of Sebald’s vast archive of references and thus further the understanding of his texts. Sebald tends to be read either by Germanists in the context of German literature, or by British and North American scholars (often in translation) for his contribution to second-generation Holocaust literature. In my project, I hope to provide a more transnational and therefore more comparative reading that takes into account a multitude of forerunners across linguistic boundaries. With the publication of the translation of *Literatur in einem Landhaus* (*A Place in the Country: On Gottfried Keller, Johann Peter Hebel, Robert Walser and Others*) in 2013, Sebald’s creative, intermedial essays will finally become available to an English speaking audience, which may reinvigorate scholarship and inspire investigations of Sebald’s turn to painting at the end of his career. My second goal involves adding to the conception of a genealogy of W. G. Sebald’s narratives. I suggest that intertextuality and intermediality, defining features of Sebald’s prose texts, develop organically from his practice of academic research and his grounding in literary criticism. The relationship between BU, UH, and SG, for example, has not yet been articulated. The English translations of his essay collections BU and UH are still pending and are therefore not often included in Sebald scholarship originating outside the German-speaking world. My third, and perhaps biggest goal was to read Sebald against the grain and bring to light the playful undercurrents of his craft, thereby resituating him as a postmodern trickster. Sebald is often read too literally (as autobiographical) and the rehashing of the apocalyptic or melancholy aspects of his writing is

unproductive and monotonous. By documenting the connection between Sebald and Nabokov, whose narratives, methodology, and style arguably influenced him as much as Kafka, I hope to provide an alternative reading of *Austerlitz*. Intertextual and intermedial methodologies represent unique ways of weaving pseudo-documentaries out of the “tissue of quotations” a text represents (Barthes 146) that draw readers into the narrative at the same time as distancing them, while foreclosing a mimetic identification. In the context of German postwar literature the intertextual method – of both reading and writing – represents patching the gap caused by the trauma of modernity, or suturing the wounds left behind by devastating wars and the traumatic silence of a literature unable to cope with the responsibility of representation. Therein lies the serious telos of Sebald’s carnivalesque playfulness.

W. G. Sebald’s narratives all portray individuals adrift in and trying to make sense of a postmodern environment marred by the effects of wars, colonialism, genocide, technology, and the exploitation of natural resources. The stories that are presented in Sebald’s patchwork fashion are set in a contemporary postwar context of emigration and exile and his texts are emotional investigations of Germany’s (literary) history that articulate the German psyche damaged by WW II. However, by confronting Germany with its repressed past, and by reconstructing history out of literary fragments, Sebald’s texts lead to healing and to constructing a “Buchstabenbrücke aus dem Unglück in den Trost” (BU 13). His works juxtapose the contemporary (20<sup>th</sup> century) moment with literature and art from past centuries and stage a dialogue between artistic forerunners and the present. This juxtaposition plays out as a tension between a religious and secular worldview in SG, as a tension between a 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century understandings of history in RS, or as nostalgia for the irretrievable moment before the first and second world wars from a perspective of postwar devastation in SG, AW, and A. Intertextuality and intermediality,

methods that sift through the past and reassemble its traces and fragments, emerge as a kind of therapy for unhappiness through reading and writing. In a postmodern conception of a world in which language has lost its referentiality and truth fans out into a multiplicity of meanings, intertextuality can perhaps be seen as an attempt to approximate text to thought: multilayered, simultaneous, amalgamated, as well as in constant movement, including elements of coincidence, chaos, and visual imagery. With intertextuality, the “literature of exhaustion,” as John Barth has termed a manner of writing that has become too self-conscious of itself in modernism in the wake of unselfconscious realism, can become a “literature of replenishment” (*Friday Book* 206). By following guides like Nabokov into the funhouse of intertextual composition, *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, *Die Ausgewanderten*, *Die Ringe des Saturn*, and *Austerlitz* demonstrate a joy of play.



## CHAPTER 1

### **“Die Buchstabenbrücke aus dem Unglück in den Trost:” Border Crossings in *Schwindel. Gefühle*.**

“with fierce convulse / Die into life” (John Keats)

#### I. INTRODUCTION: BORDERS

On a train to the German consulate in Milan the narrator of “All’estero” in *Schwindel. Gefühle* encounters two women who represent two aspects of religion. The first is a Franciscan nun, absorbed in the study of her breviary, the other a young girl “mit einer aus vielen farbigen Flecken geschneiderten Jacke um die Schultern,” who is reading a “Bilderroman” (118). Both are described as beautiful, serene, and unperturbed by the narrator’s inquisitive presence. Touched by the two women’s silent dedication to their reading materials, the narrator browses through an Italian-German phrasebook in which “alles [ist] aufs beste geordnet, so als setzte sich die Welt tatsächlich bloss aus Worten zusammen, als wäre dadurch auch das Entsetzliche in Sicherheit gebracht, als gäbe es zu jedem Teil ein Gegenteil, zu jedem Guten ein Böses [...] und zu jeder Lüge auch ein Stück Wahrheit” (119-20). This small scene epitomizes the important aspect of SG as a text defined by polarities and the boundaries between them, and encapsulates the narrator’s yearning for an ordered world composed of texts. Following this quote is a copy of a page of the dictionary, in which several words are underlined (120). The first two words are “tutti i santi – Allerheiligen,” and “il Carnevale – Fastnacht.” The nun, associated with the Catholic holiday of commemorating the dead, and literally reading “die Schrift,” represents the ordered world of words, while the young girl, with her harlekin jacket and her book of images, represents the carnivalesque. However, the textual world of the Bible is also the one that has engendered – and is reversed during – carnival. Other words underlined in the phrasebook are

“l’ángelo—der Engel, il pecáto—die Sünde, la paúra—die Angst, la verità—die Wahrheit, la menzógna—die Lüge, il dolóro—der Schmerz” – words that encapsulate the main themes of SG: the sins of the Germans during WWII and the pain it continues to cause, the narrator’s paranoia, the constant oscillation between truth and lies, and fiction and (auto)biography, and the ambiguous truth value of words and images. In SG, angels, saints, and other elements of Catholic mythology, such as references to Dante and descents or falls into an abyss, as well as the madness of carnival are juxtaposed with the narrator’s present in a rational modernity.

*Schwindel. Gefühle.* (1990), Sebald’s first prose text, bears strong resemblance to his two collections of essays, *Die Beschreibung des Unglücks: Zur Österreichischen Literatur von Stifter bis Handke* (1985), and *Unheimliche Heimat: Essays zur Österreichischen Literatur* (1991). Both anticipate many of the themes Sebald would later pursue in his prose texts but, as Sebald develops from a writer of academic essays to a writer of (hybridized) fiction, SG in particular continues ideas and revisits authors he had previously analyzed in these two works on Austrian writers: the overcoming of unhappiness and the loss and regaining of a homeland that has become uncanny. Sebald incorporates not only texts by writers featured therein, such as Franz Kafka, Peter Handke, and Adalbert Stifter, but uses his own essays as intertexts as well.<sup>15</sup> BU and UH foreground the negative, as is recognizable in the titles – *Un-glück*, *Un-heimlich* – and yet both texts are devoted to showing a transition to the opposite states: happiness and the possibility of a homeland healed through writing. Although composed of academic essays, the dramaturgy of both essay collections is palpable, as each chapter builds on the next and themes connect, dramatically pushing toward an end. BU and UH already show Sebald’s becoming as a creative writer, and SG is a transitional work and intertextual laboratory. Sebald published all

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<sup>15</sup> Between BU and UH, two essays are devoted to Handke, two to Kafka, one to Stifter, and one to both Handke and Stifter. Both collections end with essays on Handke.

essays but one separately in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. SG was published in 1990, suggesting that he worked on it simultaneously with his academic work in this period of intense research and writing. While UH came out a year after SG, only the last essay was previously unpublished. The correlation of themes between this essay, “Jenseits der Grenze – Peter Handkes Erzählung *Die Wiederholung*,” to SG (such as borders and repetition, as the title suggests) is striking. If Kafka is the writer Sebald’s narrator visibly ensconces, stalks, and emulates in SG, Handke is its secret presence guiding the four stories beyond “Unglück” and “Unheimlichkeit” at the end. In fact, the intricate interweaving of Handke, whom Sebald calls “guten Mutes” in the face of “historia calamitatum” in the forward to BU, makes it impossible to read SG as predominantly negative and melancholy, as is generally the case (12).<sup>16</sup>

The uncanny sensation of the loss of a homeland is a connective thread between all four chapters of SG. Germany and Austria stand out in several of Sebald’s works as places haunted by the catastrophes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: war, destruction, and genocide. The Holocaust survivors Jacques Austerlitz and Max Aurach, for example, have visceral reactions when crossing the border into Germany. In *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, the narrator’s journey begins in an Austria encumbered by the weight of history in “All’estero,” and closes with a journey through an alienated German homeland in “Il ritorno in patria.” In contrast, water, and places dominated by water such as Venice or Lake Garda, are concomitant with a more imaginative, porous reality. Italy, and in particular Venice, is the positive counterpart to the negative image of Austria and Germany in *Schwindel. Gefühle.* Crossing the border of the homeland to Italy as an act of escapism happens in all four chapters of SG. However, Italy is also compromised, as a liberated imagination gives way to superstition and paranoia. Venice’s façade of beauty masks terror, as

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Introduction footnote 2.

exemplified by Casanova's memoir of incarceration and torture in the Doge's Palace (63-69). Venice is also the city of carnival and encounters are tinged with an absurd or carnivalesque streak.<sup>17</sup> The Alps serve as a border between the Germanic realm, where the influence of the Third Reich is still palpable, and Italy. The theme of borders also has a counterpart in Sebald's analysis of Austrian literature in BU. "Die Ausreise aus der Enge des Heimatlandes, verbunden mit einer Grenzüberschreitung auch im psychologischen Sinn, ist ein zentrales Thema in der neueren österreichischen Literatur" (150),<sup>18</sup> Sebald writes, and "Es ist schwer zu sagen, wo das in der österreichischen Literatur zum Ausdruck kommende Interesse an Grenzüberschreitungen sich herschreibt. [...] In jedem Fall aber geht es schon beim ersten Überschreiten der Grenze um den unwiderruflichen Verlust der Familiarität" (10). As Sebald develops his unique hybrid style in SG, borders manifest not only as a theme but are mirrored in the crossing of lines between genres such as fiction and non-fiction, and (auto)biography and documentary.

The polarities "estero" and "patria" (abroad and home) and mountains and water in SG, between which the narrator drifts and whose borders he crosses and re-crosses, symbolize the articulation of a death wish versus a desire to continue life. The narrator is torn between these poles, and trying to choose causes the vertiginous sensation – "Schwindelgefühl" – Sebald wrenched apart for his title to represent both it and something beyond (vertigo, lies, and emotions). In addition, these dichotomies are structurally articulated through a constant shuffling together of opposites, as Sebald hones his intertextual and intermedial writing technique: images abut text, fiction transitions to nonfiction and back, academic essays on writers develop into creative prose narrative. Emerging as an overarching theme from this multitude of polarities are

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17 Elements of a carnivalesque imagination appear throughout Sebald's oeuvre and culminate in SG in the German consulate in Milan (a bureaucratic mini Germany within Italy), where the narrator encounters circus performers and a dwarf clerk. (In Sebald's texts ghosts are often small statured, cf. CS 32, 35.)

18 In: "Der Mann mit dem Mantel: Gerhard Roth's Winterreise."

furthermore two opposing worldviews between which the narrator and the plot oscillate: a religious/superstitious and a secularized/enlightened one. Germany/Austria represent enlightenment rationality from which the narrator flees to Italy, which stands for pre-enlightenment and the imagination, but paranoia drives him back across the border to a *Heimat* that does not exist anymore. Whichever side the narrator chooses, one appears worse than the other. Like the text's most important intertextual figure, Kafka's Hunter Gracchus, he is at home in neither place, neither embracing mountains nor water, neither happy to be alive nor ready to die. How to choose between, or rather: reconcile, these two worldviews becomes the telos of the text. SG presents the disentanglement from a Baroque religious worldview rife with irrational beliefs and superstition and a movement toward rational and critical thought (which finds expression in the similarity of the narrative to Sebald's academic essays). But Sebald never lets readers forget that a hyper-rational modernity is also inhospitable, specifically in a German/Austrian historical context, in which the rationalization of irrational fears, such as anti-Semitism, and its irrational methods of eradication have caused irreparable loss and suffering. The resolution of the text lies in the creation of an imaginary Bohemia on a coast, which provides an escape into fiction and a wistful projection of a less charged Germany/Austria.

The ultimate transgression of borders in *Schwindel. Gefühle.* is the contemplation of suicide, an act the narrative seems to steer towards. The focus on the uncanny, on ghosts, borders, and a ghostly other world is a means to elucidate the narrator's depression and death wish. Throughout the text, he is on the brink of a vertigo-inducing abyss, both literal and metaphorical, and contemplates, yet fears, disappearing into it. However, unlike the Hunter Gracchus, the narrator always turns back from the abyss and suicide remains a thought experiment. From the beginning of "All'estero" the narrator's depression dominates the narrative

tone. His trip to Austria and from there to Italy to overcome “eine besonders ungute Zeit” moves from bad to worse (39). In Vienna he nearly loses his mind, with Ernst Herbeck he almost jumps off a castle wall, and in Venice it seems to him “als könne man sich tatsächlich ohne weiteres durch Nachdenken und Sinnieren allein ums Leben bringen” (74-75). What drives the narrator’s suicidal thoughts is never revealed, but Sebald constructs him as a melancholy neurotic, like a textbook case study from Freud: paranoid and with a tendency to perceive events as uncanny, placing inordinate meaning on coincidences and similarities, subject to the “Allmacht der Gedanken,” as Freud describes in his essay on the Uncanny (263). The loss of a homeland, exemplified through Germany’s and Austria’s Nazi past, is also connected to the narrator’s depression, as is the nonexistence of love, which is portrayed throughout SG as a destructive and dividing rather than beneficial and binding force. Suicide as a way out of sadness is not only conveyed through the narrator’s personal experience, but also through the intertexts, often of authors Sebald had analyzed in BU and UH. However, in “All’estero,” the narrator gets a second chance and repeats his trip to Italy, and in “Il ritorno in patria” he returns home, like Ulysses.<sup>19</sup> Renewal is absent in the chapters on Beyle and Kafka (they die), but SG’s most important recurring intertext (and intertextual persona), Kafka’s “Gracchus,” portrays both the desire for death and a yearning for life.

Freud’s notion of the Uncanny – so influential for *Unheimliche Heimat* – returns as a foundational concept in *Schwindel. Gefühle*. Sebald reconfigures Freud’s essay “Das Unheimliche” (1919) in a manner that both pays homage to this forerunner text and stylizes it through an exaggeration of its motifs. “Das Unheimliche” is embedded deep in the structure of Sebald’s text, providing numerous plot elements, characters, and intertexts that go beyond Freud.

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19 Cf. Atkin 161-85 for an analysis of how the theme of the Odyssey recurs in Sebald’s work.

Sebald's use of intertextuality itself exhibits a trait of the Freudian Uncanny, namely the compulsion to repeat (*Wiederholungszwang*), and the return of the familiar/the repressed in altered form, be it reusing texts of forerunners (including one's own), their characters (Gracchus), or incorporating other writers' biographies. While all of Sebald's prose texts have a spectral quality, gothic elements such as ghosts – quintessentially uncanny and belonging neither to the world of the dead nor to the world of the living – appear with density in *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, where they break the pattern of melancholy and, appropriately, act as unreliable “Schwindler” (liars or tricksters – “Schwindel” in German means both vertigo and deception or swindle). Sebald's general concern with artistic creation, particularly writing, and the intermingling of fiction and reality are also mirrored in Freud. In SG, the meta-discourse on writing reflects Freud's analysis of real versus fictional uncanny experience. “Das Unheimliche der Fiktion – der Phantasie, der Dichtung – [...] ist [...] weit reichhaltiger als das Unheimliche des Erlebens, es umfaßt dieses in seiner Gänze und dann noch anderes,” Freud writes (271). Literature is so much richer than reality and the very act of composing texts eventually saves the narrator. Like the Hunter Gracchus, the narrator is following “game” through SG – the elusive lives of other writers – which he tries to pin down in writing, telling his own story in the process. For Gracchus, who says “[i]ch gedenke nicht” and “[n]iemand wird lesen, was ich hier schreibe,” salvation through storytelling comes too late (although he tells Salvatore, the mayor of Riva, and literally “the savior,” his story for that very purpose), but for the narrator of SG, the therapy for a miserable existence lies in texts, even uncanny ones (“Gracchus” 107).

Intertextuality and intermediality, while established in *Schwindel. Gefühle.* as Sebald's primary mode of composition, if not artistic credo, are more foregrounded here than in Sebald's later texts. In SG Sebald still announces, and has a tendency to explain, his intertexts, while his

later works dispense with such tags and the conceit that the narrators are researching artists in order to incorporate them into a “future” text (which turns out to be the text at hand). In “All’estero,” for instance, the narrator describes his current writing project as a “Kriminalroman” (detective novel) set in Italy (108). SG consists of mirrored entities and intertextuality functions as a two-dimensional repetition, or doubling, rather than the sophisticated (almost impossibly intricate) three-dimensional reflections as in parts of *Die Ausgewanderten*, Sebald’s subsequent text, and in *Austerlitz*, his last and most novel-like text. Borders still manifest more visibly between (literary) intertexts and original material as well as between text and images. The narrator says he is neither a writer nor a journalist, attesting to the indistinctness and novelty of Sebald’s intermedial style. The unresolved conception of borders as a stumbling block in SG is exemplified by the title, which creates a border between and around the compound “Schwindelgefühle,” with a space and two full stops. In Sebald’s subsequent texts, the lines between intertexts and original material become increasingly more fluid and imperceptible. A particularly intriguing border addressed in SG, as in all of Sebald’s work, is the one between literature and the visual arts, particularly photography. Like intertexts, photographs and other images in SG function differently than in his later works. By intermingling text and images his works in general seem to make an argument for the equal status of written language and visual culture. However, text remains the more sophisticated medium, as the photographs in Sebald’s work are frequently of low, grainy, snapshot-like quality. Sebald’s sophisticated language and the poor quality of the images create tension rather than harmony.

In SG, photographs support the text in a more direct fashion, and (at least in the German edition) are highlighted through typography and layout. Frequent colons before an image signal its deliberate inclusion, and indented text often creates a frame for the photographs. Several



photographs depict artifacts, such as receipts, forms, and inscriptions, all of which represent text in visual form, and directly reference the written content. In general, visuals are skewed towards archival materials such as postcards, rather than the narrator's own snapshots, as in *Die Ringe des Saturn*. In SG, Sebald was also more playful with the format of the images, frequently cropping them into ovals, another way of drawing attention to their presence. In his later works, Sebald continues to refer to the spectral quality of photographs and to photography itself as a dubious magical art, a stance that seems to have early roots in the gothic environments and ghosts of SG. Photographs, which share with specters their status as visual appearances (the word specter derives from the Latin *specere*, to look), furnish Sebald's texts with a ghostly dimension, their authenticating, and referential character notwithstanding. Like ghosts, photographs are a visual representation of an original and belong neither to the past nor to the present, suggesting the existence of an in-between world. Theories of photography are split between ordering photographs as representing presence and as symbols of the absence of the photographed subject or object.<sup>20</sup> At the same time as manifesting the existence of a different, somehow magical, parallel reality, photographs have been theorized as relics of the past, bearing traces of experience and highlighting the inaccessibility of history. Sebald takes advantage of this ambiguity, and by integrating old snapshots and vintage postcards he corroborates his recreation of the past while enhancing it with a spectral quality on a meta-level.

The four stories in SG trace the ghosts of dead writers: Stendhal and Kafka, who are directly referenced, and whose biographical data Sebald draws upon in the stories "Beyle oder das merckwürdige Faktum der Liebe" and "Dr. K.s Badereise nach Riva," and Freud, Stifter, and

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20 For Sebald, like the theorists of photography who influenced him, such as Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, and John Berger, photographs function in an ambiguous way, as "both a pseudo presence and a token of absence" (Sontag 16). Barthes, e.g., writes that a photograph "is authentication itself; [...] a certificate of presence" while viewing it "as an emanation of past reality: a magic, not an art" (87-88).

Handke, among others, who are present only in the sub-layers of the text. “Beyle” and “Dr. K.,” in addition to these authors’ literary works, reassemble different marginal texts to recreate their itineraries and experiences, such as Kafka’s letters, and Stendhal’s memoirs, to present snapshots of profoundly disturbed, unhappy individuals. Two quasi-autobiographical stories, “All’estero” and “Il ritorno in patria,” provide not only two important poles between which Sebald’s narrator travels but also the two concepts between which Freud’s description of the Uncanny oscillates: the foreign and strange on the one hand, and the familiar and “heim(at)lich” on the other. These two chapters also incorporate literary texts Freud mentions in his essay and mirror Freud’s personal uncanny experiences. “All’estero” depicts Sebald’s narrator travelling abroad, leaving the familiar behind to become entangled in a paranoid quest filled with ominous coincidences and uncanny, anxiety-inducing experiences such as encounters with doppelgangers, ghosts, and evil eyes. Indeed, characters go abroad and have uncanny experiences in all four stories, yet the return to the homeland in the last story is also unsettling rather than comforting. In “Il ritorno in patria” the (presumably) same narrator who made himself so vulnerable to the foreign returns to his childhood home only to find the *heimlich* turned *unheimlich*, exemplifying the basic tenet of Freud’s text, namely the profoundly unsettling aspect of the familiar. Paralleling the dichotomy between home and abroad is an oscillation between reality and a ghostly otherworld, whose emissaries the narrator and other characters encounter. Like Kafka’s Hunter Gracchus, the narrator compulsively wanders and is lost in his inability to access the old *Heimat* (patria) or find comfort *in der Fremde* (estero). The four stories sketch, as the narrator describes, “das Wiederauftauchen einer seit langem verschollenen Person” (i.e. Gracchus), and appropriate for a “Kriminalroman,” gothic allusions to crime and violence generate a sense of pending catastrophe (108).

Among the four stories, the first one, “Beyle,” stands out as an oddity. Told by a narrator with a similar voice, “All’estero” and “Il ritorno in patria” are clearly paired and part of the same chronology, taking place in the 1980s. While these two pseudo-autobiographical stories are interrupted by “Dr. K.s Badereise nach Riva,” all three stories are connected by Kafka’s itinerary and Kafka’s Hunter Gracchus/Hans Schlag character (who does appear in “Beyle” but in a less integrated way). “Beyle” does not have as clear of a connection to the other three stories. Stendhal was born in the 18<sup>th</sup> and died in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the narrator does not try to emulate him like he tries to emulate Kafka.<sup>21</sup> However, several important themes are introduced in “Beyle:” the Alps (crossing them is a form of transgression to a different realm); an escape to Italy and to water (Lake Garda), yet at the price of becoming lost; vertigo caused by the discrepancy between the imagination (and also memory) and reality; paranoia; and finally, music. Sebald describes Stendhal elated by Cimarosa’s music, but “die von der Musik versprochene Glückseligkeit” never lasts long (13). SG not only contains many references to operas (Cimarosa, Monteverdi, Verdi, the arena in Verona, the Scala in Milan), but also has an operatic structure. The last story, whose title is an abbreviation of Monteverdi’s opera *Il ritorno d’Ulisse in patria*, culminates in an apocalyptic finale furioso. Placed in a dramatic arc, “Beyle” functions as a prologue for the three acts that follow. Monteverdi’s *Il ritorno d’Ulisse in patria* is similarly structured as three acts preceded by a prologue in which Human Frailty bemoans the misfortune that underlies its ephemeral existence at the mercy of Time, Love, and Fortune – blind, deaf, and limping forces that destroy humankind, all of which are central themes in *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, if not all of Sebald’s works. Indeed, the impossibility of humans to find lasting happiness in love connects all four chapters of SG. The prologue of Monteverdi’s opera

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21 Casanova, Grillparzer, and Stifter, other writers Sebald integrates into SG, were contemporaries of Stendhal.

stands in contrast to the happy ending of Ulysses's return home and his reunion with Penelope. In the opera, love wins in the end, the homeland is regained, and the hero repatriated. Ulysses himself personifies "the return of the familiar in altered form." This simultaneously reinforces the dichotomies of SG and strengthens the hopeful undercurrent of the last chapter (rebirth after apocalypse). In UH Sebald writes: "Adorno erinnert in seinem [Gustav] Mahler-Buch, daß die Psychanalyse der Musik die Fähigkeit zur Abwehr der Paranoia zuschreibt. Das unvermittelte Ersterben der Klänge öffnet ihr dagegen Tür und Tor" (82). In SG, the frequent allusions to opera and opera houses might serve a similar purpose for the protagonist. By hinting at an opera, the title of the last story might in itself be read as an antidote to the paranoia set up in the first.

From the beginning of "All'estero," the significance of borders becomes apparent in the narrator's random walks through Vienna, which uncannily trace the same pattern day after day and never cross the boundaries of certain districts. His compulsive "Kreuzundquergehen" is subject to an unconscious "Eingrenzung," and the narrator is incapable of transgressing "die unsichtbaren und [...] völlig willkürlichen Grenzlinien" (SG 40). Yet these invisible borders, which only become manifest through the act of writing, are of course not randomly drawn, but circumscribe the former Jewish districts of Vienna.<sup>22</sup> When passing a synagogue he feels like crying. Becoming more and more isolated, disheveled, and disturbed during these aimless walks, the narrator hallucinates encountering forgotten people from his past, and the ghosts of dead literary figures like Dante. Sebald blurs the border between the tangible present and a realm of ghosts and intermingles the city's cultural history – the vanishing of its Jewish population – with his narrator's personal experience in a haunted present. A border that structurally stands out in

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<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, his walks trace the shape of a half or crescent moon, while the districts he traverses form the outline of a cross (Josefstadt, Leopoldstadt, Innere Stadt). Sebald hence incorporates a reference to three major world religions – Judaism, Islam, and Christianity – and their divisiveness into this section.

*Schwindel. Gefühle.* is the very literal border represented by the Alps, which are crossed in each of the four stories, and which serve as a metaphoric backbone for other, and more ephemeral, textual borders. The act of crossing the Alps not only means crossing the border between two nation states (Austria and Italy), but integrates history into the present, from alluding to seminal historic European military operations (Hannibal, Napoleon), to crossing the threshold between the locus of the German Romantic imagination and the rational Enlightenment associated with Northern Europe.<sup>23</sup> Each of the stories moves from a passage over (or through) mountains to water (Lake Garda, Venice, the Rhine valley, a mythical Bohemian seacoast). The trajectory of the Hunter Gracchus similarly begins in the Alps and ends (eternally) in water. While the last story in SG ends with a devastating fire, the narrator escapes it by taking refuge on the water (“wir fliehen auf das Wasser” 287).

SG not only depicts a journey from mountains to water in each chapter, but also contains multiple allusions to a particular snow-capped mountain colored red by a vision or dream of fire, which foreshadows the narrator’s apocalyptic dream at the end. Schneeberg (a mountain near Vienna in the eastern foothills of the Alps) is also a recurring motif in UH. Images of fire and ice are mixed in SG, particularly in dreams. In “All’estero” the motif of burning mountains references a quote from Grillparzer’s *Tagebuch auf der Reise nach Italien 1819*, which Sebald’s narrator reads on the train to Venice.<sup>24</sup> Traveling south towards Italy from Vienna, Grillparzer notes: “Glühen der Spitzen des Schneebergs, wie durchsichtig beim Untergang der Sonne. Wie

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23 The Alps as a site of ominous occurrences and historical remembrance recur in several of Sebald’s texts, specifically *Die Ausgewanderten* and the story fragments in *Campo Santo* and “Aufzeichnungen aus Korsika.” Mountains and water also collide in the liminal realm Corsica – “Die Alpen im Meer,” as Sebald calls the island – and ghosts encroach disturbingly on the world of the living. In *Die Ausgewanderten*, an Alpine glacier takes life, yet also gives it back and thus preserves history (and the Alps also appear in conjunction with the date 1913).

24 Seven years after his trip to Italy, Grillparzer travels north to Germany, which he documents in *Tagebuch auf der Reise nach Deutschland*. This travel journal starts with a reference to the trip to Italy. Sebald’s narrator also travels to Germany seven years after his first trip to Italy.

ein feuerspeiender Berg” (Grillparzer 7). On his train trip to Venice, Sebald’s narrator dreams of a volcano, embellishing on Grillparzer’s diary entry: “Zuoberst aber glühend, transparent, feuerspeierend und funkenstiebend die Spitze des Schneebergs, hineinragend in die letzte Helligkeit des Himmels” (SG 58). In 1813 Beyle also has a dream of a burning, snow-capped mountain:

Im Hochsommer [wurde] er von einer schweren Krankheit befallen [...], in deren Verlauf Bilder des großen Brandes von Moskau und Bilder von der Besteigung des Schneekopfes [...] ihm immer wieder die Sinne verwirrten. Mal um Mal sah Beyle sich auf dem Gipfel des Berges, abgeschnitten von aller Welt und umgeben von den waagrecht im Unwetter flatternden Fahnen des Schnees und von den Flammen, die ringsherum aus den Dächern der Häuser schlugen. (SG 27)

Beyle’s dream anticipates Samuel Pepy’s description of the great fire of London at the end of SG. The “Unglückschronik” of the village W. dictated by the narrator’s teacher Frl. Rauch (literally “smoke”) also mixes images of fire and snow (262). On the day Hans Schlag dies, the narrator as a boy trudges home through a snowstorm after a lesson on the fires that destroyed his hometown in the past.

In UH, the mountain Schneeberg appears in the chapter on Gerhard Roth, as a location that allows humans to forget themselves and reach metaphysical insight through the act of looking. A character from *Landläufiger Tod* exclaims: “Noch oft habe ich davon geträumt [...] wie wir auf dem Gipfel des Schneebergs stehen und über das Schauen alles vergessen” (UH 158, quoted from Roth, Frankfurt 1984, p.10f).<sup>25</sup> The chapter on Peter Altenberg in UH starts with a

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<sup>25</sup> The view from above and its effect on consciousness (“die Entfernung des Subjekts [...] im Schauen, aus der Welt”) is a theme central to Sebald’s work. “Der metaphysische Augen- und Überblick entspringt einer profunden Faszination, in welcher sich eine Zeitlang unser Verhältnis zur Welt verkehrt. Im Schauen spüren wir, wie die Dinge uns ansehen, verstehen, daß wir nicht da sind, um das Universum zu durchdringen,

quote from *Der Nachlaß* which describes the Alps and water (also represented by Schneeberg and Venice) as two poles in the writer's life: "In meiner Kindheit die Sonnenaufgänge auf dem Schneeberg, Kaiserstein. In meinem Alter die Sonnenaufgänge hinter der Lagune, Lido. Beides blutrot und leuchtender dampfender Nebel. Dazwischen mein ganzes Leben" (UH 65).

Schneeberg, an iconic cipher of the Austrian landscape, takes on symbolic importance in SG.

The recurring image of the opposite elements snow and fire symbolizes the alteration of a familiar environment rendered uncanny, like a snow-capped mountain suddenly burning, or, by extension, a *Heimat* being firebombed. The Alps are associated with National-Socialist patriotism and a parochial "reaktionärer Landschaftsideologie." As Sebald quotes from Guido Zernatto in his essay "Verlorenes Land – Jean Améry und Österreich:" "Für den Nationalsozialisten gibt es das Gesetz des Blutes, für den Österreicher das Gesetz der Landschaft" (UH 136). The tension in the depiction of the mountain as both burning and frozen parallels the discourse of the homeland turned uncanny.

## II. SIGMUND FREUD AND OTTO RANK

Freud's essay "Das Unheimliche" strikingly resembles SG in the way it assembles intertexts and blurs genre lines. Although Freud distinguishes between real and fictive uncanny events at the end of his essay, most of his examples for this sensation derive from fiction or use literary representations of the Uncanny as triggers for analysis. Consequently, "Das Unheimliche" develops from a speculative scientific essay into an intertextual text in its own right, becoming part literary analysis and part psychoanalysis – similar to Sebald, who crosses the borders between academic essays and literature in SG. When Sebald's narrator succumbs to bouts of

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sondern um von ihm durchdrungen zu sein" (UH 158). Sebald later devoted an entire book to the phenomenon of a "verkehrtes Verhältnis zur Welt" with *Die Ringe des Saturn*, in which a view from above obscures rather than elucidates.

paranoia, hides in hotel rooms, and perceives his life as dominated by uncanny coincidences – i.e. what Freud calls “das Unheimliche der gleichartigen Wiederkehr” (261) – the plot radically shifts away from its documentary trajectory, causing “[eine] Überbetonung der psychischen Realität im Vergleich zur materiellen” (267),<sup>26</sup> which Freud attributes to neurotics and cites as another condition in which uncanny encounters thrive. Freud also writes about his own experiences and counts himself among those prone to having uncanny encounters. Like Sebald, he uses the autobiographical self as a backbone for his text. “Das Unheimliche” is furthermore indebted to forerunner texts, as it builds upon and responds to Ernst Jentsch’s essay “Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen” (1906) and, more significantly for SG, to Otto Rank’s monograph *Der Doppelgänger* (1914), which traces the phenomenon of the double in Western literature and anthropology. In SG, intertexts simulate a reality marbled with uncanny encounters. On the surface, Sebald creates an autobiographical travel journal, yet many of his narrator’s experiences are revealed as derivatives of other writers’ travel memoirs.

While Freud’s essay is structured into three parts, the progression of ideas is so nonlinear that the division into parts seems arbitrary. For example, Freud reaches his thesis – that “die geheime Natur des Unheimlichen ist etwas wiederkehrendes Verdrängtes” (exemplified in SG by Gracchus) – only two thirds into the essay, aligning his conclusion with a quote from Schelling “das Unheimliche sei etwas, was im Verborgenen hätte bleiben sollen und hervorgetreten ist” (263-64). The meandering writing style, which mingles personal experience with quotes from literary texts and philosophy approaches the topic of the Uncanny from several oblique angles, and repeats itself until it abruptly ends, is reminiscent of Sebald’s manner of composition. The essay’s problematic classification is epitomized in Freud’s statement that real life lacks sufficient

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<sup>26</sup> Sebald highlights this passage in his copy of the essay in Marbach.



uncanny encounters for a thorough analysis of the topic. The Uncanny of fiction is richer, he writes, encompassing everything reality holds and more (271). Until the end it remains unclear which ground Freud treads on – aesthetics or psychoanalysis – and whether his investigation is rooted in or speaks to reality at all. Like the world of Sebald's texts, the reality Freud depicts is enhanced by elements from imaginative literature, and "Fiktion" – which Freud applies to both "Phantasie" and "Dichtung" – influences and even predetermines our perception of the world. Similarly, Sebald constructs simulacra in his texts that resemble reality but are woven of art – intertexts, paintings, and photographs. The uncanny in SG as such emblemizes the porousness of borders, especially between the spiritual and the physical worlds. However, specters are not just created by literary fiction but left over byproducts of a religious worldview filled with superstitious belief. A confrontation with ghosts also signals a confrontation with a Catholic mythology that saturates modernity's achievements, even secular ones like psychoanalysis, and dominates the Western imagination.

To briefly summarize "Das Unheimliche:" in part one, Freud explains the Uncanny as a type of fear, "jene Art des Schreckhaften, welche auf das Altbekannte, Längstvertraute zurückgeht" (244), and speculates that "Unheimlich ist irgendwie eine Art von Heimlich" (250). In part three of the essay he concludes that this special type of fear is caused by a resurfacing of repressed emotions, and that "das Unheimliche ist das Heimlich-Heimische [...] das eine Verdrängung erfahren hat und aus ihr wiedergekehrt ist" (268). In contradistinction to Jentsch's theory, Freud is convinced that "das Unheimliche [ist] wirklich nichts Neues oder Fremdes, sondern etwas dem Seelenleben von alters her Vertrautes, das ihm nur durch den Prozeß der Verdrängung entfremdet worden ist" (264). In parts two and three, Freud examines "Personen und Dinge, Eindrücke, Vorgänge und Situationen" that cause a feeling of the Uncanny. These are

(in the order Freud lists them): infantile complexes such as the castration complex, manifested as fear about injury to the eyes; doppelgangers; the repetition of similar entities (“Wiederholung des Gleichartigen”), such as, but not limited to: recurring numbers, coincidences, and the repetitive compulsive behavior of neurotics. These “schwierig zu beurteilende Fälle,” for which Freud draws from stories by E.T.A. Hoffmann and his own experience, are then expanded by “unzweifelhafte Fälle des Unheimlichen,” namely wish fulfillment; premonitions; superstitions, such as the fear of evil eyes; the “Allmacht der Gedanken;” “Reste animistischer Seelentätigkeit, i.e. repressed fears, such as: fear of death, corpses, “Wiederkehr der Toten, Geister und Gespenster;” malevolent people like the figure of the *gettatore* (“geheime, schädigende Kräfte”); severed limbs; “Verwischen der Grenze zw. Phantasie und Wahrheit.” These examples also derive from literature, as well as from Freud’s patients, particularly obsessive neurotics. The essay concludes with an extensive rumination on the Uncanny of fiction (“Phantasie, Dichtung”) and analyzes to what extent it differs from the Uncanny of real events. SG is rife with nearly all of the uncanny occurrences Freud mentions in his analysis, such as coincidences and recurring numbers, ghosts and doppelgangers, severed limbs and evil eyes. Sebald furthermore incorporates Freud’s personal uncanny experiences, as well as texts Freud mentions in passing, both fictional and scientific (such as *Josef Montfort* by Albrecht Schaeffer). The familiar continually returns in altered form throughout SG, as characters like Kafka’s Gracchus reappear as characters from the narrator’s childhood, and other writers’ texts emerge in reconfigured form. Indeed, Sebald’s use of intertextuality suggests that (intertextual) writing itself is an uncanny discipline, as authors are always haunted by the ghosts of their forerunners.

Coincidences and recurrences of the same numbers as portents of the Uncanny are central to the plot of SG. Freud clarifies that it is “das Moment der unbeabsichtigten Wiederholung,

welches das sonst Harmlose unheimlich macht und uns die Idee des Verhängnisvollen, Unentrinnbaren aufdrängt, wo wir sonst nur von ‘Zufall’ gesprochen hätten” (260). We tend to invest numbers that reappear seemingly at random with meaning, he writes: “wer nicht stich- und hieb fest gegen die Versuchung des Aberglaubens ist, wird sich geneigt finden, dieser hartnäckigen Wiederkehr der einen Zahl eine geheime Bedeutung zuzuschreiben” (260).

Investing numbers with the power of prediction, or performing mathematical operations to divine one’s fate, recur as a theme throughout SG. Henri Beyle calculates how much time he has left to live (35) and Giacomo Casanova engages in a complex operation to determine the date for his escape based on the epic poem *Orlando Furioso* (68). The narrator of “All’estero” dials numbers on a telephone like playing Russian roulette (41). Most importantly, the number 13, which recurs in the dates 1813, 1913, and 2013, is vested with importance in SG. Quasi-aleatory occurrences are indeed a hallmark of Sebald’s prose texts, and particularly in SG suffuse the plot with an occult or deterministic element. Coincidences suggest that human lives are predetermined and subject to an indecipherable pattern – an attitude associated with the superstitious, pre-secularized mindset the narrator encounters throughout Italy. The narrator’s efforts to decode the pattern, on the other hand, point to the critical-rational modernity the narrator lives in.

Planting “coincidences” in the narrator’s path is one of the purposes of the intertextual references in SG. Throughout the text, similarities are suggested between the writers Sebald quotes and his narrator. Sebald constructs his narrator’s journey as a repetition of literary *Vorbilder* with similar emotions, experiences, language, and itineraries – in other words as an uncanny repetition. The narrator of “All’estero,” who sets out to follow Kafka’s footsteps through Italy, reads Stendhal’s, Grillparzer’s and Casanova’s autobiographical texts and is often overwhelmed by seemingly aleatory occurrences that litter his path and reference these authors’

experiences. This behavior resembles repetition compulsion, which, as Freud specifies, “[verleiht] gewissen Seiten des Seelenlebens den dämonischen Charakter” (261). Daemonic aspects are personified in characters the narrator feels pursued by and in a menagerie of ghosts and doppelgangers that accompany his travels. Adding intrigue, Sebald’s narrator is sometimes cognizant of these “coincidences” and similarities of emotional responses that link him to his literary forerunners, sometimes not. For instance, the narrator of “All’estero” realizes with “Verwunderung” and “Schrecken” that he had been in Venice on the same date Casanova escaped from the Doge’s Palace, and near the same location. Further ominous elements are that he makes this discovery prompted by skepticism/disbelief about Casanova’s numerological experiments, and that the anniversary date of the escape is October 31<sup>st</sup> i.e. the day prior to All Saint’s Day (68f), which is also the inverse of the recurring number 13, the harbinger of bad luck for the superstitious. What the repetition of the number 13 in the dates 1813, 1913, and 2013 might signify, however, is never commented on. In SG, uncanny elements are thus both self-reflectively commented on by the narrator, and placed in a web of “coincidences” which the narrator ignores and which are left for the readers to discover and interpret.

The power of “coincidences” seems to have particularly resonated with Freud. “Als ich einst an einem heißen Sommernachmittag die mir unbekannten, menschenleeren Straßen einer italienischen Kleinstadt durchstreifte,” Freud writes near the beginning, and describes a disturbing episode of walking in circles in a seedy part of an unfamiliar Italian town (259). The sequence of Freud’s personal experiences, when he describes the uncanny effect of coincidences, reads like a blueprint for the plot lines of *Schwindel. Gefühle*. Three of the four stories in *Schwindel. Gefühle* are set in Italy and the narrator of “All’estero” has a similar experience of losing his way and walking in circles in Vienna, Venice, and Verona (surely the repetition of the

letter “V” is not coincidental either). Next, Freud describes “[das] Gefühl von Hilflosigkeit und Unheimlichkeit [...] wenn man sich im Hochwald, etwa vom Nebel überrascht, verirrt hat” (260). The doppelgänger character Gracchus/Hans Schlag also loses his way in a forest, as does the young doctor in Stifter’s *Die Mappe meines Urgroßvaters*, another key intertext for *Schwindel. Gefühle*. Freud then recounts the case of one of his patients, an obsessional neurotic who was treated in a “Wasserheilanstalt” to illustrate the uncanny aspect of repetition-compulsion. While at the spa, the man falls in love with a female patient and is disturbed by the death of a room neighbor. In “Dr. K.,” the “Kafka” character, during his sojourn in Riva (as reconstructed by Sebald), also falls in love with a fellow patient and the man who always sits next to him at meals commits suicide.

For *Schwindel. Gefühle*, Sebald also moves beyond Freud to one of the source texts for “Das Unheimliche,” and incorporates elements from Otto Rank’s *Der Doppelgänger*.<sup>27</sup> Doubling occurs frequently in all of Sebald’s prose texts, as a motif for doubting the validity of the reality transmitted by our senses. In *Schwindel. Gefühle*, doppelgängers appear as ghosts of other writers or their characters, and intertextuality in itself is a kind of doubling or reflection of an original. Drawing on Rank, Freud initially describes the origin of the doppelgänger motif as an affirmation of life and the indestructibility of the ego rather than the harbinger of death it later became in Western culture. Whereas “der Doppelgänger ist zum Schreckbild geworden,” he speculates that in “seelischen Urzeiten” doubles had a benign purpose and represented “[eine] energische Dementierung der Macht des Todes” (Freud 258-59). Rank says this in the context of narcissism, wherein “[d]er Todesgedanke ist erträglich gemacht dadurch, daß man sich nach diesem Leben eines zweiten in einem Doppelgänger versichert” (Rank 116). “[U]rsprünglich als

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27 Freud copied Rank’s methodology of analyzing fictional texts, although Rank provides more of an index of the doppelgänger motif in literature (and film).

Wunschabwehr des gefürchteten ewigen Untergangs geschaffen” doubles later return “im Aberglauben als Todesbote” (Freud 117). In both Freud and Rank, doppelgangers are connected to superstition and irrational belief. In Sebald’s text, doppelgangers fulfill both functions, appearing as uncanny symbols of mortality and at the same time as indicators of rebirth, a future less burdened by the past. In “All’estero,” for example, the narrator encounters the doppelgangers of Dante and king Ludwig II, who foreshadow the descent into the underworld and into madness. The reference to Dante also underscores the Catholic religious worldview associated in SG with Italy. Ludwig, who is a figure at the cusp of modernity, and who is remembered for his madness, represents the text’s undercurrent theme of psychoanalysis. Kafka, on the other hand, illustrates the doppelganger as a benign appearance, whom the narrator admires and tries to copy, and who renders “den Todesgedanken erträglich,” because his texts have endured.

While doppelgangers are uncanny because they are perceived as messengers of death, not all ways in which the self envisages its double are frightful. Freud writes that doppelgangers can also populate an imaginary alternate life into which the self projects “alle unterbliebenen Möglichkeiten der Geschicksgestaltung, an denen die Phantasie noch festhalten will, und alle Ich-Strebungen, die sich infolge äußerer Ungunst nicht durchsetzen konnten, sowie alle die unterdrückten Willensentscheidungen, die die Illusion des freien Willens ergeben haben” (259). In other words, a double offers an opportunity to be the person we were prevented from becoming, presents a vessel for living an alternate life. Melodramatically staging himself as Kafka’s double, finding similarities between himself and Grillparzer, staging his experience to resemble Stendhal’s, while ostensibly struggling with a vague writing project, are all ways for Sebald’s narrator to viscerally emulate already successful writers. On one level, the plot of the

(crime) story the narrator struggles to write seems to be made up of his own paranoia, yet on a different level it refers to the literary “crime” (*Schwindel*) of stealing from forerunners, of mashing up characters and entangling fiction with documentary reality, of using other authors’ experiences as a vessel for leading a more interesting and more accomplished life as a writer. Unsettling as it is, doubling becomes an extension of consciousness and causes a vertiginous glimpse of a different kind of reality in which uncanniness affirms the power of the imagination or, in Heideggerian terms, the authenticity of Dasein.

In many of the literary texts Rank cites, the doppelgänger motif appears in conjunction with mirrors, as doubles emerge from the looking glass and cause the loss of reflection of the original person. In SG, the narrator becomes lost in texts and the voice of his forerunners. Rank takes as point of departure for *Der Doppelgänger* Hanns Heinz Ewers’s film *Der Student von Prag*. In the film, which was released in the poignant year 1913, the unlucky protagonist Balduin is first liberated, then haunted, and finally killed and supplanted by his mirror-image ghost. Sebald devotes a section of “Dr. K.’s Badereise nach Riva” to Ewers’s film and speculates that Kafka watched it in Venice, calling Balduin a figure in whom Kafka would have “zweifellos” recognized his own doppelgänger (SG 166, cf. also “Kafka im Kino,” CS 201). A still from the film – Balduin engaging in a sword fight with his mirror image – is reproduced in SG (167). Mirrors constitute one of the important borders (or metaphor for borders) in SG, one that separates reality from a visible yet inaccessible world of ghostly appearances and uncannily repeats images. Two of the stories in SG are themselves mirrored: “Dr. K.’s Badereise nach Riva” reconstructs (and embellishes) a trip to Italy that Kafka took in 1913. Kafka’s trajectory from Vienna to Lake Garda is mirrored in “All’estero,” which follows a narrator retracing Kafka’s travel path – presumably, since *Schwindel. Gefühle.* is also a meta-text about writing

(like all of Sebald's prose narratives), and reads like a precursor to writing "Dr. K.s Badereise." In other words, Sebald's narrator acts as Kafka's doppelganger and tries to mirror his experiences, thoughts, and emotions. Thus, Sebald creates his own precursor document for SG and integrates it into the text.

More explicit mirroring happens in SG in transitory environments such as trains, train stations, and once a bus. In the hectic cafeteria of the Venice train station, populated by "Gespenster," the already paranoid narrator of "All'estero" has an encounter with two men who frighten him: "tatsächlich fand ich zwei Augenpaare auf mich gerichtet. Diejenigen, denen sie angehörten, lehnten an der Theke mir gegenüber. Der eine hielt das Kinn in die rechte, der andere in die linke Hand gestützt" (79). He is convinced the two men, who seem to be mirror images of each other, have been following him, and when he sees them again in Verona fear gives way to panic. A non-stop stream of ominous coincidences finally convinces the narrator that his life is in acute danger and causes him to flee from Italy altogether. According to Otto Rank, texts delineating encounters with doubles frequently "[weisen] eine Reihe so auffällig übereinstimmender Motive auf, daß es kaum nötig scheint sie noch besonders hervorzuheben" as well as "eine[n] regelrechten Verfolgungswahn oder gar [...] [ein] vollkommene[s] paranoische[s] Wahnsystem (Rank 47-48). In the crooked streets of Venice Sebald's narrator indeed suffers from a persecutory delusion. "Geht man in einer sonst leeren Gasse hinter jemandem her, so bedarf es nur einer geringfügigen Beschleunigung der Schritte, um demjenigen, den man verfolgt, die Angst in den Nacken zu setzen. Umgekehrt wird man leicht selbst zum Verfolgten. Verwirrung und eisiger Schrecken wechseln einander ab" (61). Twinned men by whom the narrator feels persecuted are also a reference to the fascist duo of serial killers who called themselves "Organizzazione Ludwig" and who terrorized Northern Italy in the 1970s and 1980s.



Sebald's narrator first reads about them in Verona in 1980 (89), and at the end of his second trip in 1987 he seeks information about them from an acquaintance, the journalist Salvatore. Salvatore is a mouthpiece through which Sebald summarizes an article from the German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* (No. 50 December 5, 1986). In retrospect, at the end of "All'estero," it seems possible that the narrator really did encounter the two killers, Wolfgang Abel and Marco Furla, in Venice and Verona (their hometown). By using a newspaper as an intertext Sebald expands his repertoire of forerunners and simultaneously heightens the documentary character of his "Kriminalroman" and renders it fictional by writing his narrator into the story presented in the *Zeit* article.

However, in both "All'estero" and Freud's essay, uncanny encounters with doubles sometimes find a lighthearted resolution. Mirrors can also act as tricksters, breaking the predominantly frightening effect of doubling. In a footnote in "Das Unheimliche," Freud describes an amusing encounter with his own reflected image in a mirror of a train compartment:

Ich saß allein im Abteil des Schlafwagens, als [...] die zur anstoßenden Toilette führende Türe aufging und ein älterer Herr im Schlafrock, die Reisemütze auf dem Kopf, bei mir eintrat. Ich nahm an, daß er [...] fälschlich in mein Abteil gekommen war, sprang auf, um ihn aufzuklären, erkannte aber bald verdutzt, daß der Eindringling mein eigenes vom Spiegel in der Verbindungstür entworfenen Bild war. (270)

Rather than being startled by the unexpected confrontation with his doppelgänger, Freud fails to recognize himself and moreover is displeased with his image: "Ich weiß noch, daß mir die Erscheinung gründlich mißfallen hatte."<sup>28</sup> Seven years after having left Italy in a panic, Sebald's

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<sup>28</sup> This is reminiscent of Austerlitz, who doesn't recognize himself in a childhood photograph (A 267).

narrator returns to resume the aborted restaging of Kafka's journey and retraces his own footsteps. Faced with his reflection in a mirror in the men's room of the Desenzano train station, the narrator imagines that Kafka might have looked into the same mirror decades ago. Mirrors, the passage suggests, retain a memory of those they reflect, the ghosts of the deceased, the aura of a vanished world. Yet the location of this epiphany – a toilet – colors the incident with an absurd quality and alludes to Freud's anecdote, which also happened in a bathroom.

The narrator's next encounter with doubling occurs on a bus where Kafka's image appears not once but twice in the form of twin boys who uncannily resemble the Czech writer (100). The boys' parents mistake the narrator's attention (he wants to take their picture) for pederasty, and filled with "äußerster Peinlichkeit" and "ohnmächtigem Zorn" that he is not able to document this uncanny sighting of Kafka's doppelgangers, he is gripped by vertigo, "ein Schwindelgefühl," as a reminder that, contrary to its presentation, Sebald's tale, as probably the encounter with the twin boys, is a work of fiction (i.e. *ein Schwindel*). Sebald takes the location of this incident – a bus – from *Das Unheimliche* as well. In the same footnote Freud mentions Ernst Mach, who relates an encounter with his own mirror image on a bus in *Analyse der Empfindungen*: "[Mach] fällte [...] ein sehr ungünstiges Urteil über den anscheinend Fremden, der in seinen Omnibus einstieg, 'Was steigt doch da für ein herabgekommener Schulmeister ein'" (270). Traveling, these passages seem to suggest, causes an altered state and the inability to recognize oneself. "Ob [...] das Mißfallen dabei nicht doch ein Rest jener archaischen Reaktion war, die den Doppelgänger als unheimlich empfindet?," Freud muses (ibid). In *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, encounters with mirrors are unsettling but also amusing. During the narrator's second trip to Italy in "All'estero," frequent bouts of vertigo replace paranoia and he is able to complete

his journey, in other words, again through a *Schwindel*, such as the project of revisioning and mirroring Kafka's experience.

Otto Rank's text also provides a clue to the title of Sebald's story "Dr. K.s Badereise nach Riva." Among others, Rank cites Jean Paul as a writer who frequently incorporates doppelgangers and cases of mistaken identity into his texts, significantly *Dr. Katzenbergers Badereise* (14). Sebald's title unmistakably mirrors Jean Paul's satire. While *Dr. Katzenbergers Badereise* is not an explicit intertext for Sebald, the kinship of the two texts' titles creates ambiguity and a tongue-in-cheek reference to a satirical piece of literature. Sebald's recreation of Kafka's footsteps is further lightened by the lingering association with the grossly inappropriate and funny figure of Katzenberger. Rank writes that Jean Paul "[hat] wie kein zweiter vor- und nachher, das Problem der *Spaltung* und *Vervielfachung* des Ichs in krasser Ausprägung immer wieder behandelt" (21, italics mine). As will become apparent later, Jean Paul also supplied Sebald with one of the codas to BU, and by extension to SG, on how to survive modernity in spite of a fragmentation of the self. The wording is reminiscent of Sebald's description in "Dr. K.s Badereise" of Kafka hallucinating a doubled church in Venice: "eine *Verzweifachung*, wie sie ihm aus seinen Träumen bekannt war, in denen auf furchterregende Weise alles beständig sich weiter und weiter *aufspaltete*" (165, italics mine). Kafka was Rank's (at the time) little known contemporary and is thus not included in the study on doppelgangers. In a sense, the three Kafka-inspired stories in SG, "All'estero," "Dr. K.'s Badereise," and "Il ritorno" are a compendium to Rank's work.

Freud mentions superstitious beliefs as a source for the Uncanny, especially the fear of evil eyes: "[e]ine der unheimlichsten und verbreitetsten Formen des Aberglaubens ist die Angst vor dem 'bösen Blick'" (262). The first literary example of the Uncanny Freud analyses and

summarizes in great detail is E.T.A. Hoffmann's story "Der Sandmann," in which a child is frightened by the specter of an evil man who tears out children's eyes and who later reappears as an optician who practices black magic (250-254). (Freud here expands on an analysis by Jentsch, who used this text as an example first.) While Sebald engages in a discourse about the visual in all of his works, and throughout SG, references to eyes are clustered in "All'estero" and tied to the narrator's paranoia. He feels negatively affected by the two men in the Venice train station (and later in the arena in Verona), who stare at him ("zwei Augenpaare," "in den Blick gekommen," "zu mir herüberschauten" 79, "ihr Augenmerk" 83), and threatened by the proprietor of the Pizzeria Verona, with the unsettling name "Carlo Cadavero," who also watches him intently ("blickt, mit einiger Verächtlichkeit [...] zu mir herüber," "schaut wieder herüber zu mir" 91). Other instances in which eyes are emphasized in SG occur in "Beyle," where a picture of Stendhal's eyes substitutes for the word "Augen:" "seine weit auseinanderliegenden [cropped image of eyes inserted here] deretwegen er zu seinem Leidwesen *Le Chinois* genannt wird" (15). Elsewhere, the word "sehen" is capitalized and emphasized by extra spaces: "ohne M é t i l d e S E H E N zu können" (24). The long ekphrastic passage about a Pisanello fresco is broken up by two images that highlight the direction of a gaze. The first image, inserted after the words "abschweifenden männlichen Blick," depicts St. George's eyes; the second one shows a woman's profile framed by the words "Beschlossenheit des weiblichen" and "Auges" (87). Instances in which looking is harmful or eyes have a negative connotation furthermore appear in "Il ritorno in patria," when the narrator has a feverish vision of scooping up eyeballs from a barrel during his illness as a child in W. (273), reminiscent of E.T.A. Hoffmann's story, in which the Sandmann collects children's bloody eyeballs in a sack to feed to his offspring (Freud mentions this twice in "Das Unheimliche"). The emphasis on eyes also has a forerunner in BU,

where Sebald writes (in response to a text by Elias Canetti) “[n]ichts empfinden die Gejagten so schmerzhaft wie die unablässige Observation. ‘Man sieht *Augen* überall,’ schreibt Canetti” and mentions that “Kafka’s *Prozeß* enthält in erstaunlicher Frequenz Verben wie blicken, sehen, gesehen werden, aufsehen, ansehen, sich umsehen, beobachten, Blicke auf sich lenken, mit Blicken verfolgen” (BU 97).

Freud’s remark about the superstitious belief in evil eyes is echoed in the name of a character Sebald’s narrator encounters in Venice, the astrophysicist Malachio. In addition to the connotation of the name to the Old Testament prophet Malachi (which means “my messenger”), the name Malachio (which appears to be a made up name) bears resemblance to the Italian term for evil eye, *malocchio*.<sup>29</sup> The encounter with the mysterious Malachio, “der alles aus der größten Entfernung sah, nicht nur die Sterne,” is in and of itself pleasant but embedded in a series of frightening events (70). Following the evening spent with him, the paranoia of Sebald’s narrator escalates. He locks himself into his hotel room on All Souls’ Night, the night of commemorating the dead, out of fear of being pulled into the world beyond the border of reality and sanity. In addition to mentioning Malachio’s peculiar way of seeing, the narrator later cannot recall his facial features or eyes (76). Malachio’s kinship to the term *malocchio* suggests that he is a *gettatore*, a person who gives others the evil eye. A passage in “Das Unheimliche” indeed suggests Sebald appropriated the figure of Malachio from another literary text, via Freud:

Wir heißen auch einen lebenden Menschen unheimlich, und zwar dann, wenn wir ihm böse Absichten zutrauen. Aber das reicht nicht hin, wir müssen noch

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29 While the pronunciation is different – “Malachio” would be stressed on the “i” of the last syllable, whereas *malocchio* is stressed on the “o” of the second – the visual resemblance between the two terms is striking. Sebald had a keen sense for homographs and homonyms, as is demonstrated in *Unheimliche Heimat*. In his analysis of Kafka’s *Das Schloß*, Sebald argues that the land surveyor K. is a messianic figure and finds proof in the similarity of the Hebrew terms “Moshiayakh” (the anointed one) – “Moshoyakh” (one who surveys) which only differ in one vowel, which is furthermore omitted in written Hebrew (UH 93).

hinzutun, daß diese seine Absichten uns zu schaden sich mit Hilfe besonderer Kräfte verwirklichen werden. Der ‘Gettatore,’ ist ein gutes Beispiel hiefür, diese unheimliche Gestalt des romanischen Aberglaubens, die Albrecht Schaeffer in dem Buche *Josef Montfort* mit poetischer Intuition und tiefem psychoanalytischem Verständnis zu einer sympathischen Figur umgeschaffen hat. (Freud 265-66)

The last section of *Josef Montfort*, “Der Gettatore,” which Freud references here, is also set in Venice. In Schaeffer’s story the young baron Josef Montfort encounters his doppelganger in a hotel room in the Palazzo Dandolo on Riva degli Schiavoni in Venice, a palace that was later converted to the Hotel Danieli, where Sebald’s narrator resides in 1980.<sup>30</sup>

The doppelganger, whom others do not perceive as resembling Montfort, i.e. whose facial features, like Malachios’s, are not fixed, turns out to be “der berühmte Gettatore” Giuseppe del M. (Schaeffer 453). When Montfort returns to the hotel at night, he encounters a sleepy night porter: “es ist Nacht, der Venediger schläft [...] Der Pförtner war so verschlafen, daß er vergaß, mir voran die elektrische Treppenbeleuchtung zu entzünden. Wie ich meinen Korridor betrete ist es finster” (360-64). The scene at the Danieli when the narrator of “All’estero” returns is similar. “Ich überquerte den Vorplatz vor dem Hotel. Nichts rührte sich mehr. Es lag alles in seinen Betten. Sogar der Nachtportier hatte seinen Posten verlassen und ruhte, wie aufgebahrt, in einer Art offener Kammer hinter seiner Loge auf einem engen, seltsam hochbeinigen Lager” (SG 72). Similar to the composite character Lemoine in *Austerlitz*, Sebald seems to merge the most unlikely characters into one – an astrophysicist/lay philosopher with the name of a Biblical prophet who ponders resurrection, and who contents himself with questions rather than answers,

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. <http://www.danielihotelvenice.com/en/hotel-danieli-history>.

and an exaggerated character from a gothic fictional text by an obscure German author whom Freud admired and called “mein[] Schriftsteller” (*Briefe* 476). However, the Bible passage Malachio refers to, the Valley of Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37, is particularly macabre, and the concept of resurrection, a corpse coming alive, is quintessentially uncanny. The sacred and the profane are simultaneously juxtaposed and united in these two names Malachi-Malachio/*malocchio*. Sebald not only brings out uncanny moments in the Bible, which demonstrates how it came to fuel superstitions and underscores it as a work of fiction, but also shows that psychoanalysis is born out of a Judeo-Christian religious context. In particular Freud’s conception of the architecture of the psyche, with divisions of above and below (id-ego-superego), resembles the stratified worldview of Catholicism.

References to Albrecht Schaeffer continue in SG, adding another layer to the narrator’s encounters with doppelgangers and his paranoia. Freud describes severed limbs in literature as frightful and uncanny: “Abgetrennte Glieder, ein abgehauener Kopf, eine vom Arm gelöste Hand wie in einem Märchen von Hauff, Füße, die für sich allein tanzen wie in dem erwähnten Buche von A. Schaeffer haben etwas ungemein Unheimliches an sich, besonders wenn ihnen wie im letzten Beispiel noch eine selbständige Tätigkeit zugestanden wird” (266).<sup>31</sup> In the third chapter of *Josef Montfort*, “Gespräch mit einem Kopf,” Montfort has a dream about a severed head, which falls into his bedroom and involves him in a conversation. The head (who later turns out to be his own/the *gettatore*’s) begs to be lifted to a “menschenwürdige Höhe.” Montfort complies, “packte ihn widerwillig genug beim Haar und setzte ihn auf die Marmorplatte des Nachttisches neben [seinem] Bett” (381). Standing at a tall buffet counter in the railway station in Venice,

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31 Freud’s assessment of the uncanniness of severed hands is also echoed in SG with multiple references to one-handedness. To name but a few, the village W. used to have a one-armed scribe (203), a photograph supposedly depicts an inspirational cast of Beyle’s lover Métilde Dembowki Viscontini’s left hand (bringing to mind the Hauff fairy tale “Die abgehauene Hand” Freud mentions) (25), and the narrator as a child accidentally severs the arm off a mannequin in the attic (248).

Sebald's narrator feels surrounded by disembodied heads: "Hätte sie einer der steifleinernen Ober mit einer ausholenden Armbewegung von der glatten Fläche *des Marmors* gewischt und wären sie alle, *diese abgeschnittenen Köpfe, mein eigener nicht ausgenommen*, in einen Schindergraben gefallen, es hätte mich nicht gewundert" (78, italics mine). Whereas Schaeffer's description of Montfort talking with the severed head is humorous and grotesque rather than frightening, Sebald's narrator is profoundly disturbed by the scene in the train station. However, these references to a comic gothic primary text underscore the artifice of Sebald's story and add a covertly humorous and macabre element.

Immediately after the severed head illusion, Sebald's narrator feels the eyes of the two men on him, and "[w]ie ein Wolkenschatten über ein Feld, so legte sich über mich die Befürchtung, [...] daß sie auch an der Bar in der Riva, in der ich Malachio getroffen hatte, unter den Gästen gewesen waren" (79). Perhaps the two men, who, as mentioned earlier, seem to be mirrored, are apparitions from Schaeffer's text – Josef Montfort and his double, the *gettatore* Guiseppe del M. Their presence alongside Malachio, the character whose name is reminiscent of *malocchio*, and the focus on eyes in this passage indeed suggest it. The narrator's next encounter with the two men in the Verona arena provides a further hint that they were inspired by Montfort and his double. He sees the two men on the opposite side of the arena:

Es bestand kein Zweifel, es waren wieder dieselben beiden jungen Männer, die am Morgen früh ihr Augenmerk auf mich gerichtet gehabt hatten. Zwei Wächtern gleich verharren sie reglos auf ihren Plätzen, bis das Licht vollends vergangen war. Dann erhoben sie sich, und es dünkte mich, *als verbeugten sie sich gegeneinander*, ehe sie herabstiegen von den Rändern und im Dunkel des Ausgangs verschwanden. (SG 83, italics mine)



The day after Montfort first finds his doppelganger in the palazzo Dandolo/hotel Danieli, he encounters him in Teatro la Fenice during a performance of *Rigoletto*:

Er steht in der zweiten Parkettreihe, allein, den Rücken zur Bühne und sieht zu uns herauf. [...] Als ich die Treppe in den Wendelgang hinuter steige, sehe ich ihn an der Wand lehnen, hell genug beleuchtet vom Kristallkandelaber über ihm. Und wieder sehe ich mich selber in ihm, aber gemein, pfui Satan, wie gemein! [...] Er lächelt; vielmehr er grinst. Oh Teufel, ich grinse! [...] *Wir verbeugen uns*, und ich gehe. (367, italics mine)

Later in *Josef Montfort* we learn that both Montfort and the *gettatore* had indeed been in Verona, from where they took the same train to Venice, the opposite direction of the journey Sebald's narrator undertakes. The convoluted plot of Schaeffer's text, rife with uncanny, supernatural, and gothic elements (such as undead maidens, living statues, and severed limbs), is never completely resolved. Montfort is haunted by the appearance of his doppelganger for the rest of his life and several times unsuccessfully tries to kill him. While the *gettatore* brings him bad luck, Montfort himself is believed by others to be a *gettatore* who brings them misfortune.<sup>32</sup> To the end it remains unclear whether Montfort and his double are indeed one and the same person, or personified aspects of the same ego. This parallels the narrator's relationship to both Kafka and his character, Gracchus. The narrator sees Kafka (and Gracchus) simultaneously from the outside (as in sighting the twin boys), and from the inside, as he follows Kafka's itinerary and tries to get into his head.<sup>33</sup>

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32 Montfort explains: "Dem echten Gettatore – das ist sein Merkmal – stößt nie etwas zu [...]. Ich bin kein Gettatore [...], ich bin ein umgekehrter Gettatore, einer den das Grausen anzieht, anstatt daß er es anzöge" (Schaeffer 113).

33 Gracchus has been interpreted as Kafka's alter ego or as symbolizing the Kafkan text. *Kavka* in Czech means jackdaw (Dohle), as does *gracchio* in Italian. In "All'estero," the narrator talks to the jackdaws in Vienna (SG 42). Cf. Richard T. Gray (ed.) *A Franz Kafka Encyclopedia* 141-42, and specific to Sebald, cf. Klebes 124-34.

At the end of “Das Unheimliche,” Freud almost reluctantly concludes that fictional narratives have less power to evoke the uncanny than real occurrences. His analysis about the ways authors trick their readers to create uncanny effects informs the question of genre in SG. Literature may seem to offer richer opportunities for producing uncanny effects, Freud writes. However, since fictional worlds are governed by their own sets of (invented) rules, readers accept the existence of daemons, ghosts, and doppelgangers without finding them uncanny. An author’s tactic to mislead readers by creating realistic environments and then breaking them with uncanny occurrences that deviate from real life backfires, as, according to Freud, readers do not like to be deceived: “[Der Autor] *beträgt uns*, indem er uns die gemeine Wirklichkeit verspricht und dann doch über diese hinausgeht. [...] wenn wir *den Betrug* merken, ist es zu spät [...] Bei uns bleibt ein Gefühl von Unbefriedigung, eine Art von Groll über die versuchte Täuschung” (273, italics mine). SG already announces “Betrug” in its title (“Schwindel”). Sebald’s texts similarly promise a realistic environment, constructed with documentary evidence such as photographs, into which ghosts like Gracchus abruptly intrude. Freud writes that breaking realism with uncanny events only works if the parameters of the fictional world are carefully veiled:

Der Dichter hat dann noch ein Mittel zur Verfügung, durch welches er sich dieser unserer Auflehnung entziehen [...] kann. Es besteht darin, daß er uns lange Zeit über nicht erraten läßt, *welche Voraussetzungen er eigentlich für die von ihm angenommene Welt gewählt hat, oder daß er kunstvoll und arglistig einer solchen entscheidenden Aufklärung bis zum Ende ausweicht.* (273, italics mine)

In SG, as in all of Sebald’s subsequent texts, the uncertainty about what is real and what invented, what an intertext and what embellished, is likewise never fully resolved. Even the

designation of genre is complicated, as Sebald's texts – "kunstvoll und arglistig" – combine elements of travel writing, journalism, fiction, nonfiction, and (auto)biography, and present the fictional with the authority of the documentary. The text in itself is uncanny, rather than plot elements like severed limbs or characters. Sebald's blurring of borders between documentary and fiction, and the narrator's disappearance into the text, is the instantiation of the Freudian uncanny, "daß es nämlich oft und leicht unheimlich wirkt, wenn die Grenze zwischen Phantasie und Wirklichkeit verwischt wird" (267).

Sebald's incorporation of and allusions to Freud and Rank signal the important position of psychoanalysis as a bridge between the two polarized worldviews – religious and secularized – thematized in SG. Freud and Rank are foundational thinkers of psychonalysis, who, like the discipline and modernity itself, transition between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. While a secular discipline, psychoanalysis projected the patriarchal, stratified worldview of Catholicism in miniature onto its conception of the self. Concepts that have come to define the fragmentation of the modern individual in a lasting way, such as the division of the psyche into three levels, and the visualization of an unconscious and its agents, such as the libido, grew out of and bear resemblance to a religious model that pits corporeal sins against mental virtue, and interprets visions like Freud defines dreams. In SG, Sebald constructs the narrator as an individual pulled between the Freudian poles of pleasure principle and death drive, inviting a psychoanalytic reading of him and the text. Considering the role of psychonalysis in diagnosing the victims of diseases it invented (neurosis and psychosis), the discipline emerges as a questionable bridge to modernity and has (in retrospect) been conceived of as a pseudo-science.<sup>34</sup> The therapy Sebald

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34 For a critique of psychonalysis as a pseudo-science and discipline founded on Freud's ego cf. Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen and Sonu Shamdasani: *The Freud Files: An Inquiry into the History of Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012) and Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen: *The Freudian Subject* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1989).

pronounces for his narrator lies in the creation of texts – not unlike the Freudian prescription for treating the traumatic memory (another concept psychanalysis invented) of war survivors, which is a repeated retelling of their own story. Yet Sebald's answer, both for his narrator and for the text, goes beyond a rehashing of autobiography and lies in art and the creation of "Bilder[], in denen es sich aushalten läßt," as he says of Handke's compositions (BU 184).

### III. FRANZ KAFKA AND ADALBERT STIFTER

In *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, the themes of uncanny ghosts, doppelgangers, borders, and suicide coalesce in Kafka's Gracchus motif. At the beginning of "Dr. K.s Badereise," Sebald describes Kafka's miserable sojourn in Vienna in 1913, which is not unlike the experience of the narrator of "All'estero." "In der Nacht hat Dr. K. Zustände [...] steht lang am Fenster [...] und wünscht sich, einige Stockwerke tiefer in der Erde zu liegen" (158). On the next page Sebald cites a line from a poem by Albert Ehrenstein, whose verses Dr. K. dislikes: "*Ihr aber freut euch des Schiffs, veregelt mit Segeln den See. Ich will zur Tiefe. Stürzen, schmelzen, erblinden*" (SG 159).<sup>35</sup> The lines of the poem anticipate Gracchus's barge and his fall to death, but its title, "Der Selbstmörder" (which Sebald does not mention) provides the more subtle intertextual connection to "Dr. K.," which culminates in Sebald's retelling of Kafka's Gracchus story – which, in turn, presents a much subtler take on suicide that Ehrenstein's poem does. In his own texts, Kafka constantly pierced the border between the normal and the paranormal and in the presence of writers like him, Sebald's text suggests, one can never be sure that the borders to an imaginary world are stable. Kafka's fragment from the *Oktavhefte* describes a hunter who died in the Black

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<sup>35</sup> Sebald changes the poem slightly. The correct second stanza reads: "Ihr freut euch des Schiffs? / Veregelt mit Segeln den See. / Ich will tiefer zur Tiefe. / Stürzen, schmelzen, erblinden zu Eis" (Ehrenstein 41).

Forest and is condemned to roam the seas because the ship that was supposed to ferry him to the underworld lost its course. Gracchus cannot fully cross the border to the world of the dead, and is hence forced to remain suspended in a state between life and death. The ghostly hunter and his barge glide through all four stories of *Schwindel. Gefühle.* and are introduced, like other themes, in the prologue, “Beyle,” where Madame Gherardi is unsettled by witnessing, in the harbor of Riva, “einen schweren alten Kahn [...], mit einem im oberen Drittel geknickten Hauptmast und faltigen gelbbraunen Segeln [...] von dem zwei Männer in dunklen Röcken mit Silberknöpfen gerade eine Bahre an Land trugen, auf der unter einem großen, blumengemusterten Seidentuch offenbar ein Mensch lag” (SG 30-31). In “Der Jäger Gracchus,” Kafka writes: “Zwei [...] Männer in dunklen Röcken mit Silberknöpfen trugen hinter dem Bootsmann eine Bahre, auf der unter einem großen blumengemusterten, gefransten Seidentuch offenbar ein Mensch lag” (Kafka *Schriften V* 102). The first part of Sebald’s quote derives from an additional entry on Gracchus in Kafka’s diary from 1917: “Ein schwerer alter Kahn, [...] der Hauptmast im obern Drittel geknickt, faltige rauhe gelbbraune Segeltücher” (Kafka *Tagebücher* 371). The images of the ship, Gracchus on a stretcher, the pallbearers with silver buttons on their coats, and the floral pattern of the blanket recur throughout SG. Gracchus is a ghost, stuck between the polarities of life and death. As Sebald’s narrator mirrors Kafka’s experiences, he takes on properties of Gracchus as well and slowly seems to become the undead hunter.

During his first trip to Italy in “All’estero,” the narrator’s paranoia peaks in the Pizzeria Verona where he feels like the Hunter Gracchus on his boat. The restaurant’s interior is decorated in a nautical theme, which gives the impression “allseits von Wasser umgeben zu sein” and painted a blue color that dashed his hopes “je wieder festes Land sehen zu dürfen” (88). The building on Via Roma, with narrow columns framing a dark wooden door, which is depicted in a

photograph in SG (142), is also visually similar to the house Gracchus is carried into in Riva, “ein gelbliches, zweistöckiges Haus [...] [D]as niedrige, aber von schlanken Säulen gebildete Tor [...] war aus schwarzem Eichenholz sorgfältig gefügt” (*Schriften V* 102-03). Consequently, the narrator flees the scene, and Italy, in a panic. When he returns to Verona seven years later, he remembers a vision of “zwei Männer in schwarzen Röcken mit silbernen Knöpfen, die aus dem Hinterhaus eine Bahre heraustrugen, auf der unter einem blumengemusterten Tuch offensichtlich ein Mensch lag” (SG 140). Sebald even appropriates “den Taubenschwarm, der [...] sich teils auf dem Balkongitter, teils auf dem Dach des Hauses niederließ” (SG 142) from Kafka, who writes in “Der Jäger Gracchus”: “[e]in Taubenschwarm, der bisher den Glockenturm umflogen hatte, ließ sich jetzt vor dem Hause nieder” (*Schriften V* 103). In Milan the narrator morphs further into Gracchus. Unable to find sleep in a hotel, he lies all night on the “mit einem blumengemusterten [...] Fransentuch bedeckte[n] Bettstatt” (SG 126). “Dr. K.s Badereise” culminates in Sebald’s retelling of Kafka’s sketch, and Gracchus’s ghost ship is depicted in a pixelated, overexposed photograph – a technique Sebald also uses in *Austerlitz* to enhance the spectral quality of images (SG 178, *Austerlitz* 354-55). Finally, in “Il ritorno in patria,” Gracchus returns in the form of a character from the narrator’s childhood, the hunter Hans Schlag, whose mysterious death in the Alps represents a key scene in the text. Like Gracchus, Sebald’s Hans Schlag transgresses beyond the borders of his territory, and dies while crossing the Alps into Austria.

Sebald expands the Freudian layers of uncanny repetition, as Hans Schlag is not only the doppelgänger of Kafka’s Gracchus, but also a character from Kafka’s fragment “Auf dem Dachboden,” a ghost discovered by a small boy in the depths of an attic, which in turn illustrates Freud’s reading of “die Schellingsche Definition [...], das Unheimliche sei etwas, was im Verborgenen hätte bleiben sollen und hervorgetreten ist” (264). In SG, the episode of Schlag’s

death is furthermore borrowed from Stifter's *Die Mappe meines Urgroßvaters*. Caught in the frame of repetition compulsion, Sebald's narrator mirrors Kafka's experience and itinerary, as well as his feelings, and seems headed for the abyss. At the beginning of "Il ritorno," when the narrator descends on foot through the woods to the village of his childhood, he rests in a chapel decorated with images of the Stations of the Cross and feels as if on a barge crossing an ocean (195-96). The German word "Kahn" alludes to Gracchus and furthermore conjures a Stygian image. The narrator's descent into the "Tobel" anticipates Schlag's fall to death. In *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, the recurring image of an abyss is linked to a Dantean underworld. References to *Inferno* are sprinkled throughout. The clumsy frescos in the chapel portray "schmerz- und wutverzernte Gesichter, verrenkte Körperteile, ein zum Schlag ausholender Arm" and depict "eine Art Geisterkampf verschiedener, frei in der Düsternis des Zerfalls schwebender Gesichter und Hände" (i.e. severed limbs) (196). Triggered by a painting, Sebald mixes images from different religious and mythological backgrounds and eras in this scene – Ancient Greek mythology, Catholicism, an 18<sup>th</sup> century fresco, a 14<sup>th</sup> century epic poem, and of course the Uncanny – which anticipates a similar mingling of references in ekphrastic descriptions in *Die Ringe des Saturn*.

The unlikely interweaving of characters from Stifter and Kafka also has its source in Sebald's work on Austrian writers. In the essay "Bis an den Rand der Natur – Versuch über Stifter" in BU, Sebald links Stifter and Kafka, specifically their literary articulation of a pessimistic unease that permeates history, and their personal aversion to matrimony. The essay ends with a death scene from Stifter's *Die Mappe meines Urgroßvaters*, in which Sebald sees a parallel to Kafka's comparison between "Zölibat und Selbstmord" and Stifter's unarticulated

desire for a celibate existence, which, Sebald speculates, drove him to suicide (BU 37).<sup>36</sup>

“Vielleicht hat deshalb der traumhafte Tod der Frau des Obristen etwas von einem Wunschtod an sich. Wunschtod aber, heißt es, stirbt nicht,” Sebald writes, anticipating the central theme of *Schwindel. Gefühle*. For SG, Sebald borrows Stifter’s death scene and inscribes it into the demise of the hunter Hans Schlag. It remains unclear whether Schlag’s death, “eine undurchsichtige, nicht recht geheuerliche Geschichte,” is suicide or not. His death does, however, follow upon a night of passionate lovemaking, and is for that reason linked to (the rejection of) desire. The hunter, who dies while crossing a deep ravine on a makeshift bridge outside his territory, might have lost his way on purpose, “[ist] gewissermaßen vorsätzlich fehlgegangen” (269). This suggests that Schlag’s death was a voluntary act, perhaps to escape the responsibility of matrimony.<sup>37</sup> The mystery of Schlag’s death alludes to the supernatural element of Kafka’s Gracchus story. Gracchus also fell to his death in a forest while hunting: “Vor vielen Jahren, es müssen aber ungemein viele Jahre gewesen sein, stürzte ich im Schwarzwald – das ist in Deutschland – von einem Felsen, als ich eine Gemse verfolgte. Seitdem bin ich tot. [...] Alles ging der Ordnung nach. Ich verfolgte, stürzte ab, verblutete in einer Schlucht, war tot und diese Barke sollte mich ins Jenseits tragen,” Kafka writes (*Schriften V* 105). The barge, however, never arrives in the underworld, and it remains unclear who is to blame.

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36 *Schwindel. Gefühle*. is filled with the ghosts of unsuccessful love. In “Recovered Memories,” Maya Jaggi writes (quoting Sebald) that “[f]or Sebald, *Vertigo* is about the ‘problem of love, but not in a standard way.’” “Beyle” ends with Stendhal’s allegory of the crystal branch, which exposes love as an illusion (cf. also chapter 4). Kafka’s distress in Riva is caused by the unresolved question of formalizing his relationship to Felice, and the narrator of the other two stories travels alone and unhappy. Lasting, monogamous love was an impossibility for most of Sebald’s precursors in SG: Stendhal, Casanova, Grillparzer, Kafka, Robert Walser, and Stifter all either chose or fantasized about celibacy, or compulsively womanized, as in the case of Casanova and Stendhal. The notable exception, Freud, spent his career as a psychoanalyst plotting sexual desire as the culprit for many psychoses.

37 According to Sebald’s narrator in “Dr. K.s Badereise,” the hidden purpose of Gracchus’s endless travels is furthermore Kafka’s own “Abbuße einer Sehnsucht nach Liebe,” specifically a desire for love that is impossible to fulfill (SG 180).



In “Dr. K.s Badereise,” Sebald’s narrator calls Gracchus’s tale of following a chamois, an animal that is not found in the black forest (so how could Gracchus have died pursuing it?), “eine der eigenartigsten Falschmeldungen aller Erzählungen, die je erzählt worden sind,” and thereby outs Kafka/Gracchus as a “Schwindler” (180).<sup>38</sup> By extension, his purported fall to death is also a suspicious fact, and Gracchus the “Selbstmörder” announced on the level of an intertext at the beginning of “Dr. K.” The blame for Gracchus’s inability to reach the underworld hence lies with the hunter himself, even though he denies it and instead holds the boatsman responsible. “Der Grundfehler meines einstmaligen Sterbens umgrinst mich in meiner Kajüte,” Gracchus explains to the mayor of Riva, which further reveals his fall as a voluntary plunge to death rather than as an accident (*Schriften V* 105). Certainly a death wish is discernible in Gracchus’s initial embracing of death and his eagerness to travel to the other side:

Ich erinnere mich noch, wie fröhlich ich mich hier auf der Pritsche ausstreckte zum erstenmal. Niemals haben die Berge solchen Gesang von mir gehört wie diese vier damals noch dämmerigen Wände. Ich hatte gern gelebt und war gern gestorben, glücklich warf ich, ehe ich den Bord betrat, das Lumpenpack der Büchse, der Tasche, des Jagdgewehrs vor mir hinunter, das ich immer stolz getragen hatte, und in das Totenhemd schlüpfte ich wie ein Mädchen ins Hochzeitskleid.<sup>39</sup> Hier lag ich und wartete. Dann geschah das Unglück. (*Schriften V* 106)

In Sebald’s interpretation, the hunter’s miserable and boring existence as an itinerant ghost at sea becomes punishment for his eagerness to die (the “Schuld” he tries to negate having a part in),

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. also Klebes 134.

<sup>39</sup> Eros and Thanatos are often linked Sebald’s scholarship and prose fictions, and pornography as an act of textual transgression similar to writing about suicide is a theme throughout BU (specifically in the essays on Stifter, Gerhard Roth, Schnitzler, and Hoffmannsthal).

and is a testimony against suicide. In SG, the narrator's grandfather reports "[e]r hielte es [...] für ausgeschlossen, daß der Schlag, der doch auf das genaueste mit den Grenzen seines Reviers vertraut gewesen sein müsse, *versehentlich auf die andere Seite* hinüber geraten sei" (268, italics mine). The other side does not just signify Austria but also death. Sebald lifts the entire scene from Stifter's *Die Mappe meines Urgroßvaters*, in which "der sanftmütige Obrist" loses his wife. The cause of her fall is also unclear in the Stifter pretext (cf. Stifter 332).<sup>40</sup> Whether she and the Gracchus/Schlag character succumb to an attack of vertigo in the mountains or transgress life's final border by committing suicide, it is important to remember that Hans Schlag (in Sebald's and Kafka's rendition), as well as the Obrist's wife are foreigners in the German/Austrian Alps.<sup>41</sup> Sebald connects their fall to death to a loss of *Heimat* and the collective guilt of the German/Austrian people.

In "Il ritorno in patria," collective guilt and the repressed traumatic memory of past wars are symbolized by ghosts in an attic, which is instantiated in the third intertext Sebald draws on to forge the composite character Hans Schlag: Kafka's story fragment "Auf dem Dachboden." In Kafka's sketch, a young boy finds a mysterious, ghostly stranger in the depths of his father's attic. The stranger, who dresses and speaks in a peculiar way, seems to awaken from a long sleep and introduces himself as "Hans Schlag, bin badischer Jäger und stamme von Koßgarten am Neckar" (*Werke IX* 150).<sup>42</sup> Sebald's narrator also climbs to an attic on his sojourn at home, experiencing it as a space beyond the threshold of his present reality. In the attic, which he had

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40 Parallels to Stifter's *Die Mappe meines Urgroßvaters* include the description of the location, the inexplicable fall, and the presence of a dog, which survives only to be shot. For a comparison of Stifter's and Sebald's texts see Appendix.

41 Stifter's Obrist finds his wife "am Rheine [...], wo sie von Verwandten hart gehalten wurde." "Da ich eingerichtet war, holte ich sie herüber [to a valley in the Alps]. Sie hatte mich nicht geliebt, aber sie war mitgegangen," he describes (MU 329).

42 The first time Sebald's narrator describes the hunter Schlag in "Il ritorno in patria" he draws from both "Auf dem Dachboden" and from "Der Jäger Gracchus," interlacing aspects of each: Für sich allein saß [...] der Jäger Hans Schlag, von dem es hieß, daß er von auswärts, und zwar aus Koßgarten am Neckar [c.f. "Auf dem Dachboden"] stamme und mehrere Jahre im Schwarzwald [c.f. "Der Jäger Gracchus"] ein wetläufiges Revier versehen habe" (SG 259).

been forbidden to access as a child because “the gray hunter” lived there, the narrator finds a mannequin dressed in a Napoleonic war era soldier’s uniform. As a child, however, sitting “an der Grenze des Erlaubten” (SG 243) in front of the locked attic door, he had imagined this hunter differently, namely verbatim like Kafka describes *his* Hans Schlag in “Auf dem Dachboden.”<sup>43</sup> The significance of the ghostly “gray hunter” (i.e. Gracchus/Schlag), which Sebald has slowly built throughout SG, culminates in “Il ritorno in patria.” The mannequin in the attic stands for skeletons in the closet, specifically the dirty secrets of war crimes, while also referencing Beyle and the military campaign in which he participated. Sebald wrote about a (literal) skeleton in the attic in the essay “In einer wildfremden Gegend – Zu Gerhard Roths Romanwerk *Landläufiger Tod*” in UH. In Roth’s text, a Russian sailor with perfect memory ends up in an Austrian village after WW I and is shot because the villagers feel provoked by his gift. In other words, a foreigner and person who exhibits difference dies. Ten years later the skeleton resurfaces and is stored in an attic until it is recuperated by a local school as an anatomy tool shortly before WW II (significantly, this episode takes place in the interwar period). In Sebald’s analysis, the skeleton represents “die Geschichte des Todes als eine Allegorie von Friedlosigkeit und unbeschwichtiger Schuld” (157).

In addition to “Il ritorno in patria” and “Auf dem Dachboden,” *Die Mappe meines Urgroßvaters* also features an important attic scene. Similar to Sebald’s narrator, Stifter’s protagonist returns for the first time in many years to the remote mountain village of his childhood, where memories overwhelm him. During his visit, the young man finds the diaries of his great-grandfather, a famous doctor, in the attic. The doctor’s diaries (which include the memoir penned by the “sanftmütige Obrist,” whose wife falls to her death in the mountains)

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43 Sebald quotes from this source text more directly than from Stifter, and with only minor syntactical changes. See Appendix for a comparison of Kafka’s and Sebald’s texts.

constitute the majority of the text. This nesting of narratives and foregrounding of obscure written materials is reminiscent of Sebald's work, as is the focus on the past and on a friendship between men. The presence of centuries-old objects that have taken on a life of their own is emphasized in all three texts. Rather than just a metonym for memory, Sebald casts the clutter in the attic as a ghostly entity which evolves in its own time: "Man konnte sich leicht einbilden, daß diese gesammte Versammlung der verschiedensten Dinge bis zu dem Augenblick, da wir eingetreten waren, sich in Bewegung, in einer Art Evolution befunden hatte und jetzt nur aufgrund unserer Anwesenheit lautlos verharrte, als sei nichts gewesen" (SG 244). Similarly, the "gray hunter's" uniform in the attic of the Café Alpenrose signifies how remnants of past wars continue to influence the present. In Kafka's "Auf dem Dachboden," the young boy blackens his hand when he timidly touches the ghost Hans Schlag: "'So staubig bist du!' sagte er staunend und zog seine geschwärzte Hand zurück. 'Ja, staubig,' sagte der Fremde, sonst nichts" (Kafka *Werke IX* 150). Sebald reconfigures this gesture into a symbol of destruction and misfortune, as one arm of the mannequin's uniform in the attic disintegrates to dust when the narrator touches it, turning the "gray hunter" into a one-armed ghost: "Als ich [...] näher herantrat und an einen der leer herunterhängenden Uniformärmel rührte, ist dieser, zu meinem blanken Entsetzen, in Staub zerfallen" (248). In other words, the narrator severs the mannequin's limb, producing a frightful, uncanny effect. This disturbing scene later recurs often in the narrator's dreams, enhancing the uncanniness through repetition: "Und jedesmal habe ich dann die von der Berührung staubig, ja schwarz gewordenen Finger meiner Rechten wie das Zeichen für ein durch nichts auf der Welt mehr auszugleichendes Unglück vor Augen" (249-50). Unattended-to secrets in the attic perpetrate unhappiness and leave an indelible mark, this image suggests. In W., the repressed secrets in the attic, "[a]lte Geschichten," (ibid) as Kafka's Schlag says, are the

traumatic memory of wars past – particularly WW II and the Holocaust, but with the reference to the Napoleonic wars Sebald looks further back to a prehistory of destruction. The image of the blackened hand is a metaphor for both the blemish on the Germans and the unpleasant consequences of dredging up history from an occluded past. Like the war crimes of the Germans, the attic is a zone beyond the border of the rational and permissible. The picture of the narrator's right hand besmirched with black dust connotes lasting catastrophe. Sebald builds upon Freud's reference to one-handedness and expands it from an only briefly frightening motif to a symbol of misfortune for the entire post-war generation.

What makes the *Heimat* in SG “unheimlich” and “unglücklich” is the people. Sebald's study of W. in Bavaria (a fictionalized version of his hometown Wertach) stands in for an analysis of the sick German homeland. A snapshot of a rural village, W. is composed of a rustic, colorful cast of characters, none of whom presents a fascist threat as an individual, but who, as a group, form a tableau of an apathetic, xenophobic society, collaborative in the war crimes of WW II.<sup>44</sup> Uniformly, the villagers reject difference, whether ethnic difference, as in the case of Hans Schlag (who is from the fictive Bohemian town “Koßgarten am Neckar” Kafka invented in “Auf dem Dachboden,” Dr. Rambousek (who is from Moravia), or the half-German half-Turkish Seelos child, or superficial difference, as in the case of the beautiful Romana (who differs in her appearance from the native womenfolk, composed of “kleinen, dunklen, dünnzopfigen und bösen Bäuerinnen und Mägden” 257). Dr. Rambousek commits suicide, Romana remains a spinster, and the mixed child “fortunately” dies (218).<sup>45</sup> Sane individuals in the village are those who are

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44 Sebald also describes this in his other works, particularly in the story “Paul Bereyter” in AW. Those that escaped W., like Ambrose Adelwarth in AW, and, significantly, the narrator himself, wrestle with depression. Paul Bereyter commits suicide, and Adelwarth dies by voluntary electroshock treatment.

45 Cf. also the character Romana in a fragment by Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, which Sebald analyzes in BU in “Venezianisches Kryptogramm – Hoffmannsthal's *Andreas*” 69-71.

educated: Mathilde Seelos the ex-nun, teachers like Frl. Rauch and later Paul Bereyter, the newspaper editor Specht, and the narrator's grandfather who had a special communion with nature. As in Kafka's *Schloß*, the villagers resemble each other. The doctor looks like the priest, and the two spinster sisters Babette and Bina lead virtually the same life (cf. UH 88). The doctor's resemblance to the priest suggests that Sebald, as elsewhere in SG, likens religion and its byproducts (such as superstition) to a kind of (mental) illness. The individual "Unglück" of the villagers of W., most of whom are unhappy or mentally disturbed, is a consequence of collective guilt and instantiates the uncanny return of repressed crimes.

In "Das Gesetz der Schande – Macht, Messianismus, und Exil in Kafkas *Schloß*" in UH, Sebald argues that the surveyor K. is a mysterious messianic figure. He finds proof in the similarity of the Hebrew terms Moshiayakh (der Gesalbte) – Moshoyakh (der Vermesser), and in Hassidic stories, which describe the messiah "als den unbekannten Wanderer, der mit Stock und Ranzen in den Wirtshäusern sitzt, bis er trunken ist," like K. (UH 92). The hunter Schlag in SG fits this depiction as well: "Stundenlang, oft bis tief in die Nacht hinein, saß er bei seinem Glas, ohne mit jemandem ein Wort zu wechseln. Zu seinen Füßen schlief der Waldmann, festgebunden an den an der Stuhllehne hängenden Rucksack" (259). The narrator also enters his hometown on foot, "bloß mit dem kleinen ledernen Rucksack über der Schulter" (193), and sits in the inn, unrecognized by his childhood peers, drinking "ein Glas Lagreiner um das andere" (223). Similar to K., no one in the village knows his purpose and like the villagers in Kafka's *Schloß*, the residents of W. are blind to the presence of messiah-like persons in their midst, as represented by the hunter Schlag, and to some extent the narrator himself. Schlag's death is hence perhaps a sacrificial death. In UH Sebald identifies the messiah figure as the "Archetyp

des Exilierten” (92) and the goal of messianism as “die Erlösung aus dem Exil der Geschichte” (91). The narrator is a possible savior who writes about the past and brings secrets to light.

#### IV. PETER HANDKE AND BOHEMIA

In the texts of the Austrian writers Sebald analyzes in BU happiness seems unattainable, and the sense of a homeland has always been compromised. But the objective – of Sebald’s collection of essays as well as of writing in general – is not just the description (“Beschreibung”) but the *transcendence* of unhappiness through the process of describing and explaining. Although subtle, Sebald is clear about this in the foreword to BU, which proposes melancholy as a form of resistance and closes with the assurance that “die Erklärung unseres persönlichen und kollektiven Unglücks” facilitates “das Gegenteil von Unglück” (12-13). While Sebald does not spell out the opposite sentiment of unhappiness (*Glück*) and suggests that we may only be able to reach it by the skin of our teeth (“nur mit knapper Not”), happiness is attainable. All of Sebald’s texts feature melancholy’s fixed gaze (“starre Blick der Melancholie”) and an etiology of *Unglück*. Not averting one’s gaze, not letting stories be forgotten and instead retelling them means bearing witness, arguably one of the primary concerns of Sebald’s texts. Melancholy as a form of resistance means not repressing but instead looking closely at past disasters. Yet the melancholy stance of taking stock of the past does not give way to a death wish: “das Überdenken des sich vollziehenden Unglücks hat aber mit Todessucht nichts gemein,” Sebald writes, and “[d]ie Beschreibung des Unglücks schließt in sich die Möglichkeit zu seiner Überwindung ein” (12). “Beschreibung” is always understood literally in Sebald’s work, as writing. The answer – and perhaps therapy – lies in texts, in reading and writing, thereby building a “Buchstabenbrücke aus dem Unglück in den Trost,” a connective thread of words to

other writers (13). In SG this “Buchstabenbrücke” is constructed through a multitude of intertexts that link to a rhizome of writers and writings, a kind of safety net to catch the narrator should he stumble over the brink of an abyss, as very nearly happens. The epigram near the end of the foreword to BU becomes a motto for SG: “Sieh ins Buch! Wenn man hineinguckt, weint man nicht” (12-13).

In the introduction to *Unheimliche Heimat*, Sebald writes about the process of recuperating, or rehabilitating the sense of a homeland in Austria after WWII: “Es bedurfte eines Generationenwechsels und es bedurfte einer beträchtlichen Anzahl ethisch und ästhetisch gleichermaßen engagierter Bücher, um die Hinterlassenschaft des Faschismus auszugleichen und aufzuwiegen” (15). Sebald continues by assessing that Austria in the 1980s is still an inhospitable homeland, marred by neo-fascism and haunted by “Vergangenheitsgespenstern.” Yet as writers work towards healing their “Heimat” through literature, an ominous pending catastrophe threatens to destroy humanity’s habitat on a larger and ineluctable scale. This cataclysm is never clearly defined – in the last chapter Sebald still speaks vaguely of “ungünstige[] Bedingungen,” “um sich greifende aride Zonen” (178) – but appears to be ecological. Sebald ends the introduction on an image of writers as bellwethers who intuit change in the environment. The new generation of Austrian writers (e.g. Thomas Bernhard) engage in “der angst- und ahnungsvollen Aufzeichnung der Veränderung des Lichts, der Landschaft und des Wetters” which leads to the “allmählich aufdämmernden Erkenntnis der im weitesten Umraum sich vollziehenden Dissolution und Zerrüttung der natürlichen Heimat des Menschen (16).” The “Unheimlichkeit der Heimat” hence refers on the one hand to a realm made inhospitable by the specters of the past, yet on the other hand to the entire planet made



uninhabitable by a pending eco-crisis. SG also depicts the homeland as marred by the effects of WW II and also – almost – ends in apocalypse.

SG structurally mirrors a preoccupation with ending one's life as it culminates in a series of many little endings, to finally stop with a reference to a date in the future. This excess of endings seems to suggest a way of "ending" one's way to survival. Frank Kermode in *The Sense of an Ending – Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, which Sebald knew well, as his extensively marked-up copy of the text in Marbach suggests, posits that modern history is determined by the invention of apocalyptic predictions, whose continuous disproval paradoxically does not hinder creating new ones.<sup>46</sup> Since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Kermode writes, "the present is conceived as a transitional stage," giving people the sense of living at a turning point in time (13-14). "Il ritorno in patria" in fact begins with an ending: after extended travels in Italy, the narrator decides to leave for England. Although the bulk of the story takes place in the narrator's childhood home W. and is composed of childhood memories, it is clear that he is only passing through, on a brief stopover en route to England. The title is ambiguous, referring both to the narrator's ancestral "patria" as well as his new chosen home (England), and of course to the Monteverdi opera *Il ritorno d'Ulysse in patria*. The structural ending of the chapter is similarly deferred; the narrator leaves his hometown and each portion of the trip back to England is connected to the Hunter Gracchus, whose homecoming is eternally on hold.

At the beginning of "Il ritorno in patria" the narrator longs for the start of winter, i.e. the end of the year (187). The first ending of the story is a depressing train trip north from W. through a bleak German winter landscape. Germany seems to him like a stifling and desolate

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46 In a handwritten note Sebald identifies as "Motto Kafka" the section where Kermode says "[Shakespeare's tragic endings] are researches into death in an age too late for apocalypse, too critical for prophecy. An age more aware that its fictions are themselves models of the human design on the world" (88). There are multiple handwritten references to Kafka throughout *The Sense of an Ending* as well as Kermode's *The Genesis of Secrecy*.

albeit orderly prison populated by automobiles and automatons, and organized on an unimaginative grid. As the train moves through the Rhine valley, the bleakness is somewhat lifted when he encounters the ghost or doppelgänger of “die Winterkönigin” Elizabeth Stuart, daughter of James I, who was queen of Bohemia for a winter in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century (278ff). This final ghost of SG reads a book titled *Das böhmische Meer* (by a fictional author Mila Štern) and quotes a verse from Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*. Shakespeare’s romance is set in part in a fictive Bohemia that borders on an ocean. *The Winter’s Tale* is furthermore a reference to other intertexts about winter or journeying in winter, such as Heinrich Heine’s *Deutschland, ein Wintermärchen*, which gives a biting satirical account of Germany, also from the perspective of a speaker travelling through Germany in winter.<sup>47</sup> Yet the book’s title also alludes to Ingeborg Bachmann’s poem “Böhmen liegt am Meer,” which thematizes borders – the borders between the individual and the world, between the individual and language, and the borders between the world of the imagination and reality:

Böhmen liegt am Meer

Sind hierorts Häuser grün, tret ich noch in ein Haus.  
Sind hier die Brücken heil, geh ich auf gutem Grund.  
Ist Liebesmüh in alle Zeit verloren, verlier ich sie hier gern.

Bin ich’s nicht, ist es einer, der ist so gut wie ich.  
Grenzt hier ein Wort an mich, so laß ich’s grenzen.  
Liegt Böhmen am Meer, glaub ich den Meeren wieder.  
Und glaub ich noch ans Meer, so hoffe ich auf Land.

Bin ich’s, so ist’s ein jeder, der ist soviel wie ich.  
Ich will nichts mehr für mich. Ich will zugrunde gehn.

Zugrund – das heißt zum Meer, dort find ich Böhmen wieder.

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47 Otto Rank mentions Heine’s text in *The Double* as an example of the doppelgänger motif: “In *Germany, a Winter’s Tale* (Ch. VI), a queer fellow always appears to the poet when he is sitting at his desk at night. Upon being questioned, this person acknowledges: ‘I am the action of your thoughts’” (Rank 19). This brings to mind Robert Walser and his “Schreib- oder Geisterzimmer” (Walser 91). Significantly for Sebald, Heine’s doppelgänger “schien von untersetzter Statur.”

Zugrund gerichtet, wach ich ruhig auf.  
 Von Grund auf weiß ich jetzt, und ich bin unverloren.

Kommt her, ihr Böhmen alle, Seefahrer, Hafenhuren und Schiffe  
 unverankert. Wollt ihr nicht böhmisch sein, Illyrer, Veroneser,  
 und Venezianer alle. Spielt die Komödien, die lachen machen.

Und die zum Weinen sind. Und irrt euch hundertmal,  
 wie ich mich irrte und Proben nie bestand,  
 doch hab ich sie bestanden, ein um das andre Mal.

Wie Böhmen sie bestand und eines schönen Tags  
 ans Meer begnadigt wurde und jetzt am Wasser liegt.

Ich grenz noch an ein Wort und an ein andres Land,  
 ich grenz, wie wenig auch, an alles immer mehr,

ein Böhme, ein Vagant, der nichts hat, den nichts hält,  
 begabt nur noch, vom Meer, das strittig ist,  
 Land meiner Wahl zu sehen. (Bachmann 167)

Bachmann's poem provides the vision of a rebirth through destruction. Her Bohemia is an imaginary alternative to the ordered and crippling German landscape that melds aspects of German rationality and Italian escapism into one mythical location.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, creating fictions in writing leads to realms enhanced by the fantastical, like a Bohemia on the seacoast. "Böhmen liegt am Meer" also evokes the carnivalesque in its appeal to vagrants such as "Seefahrer, Hafenhuren und Schiffe unverankert" as well as to "Illyrer, Veroneser, und Venezianer alle" to act as Bohemians, and enact "die Komödien, die lachen machen / Und die zum Weinen sind." Bachmann acknowledges that comedy is laced with sadness, the inverse of Sebald's technique, which is to furnish gloomy texts with an undercurrent of comedy.

Similar to Sebald's text, the poem foregrounds a yearning for the transcendence of reality from the perspective of a wandering speaker, expressed through a desire for water or a coastal

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48 Bachmann's own trajectory led from Austria to Italy (Rome), where she lived at the time of her death in 1973. The daughter of a Nazi, an ardent anti-fascist, and an outspoken critic of Austria's inability to deal with its fascist past, she was also mentally unstable, like many of the "tortured writer" personas Sebald picked as intellectual and intertextual forerunners.

location. The speaker is a vagabond, yet “unverloren,” i.e. neither lost nor found, and in a similar state as Kafka’s Hunter Gracchus: “ein Böhme, ein Vagant, der nichts hat, den nichts hält, begabt nur noch, vom Meer, das strittig ist, Land [seiner] Wahl zu sehen.” Gracchus is of course, like Kafka, really “ein Böhme” (i.e. Czech). Similar to the ghost, who is bound to the sea, the speaker is in search of a coast. Yet Gracchus is fixed in an unalterable state and condemned (not yet “begnadigt”) to an existence in a borderless world between life and death, which Kafka illustrates with the image of a staircase. Gracchus explains to the mayor of Riva:

Ich bin [...] immer auf der großen Treppe, die hinaufführt. Auf dieser unendlich weiten Freitreppe treibe ich mich herum, bald oben, bald unten, bald rechts, bald links, immer in Bewegung. [...] Nehme ich aber den größten Aufschwung und leuchtet mir schon oben das Tor, erwache ich auf meinem alten, in irgendeinem irdischen Gewässer öde steckenden Kahn. (*Schriften V* 105).

Conversely, the speaker of Bachmann’s poem and Sebald’s narrator are still bound by borders. “Grenzt hier ein Wort an mich, so laß ich’s grenzen,” Bachmann writes, and later: “Ich grenz noch an ein Wort und an ein andres Land, ich grenz, wie wenig auch, an alles immer mehr.” Rather than portraying an individual hemmed in and immobilized by borders, these lines convey the significance and necessity of borders in spite of a desire to overcome them. Sebald continuously tests borders and transcends them, yet not in order to paint a borderless world, but one expanded by the act of transgression. As Bachmann’s poem suggests with the line “[z]ugrund gerichtet, wach ich ruhig auf,” a reawakening in order to continue living can only be achieved violently: The tension in SG builds until it is resolved at the end in a dream of Apocalypse, which the narrator survives.

The second ending occurs in London, where the narrator's long and almost fatal (so he believes) journey to Austria and Italy in 1980 is recapitulated and projected in miniature onto a short walk through a labyrinth of small streets between the National Gallery and Liverpool Street Station (282-84). The walk seems to him like the longest hike of his life and culminates at the threshold to the "underworld" (a subway station), into which the narrator is almost lured. The trajectory of the walk – between a museum and a train station – encapsulates two poles of the text: artistic production and travel, or the contemplation of the past and the need to escape the present (and the self) through both this contemplation and through running away. The ominous subway stop is "guarded" by a Prospero-like flower seller and "eine sehr schwarze Negerfrau," characters that, like other people he meets on his journey, are uncanny and derived from a mythological context.<sup>49</sup> Prospero derives from the fabric of shared European literary history. The subway is tempting – the narrator is weary after his walk through the labyrinth – and lingers on the threshold, but "den entscheidenden Schritt wagte ich nicht zu tun." Smelling the chrysanthemums, flowers associated with funerals in Germany and Austria, is akin to "eine Sinnestäuschung, die einen Ruderer überkommt weit draußen auf dem Meer" and indeed the existence of the subway stop is uncertain, as the narrator has on previous trips never seen anybody get on or off at that particular station. "Vielleicht erübrigt sich die Feststellung, daß ich letztlich doch nicht in diese Untergrundstation hineingegangen bin," the narrator says, as he is still around to tell the tale. The decision to turn away from the underground stands in for a decision not to misstep into the unknown (cf. Schlag/Gracchus's "Fehltritt"), i.e. to not commit suicide. The second of the text's staggered endings again associates the narrator with Gracchus,

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49 A racist depiction of black skin as concomitant with "dark forces" also occurs in CS, where a black man is considered a portent of bad luck from a ghostly otherworld (36).

“ein Ruderer weit draußen auf dem Meer,” and shows him one last time turning back from an abyss and choosing to continue life instead of ending it.

The prologue to the third ending, as the narrator boards the train at Liverpool Street Station, associates him with Gracchus in a different manner: “Aus dem Jäger ist ein Schmetterling geworden,” Gracchus says to the mayor of Riva to explain both how a hunter can become prey and that he has morphed into a new state. On board the train the narrator remembers – or thinks he remembers – having seen a brimstone (a yellow butterfly) fluttering beside the tracks when leaving for Italy in the summer. The sighting surprised him at the time, and now he doubts the veracity of this memory. The brimstone stands out as a retrospective portent of hope in a gray environment of soot-covered walls and emaciated plants. Its existence also points to both the arbitrariness of experience and references the butterfly effect, which puts occurrences in a causal relationship with each other, although the trigger is random. The butterfly that –maybe – flapped its wings at the beginning of the narrator’s journey both provides a coda to and leaves open the question of chance as a structural and narrative element in SG. Actions influence the future, but we understand connections only in retrospect. Depriving oneself of a future would mean depriving oneself of the ability to see how everything is connected. The brimstone is one of the hardiest and longest-lived butterfly species. A chemical process prevents its bodily fluids from freezing and brimstones are the only Central European butterflies to survive frost unprotected. This ability informs the next “ending” of the text, when the narrator is led to – and withdraws from – the brink of his last abyss in an apocalyptic dream of a frozen wasteland that mingles intertexts from Handke, Stifter, and Samuel Pepys.

The apocalyptic dream vision at the end of SG moves, like all journeys in the book, across mountains to water, replicating the Hunter Gracchus’s journey. It folds scenes from

various epochs of textual history into each other and recapitulates elements of the last chapters of both BU and UH. The ending of the last chapter of BU, which is about last things (“Helle Bilder und Dunkle – Zur Dialektik der Eschatologie bei Stifter und Handke”), is funneled into the ending of SG. The last chapter of UH, also on Handke, closes with the apocalyptic yet redemptive tone of his text *Die Wiederholung*. Moreover, “Jenseits der Grenze – Peter Handkes Erzählung *Die Wiederholung*” analyzes borders in the Austrian author’s text, which provides another connection to SG. Sebald found kinship in Peter Handke’s work, particularly concerning the themes of apocalypse, borders, and their transcendence through words. In the introduction to BU Sebald singles out Thomas Bernhard and Handke as optimists, who provide an antidote to “Unglück” through writing (BU 12). For Handke (and Stifter), writing has therapeutic elements and “die fortgesetzte Erfindung der richtigen Wörter [stellt] die Transzendierung eines von ungunen Erinnerungen beschwerten Lebens in Aussicht,” Sebald writes (BU 168-69). The redemptive properties of writing are also visible in Handke’s *Die Langsame Heimkehr*, in which “[d]as theologische Präzept einer in der Geschichte der Natur und des Menschen und über diese hinaus fortschreitenden Verdrängung der Finsternis [...], in bewußtem Gegensatz zur apokalyptischen Disposition der Jetztzeit, zum Leitbild schriftstellerischer Arbeit [wird]” (BU 179).<sup>50</sup> The contrapuntal responsibility of writing to overcome darkness is mirrored at the end of BU, where suicide is transfigured into a mental exercise and becomes “weniger Todesruf als eine widerrufliche Simulation des Sterbens,” as Sebald says of a scene in Jean Paul (BU 185). Suicide as a thought experiment means rehearsing an ending in order to begin again.

In the dream on the train at the (final) end of “Il ritorno in patria,” the narrator crosses the Alps one last time and walks through a glittering, petrified landscape with views of both an

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50 In addition to the essays discussed here, BU also contains an additional essay on Handke: “Unterm Spiegel des Wassers – Peter Handkes Erzählung von der Angst des Tormanns.”

insurmountable summit and a vertigo-inducing abyss: “Alles, was ich von dort oben aus sah, war einerlei kalkfarben, ein helles, gleißendes Grau, in dem Myriaden von Quarzsplintern schimmerten. Dieses machte mir seltsamerweise den Eindruck als zerstrahle der Stein” (SG 286). Initially, Sebald overlaps scenes from Stifter’s landscapes and Handke’s *Die Lehre der Sainte Victoire*.<sup>51</sup> In BU Sebald calls the Alps “Stifter’s last horizon.” According to Simmel, Sebald quotes, Stifter’s Alps are “eine unhistorische Weltgegend” visible “am äußersten Bildrand” of his prose and consist of “nur noch Schnee, aber kein Grünes, kein Tal, kein Pulsschlag des Lebens mehr” (28). In *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire*, Handke’s pilgrim stands on the Sainte-Victoire massif and sees the Alps in the distance. His apocalyptic visions are transformed into an epiphany about a “Drehpunkt” (turning point) and “die unbestimmte Fortsetzung der Existenz” (the continuation of life) (90-91). Sebald cites from Handke’s SV as follows, condensing quotes from four widely spaced parts of Handke’s text (24, 29, 48, 66):

Der Wechsel von dieser apokalyptischen Aussicht zu jenem helleren Begriff von Endzeit, der dann in den Bildern der Sainte Victoire sinnfällig erscheint, ist nicht sowohl der längste als auch der kürzeste, so wie der Schritt aus der Trauer in den Trost nicht der größte, sondern der kleinste. Erst einem Bewußtsein, das gelernt hat auf die Beschwörung der Katastrophe nicht bedingungslos sich einzulassen [...] erscheint wie ‘durch einen Torbogen für die Ferne’ und ‘in den hellen Farben des Himmels das Massiv des Sainte Victoire Gebirges,’ dessen Felswände, wie es später heißt, als ‘eine stetige hellweiße Bahn bis hinten in den Horizont sich erstrecken.’ Die hellweiße Bahn markiert den Weg auf eine Anhöhe, von der aus

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<sup>51</sup> Handke’s text is a ruminating statement of the author’s poetics through the description of a pilgrimage to Mont Sainte-Victoire (in Provence) in Paul Cézanne’s footsteps (who painted the mountain several times). Handke repeatedly cites from Stifter’s *Bunte Steine*, particularly his use of light and colors. In BU Sebald also characterizes Stifter’s landscapes as “ein Panorama, das inspiriert scheint von der eigentlich nur mit den hellsten Farben und auch mit diesen auf sparsamsten umgehenden Technik des monochromen Aquarell” (165).



der Wanderer gegen Nordosten im äußersten Hintergrund die Gipfelflur der Alpen aufleuchten sieht [...]. (BU 183)

In SG, Sebald's narrator is on an opposite trajectory to Handke's pilgrim: he crosses the Alps, and from their peaks sees a white road extend towards a second mountain range in the distance:

Lang zog sich die mit feinem weißen Schotter bedeckte Straße in endlosen  
Kehren durch die Wälder hinan und hinauf und führte zuletzt auf der Höhe des  
Passes durch einen tiefen Einschnitt auf die andere Seite des Gebriges hinüber,  
das, wie ich im Traum wußte, die Alpen gewesen sind. [...] Von meinem  
Aussichtspunkt aus führte die Straße bergab, und in der Ferne erhob sich ein  
zweites, zumindest ebenso hohes Gebirge, das ich, wie ich ahnte, nicht mehr  
würde überwinden können. (286)

The image of a white road leading towards a mountain range in the distance, which clearly has a forerunner in the scene described by Handke, marks a path forward. Although the narrator finds himself in a dead environment and in a situation similar to Gracchus/Schlag ("Zu meiner Linken ging es in eine wahrhaft schwindelerregende Tiefe hinab. Ich trat bis an den Rand der Straße, und es war mir bewußt, daß ich überhaupt noch nie in eine solche Tiefe hinabgeschaut hatte"), words pull him back from abyss. The small "Schritt aus der Trauer in den Trost" Handke describes is reminiscent of the "Buchstabenbrücke aus dem Unglück in den Trost" we can build through writing and reading.

Into the emptiness of the petrified alpine landscape words return to conjure a vision of apocalyptic destruction through a cleansing fire: "Als ein fast vergangenes Echo kehrten sodann in diese atemlose Leere die Worte zurück – Fragmente aus dem Bericht über das große Feuer von London" (287). For this scene, Sebald draws from Samuel Pepys's diary entries of the great

fire of London (9/2-9/5 1666), which the narrator reads before falling asleep on the train. As often in Sebald's oeuvre, this foregrounding of language (the return of words), especially written material, emphasizes that a vision of the future is necessarily informed by our archives of the past, which contribute to binding human beings in a vicious cycle of repeating history.

Historiography is created through words, which keep alive the memory of past atrocities. But the return of words also signals optimism – stories remain and texts can be invented to envision a new future. Significantly, the apocalyptic vision of the fire derives from a real event in the past, not an imaginary one in the future. Appropriately, the last word of *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, the date “2013,” signals a future after the vision of end of the world in 2012 supposedly predicted by the Mayan calendar and implies an optimistic outlook. Rather than projecting the text's recurring date 1913 one hundred years into the future and implying an end of the world, 2013 appears as a contrast to both 1913 and another date mentioned in the text, 1932. The latter are both border years that signal the beginning of an end: 1913 signifies the eve of a world war and 1932 the year before Hitler rose to power. “1913 war ein besonderes Jahr. Die Zeit wendete sich, und wie eine Natter durchs Gras lief der Funken die Zündschnur entlang. Allerorten kam es zu einem Aufwallen der Gefühle,” Sebald's narrator muses in “All'estero” (136). Conversely, 2013 goes beyond a vision of destruction and implies a renewal. Turning away from the underworld of the subway, the butterfly, the apocalypse the narrator survives in his dream, and the year 2013 all suggest a continuation of life. The multiple journeys of SG across mountains and towards water end with the narrator fleeing onto water to escape the fire. In the end, the narrator has become the Hunter Gracchus but does not commit suicide and goes home instead of him, absolved of guilt. St. George, whose image recurs throughout SG, and who is also a hunter/slayer of animals (the dragon), is another alter ego of the narrator/Sebald and forgiven in the end. “Nicht der geringste

Schatten der Schuldhaftigkeit fällt auf das jugendliche Gesicht Georgs” in Pisanello’s painting *The Virgin and Child with Saints* in the National Gallery, which the narrator sees prior to walking to Liverpool Street Station.

Similar to the end of SG, which provides a hint to survival in the epitaph “2013,” *Unheimliche Heimat* also ends on a hopeful note. The last chapter, “Jenseits der Grenze – Peter Handkes Erzählung *Die Wiederholung*,” closes with the possibility of the continuation of life in spite of the human-made degeneration of culture, society, and nature. Handke’s text *Die Wiederholung* contains a description of a remote, windswept region in Slovenia where animals congregate undisturbed by humans: “Diesem von einem Andenken an die Arche bewegten Bild friedlicher Vereinigung ist die Hoffnung eingeschrieben, daß den ungünstigen herrschenden Bedingungen zum Trotz ein wenig unserer natürlichen Heimat sich wird retten lassen” (UH 178). These are in fact the last lines of Sebald’s collection of essays. The hope is textual, as “Handke gelingt es, den Text selber zu einem Schutzort zu machen.” Similarly, Sebald’s narrator becomes more and more textual. He has emulated Kafka and Freud and becomes Gracchus, and the last scene of the text is composed entirely of intertexts. The last words of BU also correlate with the ending of a text by Handke. Sebald cites the end of *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire*, where the narrator has a hallucinatory experience looking at a wood stack:

Ausatmen. Bei einem bestimmten Blick, äußerste Versunkenheit und äußerste Aufmerksamkeit, dunkeln Zwischenräumen im Holz, und es fängt in dem Stapel zu kreisen an. Zuerst gleicht er einem aufgeschnittenen Malachit. Dann erscheinen die Zahlen der Farbentest-Tafeln. Dann wird es auf ihm Nacht und wieder Tag. (185-86)

For the end of SG Sebald takes from this scene the sequence of numbers, as well as the reference to the dawning of a new day (“anderntags”). “Malachit” is furthermore reminiscent of Sebald’s character Malachio. The gaze of “äußerste Versunkenheit und äußerste Aufmerksamkeit” recapitulates melancholia’s “starrer Blick” Sebald described in the introduction.

In BU Sebald describes the last part of *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire*, in which Handke’s pilgrim walks through a forest that morphs, in his imagination, into a painting by Ruisdael. Sebald describes that the walk is “selber weniger eine Wandschaft als eine Art von Komposition, in der die Welt für die Erzählfigur zu Bildern gerinnt, in denen es sich aushalten lässt” (BU 184). Ruisdael’s forest reminds Handke’s narrator (who is “Handke” in the same way that Sebald’s narrator is “Sebald”) of a real forest near Salzburg. According to Sebald’s reading in BU, Ruisdael’s forest morphs into the real forest, yet the pilgrim of Handke’s text vanishes into his own imagination. Sebald links this transcendence to a scene in one of Stifter’s landscape watercolors. In Stifter’s painting, “ein Schneeberg” looms above a lake and “erschließt dem Beschauer [...] die lautlose Sensation eines Überganges in einen anderen Aggregatzustand” (BU 184). Significantly, Stifter’s painting shows both poles of SG, a snow-capped mountain (the recurring “Schneeberg”), and water. Yet the disappearing act into an imaginary realm does not mean vanishing from life: “Die verhaltene Geste, die sich in derlei Bildern und Prosa ins Werk setzt, ist die Äußerungsform einer, wo nicht aufs Auslöschen, so doch aufs Ausatmen bedachten Haltung, die dem von der Kunst imaginierten, über das Profane erhabenen Niemandsland zwischen Leben und Tod angemessen wäre,” Sebald writes, linking Handke’s prose and Stifter’s visual images (both in paintings and with words) at the end of BU. This is a fundamental influence on SG. Sebald links art to Gracchus’s realm, a ghost world and fictive Bohemia. As an alternative to suicide (“Auslöschen”), art provides “Ausatmen” – transcending by exhaling into a

different state, to gain a stance of suicide within life and create a “widerrufliche Simulation des Sterbens” (185). Just a breath (ein Atemzug) divides the two realms, yet even the smallest step away from an abyss means a continuation of life, “so wie der Schritt aus der Trauer in den Trost nicht der größte sondern der kleinste [ist]” (183). To reach “[einen] hellerer[en] Begriff von Endzeit” we must not give in to “an invocation of catastrophe” but reach a state (easier attainable in art) of becoming one with the “fremde Natur aller Dinge” (184) – developing a cosmic consciousness. At the end of “Il ritorno in patria,” as the narrator becomes text, i.e. vanishes into art, Sebald’s transition from academic to creative writing – his true “patria” – is completed.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

When Sebald’s narrator of “All’estero” gets off the train in Milan, the two reading women he had observed during the journey, the nun, and the young girl with the harlequin jacket, disappear. The peacefulness created by their staggered turning of pages – “Einmal blätterte die Franziskanerschwester um, dann das Mädchen in der bunten Jacke, dann nochmals das junge Mädchen und dann wieder die Franziskanerschwester” (119) – is shattered once the train pulls into the confusing train station, and “rettungslos verloren” the narrator wonders:

Welchen *Zusammenhang* gibt es [...] zwischen diesen beiden schönen Leserinnen und der riesigen, alles bislang in Europa Dagewesene übertrumpfenden Konstruktion dieses Bahnhofsgebäudes aus dem Jahr 1932, zwischen den sogenannten steinernen Zeugen der Vergangenheit und dem, was als eine undeutliche Sehnsucht über unsere Körper sich fortpflanzt, um sie zu bevölkern, die staubigen Landstriche und die überschwemmten Felder der Zukunft. (SG 121, italics mine)

1932, like the ominous year 1913, represents a year that in retrospect was the last of an irretrievable era, and the vision of a landscape after apocalypse is juxtaposed to an emblem of modernity, the steel structure of the train station. The “Zusammenhang” between religion, secularization, modernity, and its teleological progression to an uncertain future, is a topic Sebald will return to again and again in his emerging creative work. The immediate answer to the narrator’s question in SG lies, once again with Peter Handke, from whom the girl “mit der aus vielen farbigen Flecken geschneiderten Jacke” is on loan (SG 118). In *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire*, Handke repeats his trip to Provence with a female companion, the tailor D., who describes the process of wanting to design “den ‘Mantel der Mäntel’” (81). Stitching together the patchwork coat, especially the “Problem der Verknüpfung” becomes a metaphor for writing, particularly intertextual writing. “D. saß zwischen mir und dem Ausblick, in ihrem aus verschiedenfarbigen Stoffen zusammengenähten Kleid, das zugleich ein Mantel war” (89) and describes how she lost “den *Zusammenhang*” between parts of the coat, which became increasingly “verbindungslos” (92, italics mine). Upon realizing “daß es einen Bereich des Dazwischen überall gab” she was finally able to complete the coat. “Der Übergang muß für mich klar trennend *und* ineinander sein,” she says (93). The polychrome patchwork jacket stands for intertextuality and the process of sewing describes Sebald’s intertextual method: integrating disparate materials into a new design such that they cohere yet remain recognizable as distinct. The image of connecting and separating also describes a bridge. SG functions as a transitional work (a “Bereich des Dazwischen”) that bridges Sebald’s literary scholarship, particularly UH and BU, with his prose fictions.

In *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, Sebald proposes writing as a therapy to counter his narrator’s death wish and the unhappiness of modern subjects the narrator represents. Using melancholy as

a form of resistance, as Sebald indicates in the foreword to BU, SG proposes transfiguring suicide into a mental exercise, cultivating a “stance of suicide within life.” Suicide and apocalypse as thought experiments lead to an intellectual “rebirth,” which is a reconciliation of the superstitious-religious and the rational-enlightened worldviews thematized in SG. The concept of a Christian-like “rebirth” through intellect/thinking integrates aspects of Catholic mythology into a rational modernity. Both the rich world of mythology described in religion (and Freudian psychonalysis) and a rational stance are needed in order to visualize an alternative coast of “Bohemia,” i.e. a world in which reality and the imagination merge. SG creates such a “Bohemia” by entwining fictional and real characters and by weaving intertextual quotations and borrowed images that repeat and reflect the original in transfigured form into a documentary frame. The meshing of reality with fiction in Sebald’s text is also an example of Freud’s and Rank’s hypothesis that doppelgangers give us a chance to live life over again. Assuming the role of Kafka’s double suggests that experiences can be recreated with fictional accents. By becoming Gracchus, who commits suicide, the narrator does not have to end his own life. At the end, because the past has been examined in writing as a therapy, there is no further need for escape from real life and the narrator can instead temporarily vanish into an intertextual dream. Sebald’s first foray from academic essays into hybrid prose fiction (via the prose poem *Nach der Natur* – which still, as the title suggests, follows nature/the original) suggests that hope lies in art and that the imagination is redemptive. By reassembling excerpts of literature, biographies of artists, photographs, references to films, and ekphrastic descriptions of paintings, Sebald’s subsequent texts continue to envision an alternate world of art, a form of reality augmented and ameliorated by fiction.

## APPENDIX 1

**Intertext 1: The death scene from Stifter's *Die Mappe meines Urgroßvaters***

In “Bis and den Rand der Natur – Versuch über Stifter” in *Die Beschreibung des Unglücks*, Sebald identifies the description of the death of the Obrist's (nameless) wife as the most intimate of Stifter's entire oeuvre, yet also as a “Traumsequenz” apart from reality. Sebald writes:

Auf einer ihrer vielen Gebirgswanderungen müssen der Obrist und seine Frau, die überall mit ihm mitgeht, einen tiefen Tobel auf einer geländerlosen Riese überqueren. Der Obrist erzählt [now Sebald quotes from Stifter]: “Ich betrat zuerst die Riese mit meinen groben Schuhen und hielt den Stock mit der linken Hand. Dann kam meine Gattin, sie hielt sich mit der linken Hand an dem Stocke, und im rechten Arme trug sie das Hündchen. Dann ging der Holzknecht und trug das Ende des Stockes ebenfalls in der linken Hand. Wie wir auf dem Holze weiterkamen, tiefte sich der Abgrund immer mehr unter uns hinab. Ich hörte seine Tritte mit den eisenbeschlagenen Schuhen, die ihrigen nicht. Da wir noch ein kleines vor dem Ende der Riese waren, hörte ich den Hozlknecht leise sagen: Sitzt nieder. Ich empfand, daß der Stock in meiner Hand leichter werde. Ich sah um, und sah nur ihn allein. Es kam mir ein entsetzlicher Gedanke. Aber ich wußte weiter nichts. Meine Füße hörten auf, den Boden unter mir zu empfinden. Die Tannen wogten wie Kerzen auf einem Hängeleuchter auf und nieder, dann wußte ich nichts mehr.” (BU 36)<sup>52</sup>

For *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, Sebald strips the passage of its female character and reconfigures it to describe the fall of the hunter(s) Schlag/Gracchus:

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<sup>52</sup> At least two versions of this scene exist in Stifter's collected writings. Sebald quotes from: *Adalbert Stifters Sämtliche Werke XII* (1939) 213-16.



Am folgenden Morgen [...] erzählte der Großvater, [...] aus dem Jungholz sei die Nachricht gebracht worden, daß man den Jäger Schlag eine gute Stunde außerhalb seines Reviers, auf der Tiroler Seite, auf dem Grunde eines Tobels liegen gefunden habe. Offensichtlich sei er, sagte der Großvater, [...] beim Überqueren des Tobels von der sogar im Sommer gefahrvollen, im Winter so gut wie ungangbaren Riese zu Tode gestürzt. [...] Er hielt es, so meinte der Großvater, für ausgeschlossen, daß der Schlag, der doch auf das genaueste mit den Grenzen seines Reviers vertraut gewesen sein müsse, versehentlich auf die andere Seite hinüber geraten sei. [...] Hinwiederum wüßte auch niemand zu sagen, was der Jäger, wenn er gewissermaßen vorsätzlich fehlgegangen sei, ausgerechnet in dieser Jahreszeit und bei diesem Wetter im Österreichischen drüben zu suchen gehabt habe. Wie man es wende, es bleibe eine undurchsichtige, nicht recht geheuerliche Geschichte. (SG 268-69)

A further parallel to Stifter's *Die Mappe meines Urgroßvaters* is the description of a dog.

Stifter's Obrist says:

[A]uf den Kleidern saß das Hündlein und war lebend und fast unversehrt. Das Weib hatte es vielleicht während des Falls emporgehalten und so gerettet. Aber es mußte über Nacht wahnsinnig geworden sein, denn es schaute mit angstvollen Augen umher und biß gegen mich, da ich zu den Kleidern wollte. Weil ich schnell mein Weib haben mußte, gab ich zu, obwohl ich mir das Tierchen hatte aufsparen wollen, daß es einer der Knechte mit der Büchse, die sie zuweilen tragen, erschieße. (Stifter 332-33)

Sebald borrows this image as well, and writes in "Il ritorno in patria:"

Der Gendarm [...] berichtete nun seinerseits, daß der arme Waldmann, der jetzt stocksteif zu Füßen des Jägers lag, sogar noch lebendig gewesen sei, als man das vorgefallene Unglück entdeckt habe. [...] Eigenartiger Weise sei der Dachshund, als man ihm und dem Jäger sich annäherte, auf einmal und obschon kaum mehr ein Hauch Leben in ihm war, toll geworden, so daß man ihn auf der Stelle habe erschießen müssen. (SG 271)

In SG, as in Stifter, the dog's grief stands in contrast to the repressed feelings of the humans involved in the accident. The dog has crossed an unacceptable border into what is perceived as insanity and therefore has to be eliminated. Its death serves as a parable for the destructive force of love which Sebald addresses in "Versuch über Stifter" and which dominates the fate of his protagonists in *Schwindel. Gefühle*.

## **Intertext 2: From Kafka's "Auf dem Dachboden"**

Kafka's lines read:

Eine große runde Mütze aus Krimmerpelz saß tief auf seinem Kopf. Ein starker Schnurrbart breitete sich steif aus. Gekleidet war er in einen weiten braunen Mantel, den ein mächtiges Riemenzeug, es erinnerte an das Geschirr eines Pferdes, zusammenhielt. Auf dem Schoß lag ein gebogener kurzer Säbel in mattleuchtender Scheide. Die Füße staken in gespornten Schaftstiefeln, ein Fuß war auf eine umgestürzte Weinflasche gestellt, der andere auf dem Boden war etwas aufgerichtet und mit Ferse und Sporn ins Holz gerammt. (Kafka *Werke IX* 149)

Sebald writes:

Was ich mir vorstellte [...], das war ein großer, fremder Mensch, der eine hohe, runde Mütze aus Krimmerpelz tief in seiner Stirn sitzen hatte und der gekleidet war in einen weiten braunen Mantel, zusammengehalten von einem mächtigen, an das Geschirr eines Pferdes erinnernden Riemenzeug. Auf dem Schoß liegen hatte er einen gebogenen kurzen Säbel mit mattleuchtender Scheide. Die Füße staken in gespornten Schaftstiefeln. Ein Fuß war auf eine umgestürzte Weinflasche gestellt, der andere auf dem Boden war etwas aufgerichtet und mit Ferse und Sporn ins Holz gerammt. (SG 249)

## CHAPTER 2

### **The Moth, the Dachshund, the Squirrel, and its Tricks: Reflections of Nabokov in *Austerlitz***

“Nessun maggior dolore Che ricordarsi del tempo felice  
Nella miseria.” (Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*)

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Among authors who use an intertextual writing technique as a semantic, thematic, and methodological tool, W.G. Sebald and Vladimir Nabokov stand out as this method's perhaps most relentless and cunning technicians. In both their oeuvres, intertextuality is a constant and a constituent, the glue that binds the prose. Nabokov's works, like Sebald's, brim with patterns, recurring motifs, doubled characters, hidden meanings, and riddles, waiting to be decoded by readers. The act of remembering in Sebald's and Nabokov's prose is so prevalent that memory becomes a tool, indeed even a methodology in its own right. In both writers, the process of remembering itself becomes a primary narrative device. The main difference between the two authors seems to be a fundamental one of tone: While Nabokov is associated with playfulness and humor, a proto-postmodern trickster, Sebald is predominantly read as humorless and serious, as an “Anatomist of Melancholy,” as Rüdiger Görner has titled a collection of essays in memoriam to W. G. Sebald. However, Sebald often incorporates the works of others to undercut the disasters and loneliness described in his texts. In other words, his playfulness is performed on the level of the intertexts – a strategy that is enhanced and becomes even more playful when Sebald weaves texts by Nabokov into his stories. The presence of Nabokov in *Die*

*Ausgewanderten* has already been well documented,<sup>53</sup> but *Austerlitz*, too, contains a profusion of references to Nabokov. Various episodes of Jacques Austerlitz's past are connected to iconic elements of Nabokov's autobiography and fiction. Whereas Sebald incorporates Nabokov in *Die Ausgewanderten* as a photograph and character, the references to him in *Austerlitz* are predominantly on a level of allusions to texts, in the form of scenes, characters, and motifs Sebald lifts from *Ada*, *Pnin*, and *Speak Memory*. These allusions are often buried and only recognizable to those in the know – a strategy Nabokov employs in his own texts. On the one hand, Sebald thus pays homage to Nabokov by hiding him, the master of riddles, as a riddle in his own text. On the other hand, *Austerlitz* is revealed as a Nabokovian text, in the sense that its dark side is buoyed by hidden elements of play. The presence of Nabokov, the trickster, marks a redemptive aspect of Sebald's text.

As Sebald's essay on Nabokov, "Traumtexturen," demonstrates, he was extremely attuned to the dark side of Nabokov's works and his use of irony to sublimate feelings of loss and alienation as an emigrant and exile. In both authors' work, playfulness is formal rather than thematic. Yet referencing Nabokov by using a Nabokovian bag of tricks allows Sebald to lighten the narrative of *Austerlitz*, especially the leaden weight of the Holocaust. Sebald takes from Nabokov a synesthetic perception of the world, which turns the Sebaldian gray into a color spectrum. Passages in *Austerlitz* in which Sebald employs a Nabokovian style or references Nabokovian scenes sparkle with uncharacteristic light and color. Reading intertextually is akin to a form of synesthesia – the sensory experience of reading becomes as multilayered as the intertextual methodology of composition. Yet if Nabokov becomes a "Prismatic Bezel" (cf.

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53 Cf. Curtin and Shrayder: "Netting the Butterfly Man: The Significance of Vladimir Nabokov in W. G. Sebald's *The Emigrants*," and Oliver Sill: "Aus dem Jäger ist ein Schmetterling geworden: Textbeziehungen zwischen den Werken von W. G. Sebald, Franz Kafka und Vladimir Nabokov."

*Sebastian Knight* 92) to Sebald, Sebald also becomes a compendium to Nabokov and transcends his legacy. Sebald's texts provide a counterpoint to Nabokov's, expanding, and, as I argue, sometimes improving the texts of his forerunner. Elements Sebald consistently lifts from Nabokov's fictions are animals, which become triggers for memory and the discourse on time. Whereas some animals in *Austerlitz* provide gruesome images – dirty pigeon feathers carpet the Gare d'Austerlitz and a fossilized elephant lung and other obscurities in the Veterinary Museum in Paris provoke one of Austerlitz's breakdowns – most animals, especially those imported from Nabokov, appear as spiritual creatures that offer a connection to an alternate world, magical familiars who transcend reality. The importance of animals is already announced at the beginning: the novel starts in the Antwerp zoo. The Nabokovian animals Sebald incorporates in *Austerlitz* – moths, dogs, and squirrels – mediate between the past and the present and embody one of Sebald's intertextual strategies: unfettered time travelers, they cross boundaries of time and space, become metaphors for memory, and break through the formal pattern of the text.

## II. *ADA AND SPEAK, MEMORY*

### II.1. FLUTTERINGS IN THE TEXTURE OF MEMORY

While he was working on *Austerlitz*, Sebald corresponded with an historical archive in Prague, searching for people with the name Austerlitz, and he plucked the names “Adéla and Maximilian Austerlitz,” who lived there between 1907 and 1938, from its records (Modlinger 225). He renamed them Agáta and Maximilian, but kept the name Adela for the mother of Jacques Austerlitz's friend Gerald, the text's seductive surrogate mother figure who presides over Andromeda Lodge and who is inspired by several characters from Nabokov's oeuvre. Adela is a composite figure of Nabokov's mother Elena Ivanovna Nabokov, who is described extensively

in *Speak, Memory*, and Ada Veen, the promiscuous heroine of *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (whose full name is Adelaida). Consequently, in *Austerlitz* Adela is simultaneously an ersatz mother figure and a temptress. Andromeda Lodge, where Austerlitz experiences moments of unsurpassed happiness during his adolescence, is inspired by the Eden of Nabokov's childhood, his mother's estate Vyra, where he spent the unforgettable summers that would provide him with images and inspiration for his entire oeuvre. Vyra, to which Nabokov pays such wistful tribute in *Speak, Memory*, and the loss of which he mourned all his life, recurs in many of his novels as a bucolic setting for his characters' childhood. In *Ada*, Vyra is transfigured into Ardis Hall. Like its proprietress Adela, a fusion – also phonetically – of Elena and Ada, Andromeda Lodge bears resemblance to both Vyra from *Speak, Memory* and Ardis Hall, the country residence of Ada's family.

In "Traumtexturen," Sebald identifies Nabokov's "Kindheitsdomizil Wyra" as his "liebste Behausung" (CS 191) and comments on a scene in SM in which Nabokov imagines the ghosts of forebears, "Grenzgänger zwischen der jenseitigen Welt und dem Leben in dem mit der Oktoberrevolution spurlos verlorenen Reich seiner Kindheit, einem arkadischen Land, von dem er sich, trotz der suggestiven Genauigkeit seiner Erinnerungen, bisweilen fragen mochte, ob es wirklich existiert hatte dereinst" (CS 185). Correspondingly, Andromeda Lodge provides an otherworldly refuge for Austerlitz (cf. 122), an aspect also inspired by *Ada*. *Ada* is set in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century in a playful alternate world, on the planet "Demonia," also known as "Antiterra," a mirror world of planet Earth, "Terra," with a few Nabokovian warps and twists.<sup>54</sup> Mirrors and

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54 19<sup>th</sup>-century Demonia combines features from America and Europe into a war-free "best of (Nabokov's) both worlds": for example, a North American continent settled by Russian aristocracy, a Europe under the rule of a British king, and aspects of 20<sup>th</sup> century technology such as cars and airplanes (but not electricity). In other words, "Antiterra" intertwines facets of the Russia Nabokov experienced as a child with the modernity of America, which became his home after 1940. The male protagonist Van Veen grows up to become a famous psychologist, whose secret goal is to prove the existence of Terra, a mythical world in the Demonians' minds.

alternate worlds are a theme throughout *Austerlitz*, and their primary resident is Jacques Austerlitz. At the beginning of the text, the narrator ponders the life of animals in the “verkehrtes Miniaturuniversum” of the “Nocturama” (12). In his mind, the exhibit of nocturnal creatures is later superimposed onto the mirrored waiting room of the Antwerp train station where he will meet Austerlitz. Two subsequent meetings between the narrator and Austerlitz are accompanied by mirrors (161, 176). The stage is set for the entrance of a protagonist who intuits that he leads a “wrong” life in a parallel universe of amnesia, but does not know why, and who feels most at home in the immaterial and undetermined.

Nabokov’s novel *Ada* is a labyrinthine parody of a family chronicle told by Ivan (Van) Veen and edited by his sister Ada Veen. Like *Austerlitz* and *Speak, Memory* the text is, at its core, about memory, with the focus on Van’s effort at re-constructing an unattainable past. Van’s consciousness, like the entire book, revolves around two summers of incest with his sister Ada, the love of his life, when they were both children at Ardis Hall. The “family chronicle,” a manuscript written by Van that includes passages written by Ada, is the siblings’ effort to recapitulate, recapture, and fix their impossible attraction for each other in writing. In typical Nabokovian fashion, the artistically crafted text is built around elaborate and subtle patterns, which take multiple readings to decode, and laced with irony, multilingual word plays, intertextuality, and self-referentiality, oscillating between *jouissance* and a feeling of loss. For the incestuous lovers in *Ada*, Ardis Hall is the locus of first erotic encounters paired with memories of a happy and free childhood, an Eden that slides further and further into an unattainable past as the illicitness of their union drives them apart. In *Austerlitz*, the erotic tension between Jacques Austerlitz and the much older Adela is an allusion to *Ada*’s many sexually explicit scenes and “deviant” sexual behaviors. Ekphrasis, a technique Sebald uses in all



of his texts, is a further connection between the two texts and the two authors. For example, Nabokov drew themes and imagery from paintings by Hieronymus Bosch for *Ada*.<sup>55</sup> The philosophical investigation of time, and how it relates to memory, constitutes another link between *Austerlitz*, *Ada*, and *Speak, Memory*. Nabokov's novel culminates in a meditation on the nature of time – Van's treatise on "Time's essence" – that argues for the nonexistence of the future as a concept. In *Austerlitz*, the narrator and Austerlitz ponder the passing of time during their first meeting, and later they travel to Greenwich, discussing the evolution of humans' perception of time. As in *Austerlitz*, the past, and the loss associated with it, overshadows the present in *Ada*, and a few luminous, remembered memories sustain the characters' lives.

Similar to the young Nabokov from *Speak, Memory*, *Ada*'s distinguishing feature is that she is a precocious lepidopterist, who is "crazy about everything that crawls" and whose "dream is to have a special institute of Fritillary larvae and violets" (60). Ardis Hall contains her "larvarium," where she breeds rare butterflies and moths from caterpillars on their appropriate food plants. Andromeda Lodge, too, is a private museum of natural history, in which parrots' eggs, minerals, butterflies, grasses, and small reptiles, to name only a few, are preserved and archived. A picture of butterflies mounted in a display case accompanies the description of the zoological and botanical collections in Andromeda Lodge, seemingly illustrating its interior (126). This image functions as a crucial intermedial tag, which announces the presence of Nabokov in this section of the text, and in *Austerlitz* in general. The photograph really depicts the zoological museum in St. Petersburg, and it was used as an illustration in the first publication of Sebald's essay on Nabokov, "Traumtexturen," in an issue of the Swiss magazine *Du* devoted

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. Ashenden 145-65.

entirely to Nabokov (cf. Appendix).<sup>56</sup> Beyond alluding to the Nabokovian theme of butterflies and thus also connecting to the butterfly man in *Die Ausgewanderten*, the image references St. Petersburg (Nabokov's hometown), and playfully points to Sebald's own research on Nabokov. Even in his last creative prose text, Sebald continues to turn to his academic essays for inspiration or intertextual material. Even the title of the *Du* magazine: *Vladimir Nabokov: Das Leben erfinden* (to invent life) resonates with the novel *Austerlitz* and its composite, Nabokov-inspired characters. At the same time, the photograph references and embodies other falsified items in *Austerlitz* – images as well as characters that have several layers and several “truths.” Butterflies always have symbolic meaning, in Sebald as well as in Nabokov.

For Nabokov, butterflies were not merely a hobby but an obsession – “my mania,” “my demon,” as he calls it in *Speak, Memory* (126-27) – and a second profession. Having developed an all-consuming passion for chasing butterflies as a boy in Vyra, he started publishing scientific articles on lepidoptera as a young man, and when he came to the U.S. was employed for several years as a research scientist for the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard (1941-1949).<sup>57</sup> He discovered several species of *Lycaenidae* (Blues), which are named after him, and continued to collect butterflies and publish scientific articles on his research until his death. Nabokov's descriptions of butterflies in his writing (in novels, letters, and his autobiography) are scientifically precise and poetic, yet never more passionate than when he portrays the hunt itself.

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56 The photograph's caption reads: “Im zoologischen Museum in St. Petersburg. Foto Arwed Messmer” (p. 23). (Messmer provided several pictures of St. Petersburg and the countryside around Vyra for the magazine.) The same *Du* issue also contains an essay on *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* by Michael Maar (“Ins Leben Sterben. Vladimir Nabokov Nimmt Abschied von Europa”) which later appeared, in expanded form, as “Die Welt im Tropfen – Sebastian Knight und die Belle Dame sans Merci,” in Maar's book of essays *Die Feuer- und die Wasserprobe. Essays zur Literatur* (1997). Sebald knew this book well, and, in his copy archived in Marbach, marked passages in the “Sebastian Knight” essay as well in Maar's essay on Pnin: “Leuchtfisch und Flunder. Nabokov's Meisterwerk Pnin.”

57 In recent years, several publications have analyzed Nabokov's passion for butterflies, focusing on his scientific contributions to lepidopterology as well as its influence on and integration into his writing, e.g.: *Nabokov's Butterflies* (Boyd and Pyle, 2000) and *Nabokov's Blues* (Johnson and Coates, 1999).

Nabokov's passion for butterflies is a hunter's passion for his prey, an artist's passion for abstracted beauty. Fascinated by mimicry – butterflies imitating other animals or plants, often with “mimetic subtlety [...] far in excess of a predator's power of appreciation” – he writes: “I discovered in nature the nonutilitarian delights that I sought in art. Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception” (SM 125). Consequently, he writes about butterflies and moths ecstatically yet with the detached stance of a scientist and complete indifference that “collecting” animals for sport and display involves inflicting death every single time. “Tonight I shall sugar for them,” he writes to Edmund Wilson in 1941:

[Y]ou mix: a bottle of stale beer, two pounds of brown sugar (or treacle) and a little rum (added just before applying); then just before dusk you smear (with a clean paint brush) a score of tree trunks (preferably old lichenized ones) with the concoction and wait. They will come from nowhere, settling on the glistening bark and showing their crimson underwings (especially brilliant in the flashlight) and you cover them with a tumbler beginning with the lower ones [...] it is the noblest sport in the world. (Karlinsky 76).<sup>58</sup>

Prior to *Austerlitz*, Sebald had already paid tribute to Nabokov's obsession with lepidoptera in AW, depicting him in word and image as a butterfly hunter who appears in each chapter as a (paradoxical) sign of hope. In “Max Aurach,” for instance, an encounter with Nabokov in Switzerland interrupts Aurach's contemplation of suicide, deflecting the act. Sebald always depicts Nabokov with a net, thus emphasizing the hunt. The prey is only important as a metaphor – Nabokov hunts and collects butterflies like Sebald captures the stories of the four emigrants. In *Campo Santo*, Sebald vociferously condemns hunting and the culture around it as

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<sup>58</sup> Maar cites this passage in his essay “Zärtliche Koyoten – Nabokovs Briefwechsel mit Edmund Wilson.” In *Die Feuer- und die Wasserprobe* it directly precedes the essay on *Pnin*, which includes Sebald's marginalia, and suggests that Sebald was familiar with it.

bloodthirsty and macabre (cf. CS 43-46). The mysterious, romantic figure of the butterfly hunter in *AW*, whose appearance signals the continuation of life, mirrors Nabokov's indifferent stance towards his favorite "sport." In *Austerlitz*, however, Sebald emphasizes the butterflies – or rather, moths – over the hunter, even giving his protagonist certain moth-like attributes. Sebald depicts moths as creatures with a consciousness, a "Seelenleben," perhaps the capacity to dream, and mystifies them as atavistic creatures whose superior senses transcend human understanding (141). One of the main differences between butterflies and moths is that the latter are primarily nocturnal creatures. From the beginning, Austerlitz is associated with the "Nocturama," the night exhibit of the Antwerp zoo, and is described as a creature who lives in metaphorical darkness and likes to take walks at night – a "Nachtgeist" with pale hair, not unlike the ivory-colored moth-corpse the narrator finds in Austerlitz's house in London (241). Hapless moths that follow a light only to become trapped also invite comparison with Austerlitz, who is involuntarily drawn to the origin of his unhappiness, only to become even unhappier once he has found it. Austerlitz also undergoes a metamorphosis during the course of the narrative, from ignorant to knowing. Both resilient and fragile, moths, like Austerlitz, are mysterious creatures.

Austerlitz first encounters moths at Andromeda Lodge, where Gerald's uncle Alphonso, a painter and naturalist, initiates the boys into the wonder of the animals' nocturnal world. Although Austerlitz stresses that he did not go on to become a scientist himself, he absorbs Alphonso's lessons in botany and zoology, and his explanations of "das Leben und Sterben der Motten" make him view the animals with utmost respect (140). The uncle takes the boys Jacques and Gerald to observe moths at night, and the scene that ensues is a luminous Nabokovian spectacle that contains poetic descriptions of color and light in which the moths appear as magical beings. Choosing similar words to Nabokov's ("They will come from nowhere"), Sebald

describes how the moths descend “Wie aus dem Nichts heraus [...] bis sie, schneeflockengleich, um das Licht ein stilles Gestöber bildeten” (135-36). The moths are both ghostly and anthropomorphized, with theatrical names that conjure a travelling troupe of performers: “Porzellan- und Pergamentspinner [...], spanische Fahnen und schwarze Ordensbänder, Messing und Ypsiloneulen, Wolfsmilch- und Fledermausschwärmer, Jungfernkinder und alte Damen, Totenköpfe und Geistermotten.” Sebald’s depiction of the moths’ physical features is as exquisite as Nabokov’s descriptions of chasing butterflies:

[Q]uer- und Wellenlinien sah man, Verschattungen, Sichelflecken und hellere Felder, Sprenkelungen, gezackte Bänder, Fransen, Nervaturen und Farben, wie man sie sich nie hätte ausmalen können, Moosgrün mit bläulichen Einmischungen, Fuchsbraun und Safranrot, Lehmgelb und Atlasweiß, und einen metallischen Glanz wie aus pulvrigem Messing oder aus Gold. (137)

“Manche trugen Halskrägen und Umhänge, wie vornehme Herren [...] auf dem Weg in die Oper [...] andere wieder, die ihr kurzes Leben schon fast hinter sich hatten, kamen zerschissen und zerfetzt daher,” the anthropomorphization continues (136-37).

Yet very unlike Nabokov, Sebald’s protagonist haphazardly lists features without attributing them to specific moths, and emphasizes that he does not remember which species he saw that night: “Wohl zwar erinnere ich mich, daß wir [...] gar nicht mehr herausgekommen sind aus der Verwunderung über die Mannigfaltigkeit dieser sonst vor unseren Blicken verborgenen wirbellosen Wesen und daß Alphonso uns lange einfach nur schauen und staunen ließ, aber ich weiß heute nicht mehr, welche Sorte von Faltern bei uns gelandet ist” (136). Of course the fact that Austerlitz then does go on to name obscure species – not by their scientific names, but by their no less obscure common ones (“Ypsiloneulen” etc., see above) – belies the later statement

that he did not study science and demonstrates that Sebald did his homework.<sup>59</sup> Conversely, Sebald gives the animals' common names and describes an evening whose main purpose was to look, not to classify and collect.<sup>60</sup> The moths' imaginative names and delicate, stunning physical features give them character and distinctiveness. The catalog of moth names parallels the narrator's visit to the Nocturama, after which he claims not being able to recall the animals he saw, but goes on to list them anyway, including specifics like their country of origin: "Wahrscheinlich [...] Fleder- und Springmäuse aus Ägypten oder der Wüste Gobi [...] Australische Beutelratten, Baummarder, Siebenschläfer und Halbaffen" (10). This is an example of the way Sebald overlaps the voice of Austerlitz with that of his narrator.

In *Austerlitz*, Sebald provides an emotional, contrapuntal compendium to Nabokov's taxonomic, hunt-oriented relationship with butterflies. Sebald skirts Nabokov's scientific interest in lepidoptera and rather presents scientific facts with an air of mystery and symbolism. Alphonso relates, for example, that caterpillars and moths live lives of extremes, first stuffing then starving themselves, sometimes drowning in their eagerness for water, flying great distances in swarms yet dying alone and motionless if they lose their way (138-39). Similar to the herring passage in RS, which has befuddled critics because of its allusion to the Holocaust, scientific facts about moths appear fantastical, although they are factual.<sup>61</sup> Whereas Nabokov writes about butterflies and moths passionately but coldly, Sebald's character Alphonso observes rather than collects and is not interested in killing and categorizing the creatures, or mounting them for

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59 Nabokov was exasperated by unscientific or sloppy descriptions of butterflies (cf. Johnson and Coates 40).

60 In *Speak, Memory* Nabokov writes derisively about the German early- to mid-20th century school of classifying butterflies. Unlike British entomologists, who applied rigorous scientific measures "based on the microscopic study of organs," Germans were "content to classify butterflies by characters visible to the naked eye" and "continued to cherish the philately-like side of entomology" (SM 123-24). Sebald's description of moths echoes the tradition of his German forebears.

61 Some critics read the implicit comparison of the mass killing of herrings to the extermination of Jews as inappropriate (cf. Friedrichsmeyer 18, Long *Image* 143). Similar to the moths in A, Sebald describes herrings as mysterious creatures in RS. The phosphorescing effect of their corpses underscores the herrings' eeriness as well as the cruelty of humans.

display. The photograph from the St. Petersburg Museum of Zoology, which depicts classified, etherized butterflies, does in fact not “illustrate” Andromeda Lodge, where cockatoos are lovingly buried in shoeboxes, at all. *Austerlitz* is full of cemeteries and the image of the mounted butterflies also depicts a cemetery of sorts, but the animals’ memorialization is accidental rather than intentional. The value of scientific cataloguing is undermined by the naturalist Alphonso’s emphasis on fostering respect and wonder in the boys through observation. Sebald writes against scientific taxonomy by placing emphasis on the moths’ beautiful, individual physical features and behavior rather than on their nomenclature. As in the herring section in RS, an implicit critique of Nazi Germany and its scientific racism underlies this passage. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century Anti-Semitism inherited by the Nazis was predicated on the taxonomy of human races, and the racist diagrams measuring human features bear disturbing similarity to drawings classifying animals. Moths are a pest that needs to be eliminated with the help of chemicals: “Die meisten von uns, sagte Austerlitz, wissen ja von den Motten nichts, als daß sie Teppiche und Kleider zerfressen und darum vertrieben werden müssen mit Kampfer und Naphthalin, während sie doch in Wahrheit eines der ältesten und bewundernswertesten Geschlechter sind in der ganzen Geschichte der Natur” (135). The use of words reserved for human genealogy – “Geschlechter,” “Geschichte” – underscores that moths are beings with a consciousness and precede humankind. Sebald takes another stab at a fanatical Nabokovian manner of collecting animals in describing how the human “Sammelleidenschaft” exterminates the world’s zoological and botanical variety (135). By contrast, the adult Austerlitz views moths that stray into his house with sympathy and even entombs them, following the example of the bird cemetery he encountered in Andromeda Lodge. Through emphasis on the living animals and the description of Austerlitz’s moth

cemetery, Sebald critiques the dehumanization of science inherent in scientists' (in other words, Nabokov's) zealous urge to classify as well as the collecting of butterflies for "sport."

As in his other works, Sebald's stance towards nature and animals in *A* is one of preservation. Alphonso may lure moths with light, but he also provides them with shelter. The animals rest "in den grauen Vertiefungen der von Alphonso zu ihrem Schutz in einer Kiste ineinander verschachtelten Eierkartons" (135-36) – an image that is also a metaphor for the structure of *Austerlitz*. Like other animals in *A*, moths are tied to memory, and the preservation of memories is a central question of the text. Not only is the night at Andromeda Lodge one of Austerlitz's few cherished memories from adolescence, but moths are also commemorated in the photographs of his "Solitaire game" ("ein großer [...] Tisch, auf dem in geraden Reihen und genauen Abständen voneinander ein paar Dutzend Photographien lagen" 175). A photograph within the text depicts a single black moth on a wall in a light-colored patch of plaster (141). Nabokov also compares the collecting of butterflies to the making of memories. In *Ada*, Van watches blue butterflies while imagining a tryst with his sister: "he was looking forward to collecting what he would recollect later, and watched the big bold Blues as he sprawled on the turf, burning with the evoked vision of Ada's pale limbs in the variegated light of the bower" (136). The double meaning of hunting for butterflies/collecting memories is here enhanced by sexual preying. Nabokov's descriptions of hunting for butterflies often contain sexual imagery. In stark contrast to Austerlitz's recollection of the wondrous (and innocent) night at Andromeda Lodge stands Nabokov's description of a nocturnal encounter with moths in his letter to Wilson.<sup>62</sup>

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62 The nocturnal moth spectacle in *Austerlitz* has its counterpart in Van's visit to Ada's larvarium and in the burning barn scene in *Ada*. Both passages depict an awakening, one sexual, and one to the beauty (as well as fecundity) of nature (59-63, 121-37).



It is one of the most perfect pleasures I know of – to open the window wide on a muggy night and watch them come. Each has its own lamp-side manner: one will settle quietly on the wall to be boxed in comfort, another will dash and bang against the lampshade before falling with quivering wings and burning eyes upon the table, a third will wander all over the ceiling. The system is to have several tumblers with a piece of “carbona” soaked cotton-wool stuck to the bottom, and you overturn the tumbler upon the bug. When stunned it is transferred to another jar to be pinned later. (Karlinsky 76)

Nabokov talks about the dying moths like a lover (“perfect pleasure,” “watch them come,” “lamp-side manner,” “quivering wings and burning eyes”) – an equation of sexual desire with killing that is not unique to this letter.

In *Speak, Memory*, remembering the first moth he managed to kill and preserve (with the help of his mother), Nabokov also expounds on the “system” of killing butterflies and moths in ecstatic, lustful terms:

[...] I found a spectacular moth, marooned in a corner of a vestibule window, and my mother dispatched it with ether. In later years, I used many killing agents, but the least contact with the initial stuff would always cause the porch of the past to light up and attract that blundering beauty. Once as a grown man I was under ether during appendectomy, and [...] it was all there, brilliantly reproduced in my dream, while my own vitals were being exposed: the soaking ice-cold absorbent cotton pressed to the insect’s lemurian head; the subsiding spasms of its body; the satisfying crackle produced by the pin penetrating the hard crust of its thorax; the careful insertion of the point of the pin in the cork-bottomed grove of the

spreading board; the symmetrical adjustment of the thick, strong-veined wings under neatly affixed strips of semitransparent paper. (121)

The satisfaction of inflicting death in this passage is again sexual (“being exposed,” “soaking,” “pressed to the head,” “subsiding spasms,” “penetrating,” “inserting,” “spreading”), but at the same time moths, even in this scenario of undercurrent violence, are also tied to memory and remembering. The “porch of the past” lighting up is a metaphor for a sudden recollection; the “blundering beauty” stands for a cherished memory. Nabokov is of course no stranger to endowing somewhat questionable sexual allusions, as in *Lolita* and parts of *Ada*, with the nostalgic warmth of memory (for the protagonists).

While Sebald keeps Nabokov’s association of moths with childhood memories, his description of Austerlitz’s interaction with the animals could otherwise not be more different. Austerlitz wonders about the nature of the fear and pain experienced by the moths that have strayed into his house, speculating that they are cognizant of their predicament:

Sie wissen, glaube ich, sagte Austerlitz, daß sie sich verflogen haben, denn wenn man sie nicht vorsichtig wieder nach draußen entläßt, so verharren sie reglos, bis der letzte Hauch aus ihnen gewichen ist, ja sie bleiben, festgehalten durch ihre winzigen, im Todeskrampf erstarrten Krallen, am Ort ihres Unglücks haften bis über das Lebensende hinaus, bis ein Luftzug sie ablöst und in einen staubigen Winkel verweht. (140-41)

Instead of Nabokov’s recollection of the pleasure of killing, Sebald underscores the moths’ fragility, with words such as “vorsichtig entläßt,” “Hauch,” “winzige Krallen,” “Luftzug,” “verweht.” The behavior of moths again mirrors Austerlitz’s life: blown into and lost in an unsuitable environment he becomes paralyzed, a bystander to his own life who reacts to crisis

with apathy, who does not kill moths but does not go out of his way to rescue them either. For example, of the time when his writer's block became concomitant with the inability to tell his own story, he remembers: "[w]äre damals einer gekommen, mich wegzuführen auf eine Hinrichtungsstätte, ich hätte alles ruhig mit mir geschehen lassen, ohne ein Wort zu sagen" (182). Uwe Schütte has remarked on Sebald's "eminente Empathie mit der Tierwelt" in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, "die sich in manchen Passagen des Werks zu intensiven Momenten kreatürlicher Solidarität steigert," an affect "so überbordernd [...] dass der Graben zwischen Mensch und Tier überschritten wird" (Schütte 559). Austerlitz's moth-like attributes, which recall Pnin's squirrel-like qualities (of which more later), suggest the bridging of a gap between human and animal in one character.

When the narrator visits Austerlitz in his house in Alderney Street in London, he finds a moth cemetery on Austerlitz's mantle. Seven Bakelite boxes contain the carcasses of moths that died in the house. The narrator examines one of them more closely, and the translucent, fragile, yet well-preserved "Nachtgeist" fascinates him, especially "das starrschwarze, ein wenig aus dem Kopf hervortretende Auge" (241). Similar to the stuffed squirrel in the window of the Antikos Bazar in Terezín, which stares at Austerlitz with its beady glass eye, the dead animal seems to communicate with humans, yet its message is indecipherable. Interestingly, in "Traumtexturen," the description Sebald gives of Nabokov's obsession with butterflies and moths is more aligned with his own adaptation of the material in *Austerlitz* than Nabokov's reality. "Kaum etwas beschäftigte [Nabokov] [...] meines Erachtens nach mehr als die Geisterkunde, von der seine bekannte Passion, die Wissenschaft von den Nachtfaltern und Schmetterlingen, für ihn wahrscheinlich nur ein Seitenzweig gewesen ist" (CS 185). Nothing in *Speak*, *Memory* or *Ada* suggests that lepidoptery for Nabokov was an occult science or that he

perceived butterflies as ghostly emissaries from beyond. By portraying the animals as beings capable of experiencing confusion and pain, capable of communicating, and worthy of being buried, Sebald deemphasizes Nabokov's scientific stance towards butterflies and his association of hunting with sexual preying. Instead Sebald aligns Austerlitz's attitude with one that he imagined for or misattributed to Nabokov. In other words, Sebald modifies and "improves" on Nabokov's descriptions of butterflies with a humane, gentle reverence for the animals' lives. The sexual or predatory pleasure of hunting is completely absent. In the context of *Austerlitz*, which contains multiple sites of conservation of questionable ethics – zoos, a museum of veterinary oddities, concentration camps turned into tourist attractions – the moth tombs also provide an example of how to commemorate adequately. The image is contrapuntal to the photograph of butterflies in the display case that depicts a mass grave designed for human pleasure. Sebald's unique form of intertextuality not only alludes to, but expands on his forerunner, addressing a lack in (or deliberate misreading of?) Nabokov's writing and answering it with a counterexample.

It is not surprising that in London, moths die, whereas in the utopia of Andromeda Lodge they swarm freely. Alderney Street, on which Sebald places Austerlitz's house, is named after the Channel Island Alderney on which the Germans operated four concentration camps during World War II.<sup>63</sup> Alderney was occupied by the Nazis from 1940-1945, and stands out as the only British territory briefly under German rule. Ironically, Austerlitz, who escaped the Nazis and death in a concentration camp alongside his mother, ends up living in a street whose name is concomitant with occupied territory. Although free, he remains oppressed by the burden of his unknown past. Andromeda Lodge, on the other hand, represents the only place where Austerlitz

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<sup>63</sup> Sebald calls Austerlitz's address *Alderney Street*, which is in Pimlico. However, the location he describes resembles Alderney Road in the East End, which features the hidden Jewish cemetery.

feels unburdened and happy. For Austerlitz, the school vacations spent at Androemda Lodge, his “Ferienasyll,” represent a fragile interlude in a sad, taciturn, and gray childhood (121). Like Vyra in *Speak, Memory* and Ardis Hall in *Ada*, this Eden is described in rare superlatives. The train ride to Bartmouth is better than any subsequent train rides, and the first view of the bay triggers overwhelming joy in Austerlitz. “[Ich merkte], wie mir das Herz aufzugehen began,” he recalls, and “[ich wußte] oft vor Freude kaum, wo ich hinsehen sollte” (121). Everything about Andromeda Lodge is elevated and seems suspended, hovering above or beyond reality, in the misty realm of the past or the imagination. Sebald gives memories to Austerlitz that are luminously detailed as well as suffused with eerie haziness and that are reminiscent of Nabokov’s childhood recollections. Nabokov captures the timelessness inherent in childhood memories:

I see again my schoolroom in Vyra, the blue roses of the wallpaper, the open window. Its reflection fills the oval mirror above the leathern couch, where my uncle sits, gloating over a tattered book. A sense of security, of well-being, of summer warmth pervades my memory. That robust reality makes a ghost of the present. The mirror brims with brightness; a bumblebee has entered the room and bumps against the ceiling. Everything is as it should be, nothing will ever change, nobody will ever die. (SM 77)

Sebald also places Austerlitz in a blue room: “Die Aussicht aus dem Zimmer mit dem blauen Plafond, das Adela stets als mein Zimmer bezeichnete, grenzte wahrhaft ans Überwirkliche” Austerlitz reminisces at the start of a two-page long reverie about the always changing dramas of clouds, fog, and light playing out before his gaze from a window (142). Sebald also echoes other elements of Nabokov’s recollection, such as the sense of wellbeing, timelessness, and brightness.

However, rather than representing a “robust reality,” the memory of Andromeda Lodge is suffused with an otherworldly haze, like Austerlitz’s past. The emotionally so tightly circumscribed title character Sebald has created is incapable of having glossy memories.

Nabokov looks back and recreates the images of his past in sharp relief. “The act of vividly recalling a patch of the past is something that I seem to have been performing with the utmost zest all my life, and I have reason to believe that this almost pathological keenness of the retrospective faculty is a hereditary trait,” he writes in *Speak, Memory* (75). “I inherited an exquisite simulacrum – the beauty of intangible property, unreal estate – and this provided a splendid training for endurance of later losses” (40). Butterflies, in particular, are stylized as metaphors for memories that encapsulate Nabokov’s (stylized) happy childhood. Nabokov pins memories to a spreading board like butterflies, fixing something intangible and fleeting as glossy objects to revisit. Van obsessively rewrites his memoirs, similarly trying to pin down the definitive version of his and Ada’s (love)life. Nabokov chose to remember the good parts of his childhood instead of the loss and used his memories as intertexts for his fictions. While memories, as he writes in SM, sustained him and provided a wealth of material for his novels, giving personal memories to fictional characters also risked losing them in the process. “I have often noticed that after I had bestowed on the characters of my novels some treasured item of my past, I would pine away for it in the artificial world where I had so abruptly placed it [...] and presently, it became more closely identified with my novel than with my former self,” he comments (SM 95). “[Z]weifello[s] [war] die Errettung eines jeden Bildes für [Nabokov] mit schweren Phantomschmerzen verbunden,” Sebald writes in “Traumtexturen” (CS 186). Sebald draws upon and fictionalizes Nabokov’s already fictionalized traces of his own childhood.

In contradistinction to Nabokov's "fixed" memories, Austerlitz's memories are, at best, vague and incomplete. Even happy memories of childhood summers spent in Andromeda Lodge play out in a pastel haze. Austerlitz has so little happy past to recall that his version of Vyra/Ardis Hall is described as "intangible property, unreal estate," a place in which exotic plants and birds "geben einem das Gefühl, man sei jetzt in einer anderen Welt" (122). While Vyra, for Nabokov, is precisely the locus of the glossiest recollections, the environment of Andromeda Lodge that Austerlitz observes from a window is a strange world that dissolves before his eyes. The surfaces of earth, water, and sky blend into each other and become indistinguishable. "In einem perlgrauen Dunst lösten alle Formen und Farben sich auf; es gab keine Kontraste, keine Abstufungen mehr, nur noch fließende, vom Licht durchpulste Übergänge, ein einziges Verschwimmen, aus dem nur die allerflüchtigsten Erscheinungen noch auftauchten," Austerlitz remembers; and he continues: "seltsamerweise [...] ist es gerade die Flüchtigkeit dieser Erscheinungen gewesen, die mir damals soetwas wie ein Gefühl für die Ewigkeit gab" (143). Happiness, for Austerlitz, is a reversed development process in which the glossiness of reality slowly fades into an overexposed, flattened blur. The man who has always felt "als hätte ich keinen Platz in der Wirklichkeit, als sei ich gar nicht vorhanden" revels in the world when it seems to vanish before his eyes and wishes to disappear in moments of happiness (269). Remembering the times he spent at Andromeda Lodge, he says: "ich wünsche mir noch heute, daß ich in dem Frieden, der dort ununterbrochen herrschte, spurlos hätte vergehen können" (119). Austerlitz feels most at peace in a world that is like an overexposed photograph, in which colors fade and contours dissolve ("Flüchtigkeit der Erscheinungen"). A hobby photographer, he is fascinated by the development process, especially "der Augenblick, in dem man in dem belichteten Papier die Schatten der Wirklichkeit sozusagen aus dem Nichts

hervorkommen sieht, genau wie Erinnerungen” (117). Again Sebald provides a contrapuntal image to Nabokov, and chooses environments that are obviously Nabokov-inspired yet provoke an opposite effect in his protagonist, a character who also, like Nabokov, lost everything.

*Speak, Memory* is in many ways a delicate attempt to restore Nabokov’s parents to three-dimensionality. Whereas Nabokov’s mother died in Prague of natural causes, his father died violently, shot in Berlin in the 1930s. Austerlitz, on the other hand, has virtually no memories of his parents. Nabokov’s references to his parents’ lives in the memoir are as abundant and exuberant as references to their deaths are oblique and pithy. The description of the fifteen years his widowed mother spent alone in exile in Prague before her death in 1938 barely fills one page. The sadness that permeates this short passage is evoked by objects referred to in the text, rather than by the otherwise so abundant portrayals of the author’s feelings. A cast of her husband’s hand, a watercolor of his grave, black thread tying his wedding band to hers on her finger, “dim little photographs in crumbling frames” – these are some of the objects that undermine the serenity the author conjures as he remembers his mother playing solitaire and silently feasting on a wealth of memories “that her soul had stored.” Objects, Nabokov assures us, are superfluous: “she did not really need [these objects] for nothing had been lost” (SM 48). Sebald’s Austerlitz does not have any memorabilia that connect him to his Czech childhood. His main possession is his rucksack – a symbol of émigré existence – and a house filled with photographs, both of which he abandons and bequeaths to the narrator. The rucksack as an object to be filled with objects is yet another metaphor for memory. Objects that retain a memory of their owners are a central theme of *Austerlitz*. Jacques Austerlitz’s questions faced with the bric-a-brac in a second hand store in Terezín are some of the text’s most existential. In *Heshel’s Kingdom*, which Sebald’s narrator reads on the last pages of the text, a display case of objects excavated from the



site of a massacre in the Kaunas concentration camp in Lithuania is depicted. “Bunches of keys lie among them [...] penknives; spectacles and spectacle cases; combs; purses; a pair of lady’s scissors; a tiny, dusty, intact pair of shoes – the shoes of a two-year-old” (163). The reference to objects as the only remnants of lives ties the intertext into both Austerlitz’s trip to Theresienstadt and the depot of looted goods at the Galeries d’Austerlitz in Paris (cf. chapter 3). Similar to the memorabilia Nabokov’s mother surrounds herself with in *Speak, Memory*, these objects are overdetermined because they contain stories but remind us of the lack of somebody to tell it. In this sense they reference the gap created by the deaths of their former owners, the removal of the witnesses. Compared to them, both Austerlitz’s moths and Nabokov’s glossy butterflies, memories created by writing, are paradoxically more tangible.

## II.2. DOGS AS TRAVELLERS IN THE TEXTURE OF TIME

Characters in *Ada*, as well as in *Austerlitz* and *Speak, Memory*, strive to relive the past through writing (or, more broadly speaking, through storytelling) in order to arrest time. The act of remembering both memorializes experiences and denies the chronological progression of time. In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov oscillates between fearing time and negating its existence. He starts by describing himself as a “chronophobiatic,” and time as a sort of spherical prison that constrains him (19-20), but later says: “I confess I do not believe in time. I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another” (139). Austerlitz echoes both sentiments. Time is a threatening medium he wants to escape, and he tells the narrator: “[ich habe mich] gegen die Macht der Zeit stets gesträubt [...], in der Hoffnung [...] daß die Zeit nicht verginge, nicht vergangen sei, daß ich hinter sie zurücklaufen könne” (152). In the Antwerp train station, the narrator and Austerlitz notice the foreboding nature of clock hands,

agreeing “wie schrecklich uns jedesmal, trotzdem wir es doch erwarteten, das Vorrücken dieses, einem Richtschwert gleichenden Zeigers schien, wenn er das nächste Sechzigstel einer Stunde von der Zukunft abtrennte, mit einem derart bedrohlichen Nachzittern, daß einem beinahe das Herz aussetzte dabei” (17). Later, however, he says: “[es ist] mir immer mehr, als gäbe es überhaupt keine Zeit, sondern nur verschiedene, nach einer höheren Stereometrie ineinander verschachtelte Räume, zwischen denen die Lebendigen und die Toten, je nachdem es ihnen zumute ist, hin und her gehen können” (269). Both writers use memory as a tool for losing their fear of the passage of time.

In “Traumtexturen,” Sebald writes that Nabokov “wußte [...], daß sich die Sehnsucht nach der Aufhebung der Zeit bewähren kann einzig in der genauesten Revokation der längst vom Vergessen geholten Dinge” (189). Sebald locates in Nabokov’s writing a desire not just to relive past experiences but also to make sense of the past with the clarity of telescopic distance. The frequently employed bird’s-eye view in Nabokov’s works, Sebald writes, is analogous to the process of remembering-through-writing: “das Schreiben, wie es Nabokov betreibt, [wird] in die Höhe getragen von der Hoffnung, daß sich, bei genügender Konzentration, die schon hinter den Horizont sich herabsenkenden Landschaften der Zeit in einem synoptischen Blick noch einmal könnten erfassen lassen” (188-89). This parallels an intertext from *Religio Medici* by Sir Thomas Browne Sebald uses in RS, about the (imagined) sharp focus of a view of the world from above simultaneously through a microscope and a reversed telescope, and attests to the fact that throughout his oeuvre, Sebald was interested in using visual perspective and seeing as a metaphor for understanding (cf. RS 30). The portrayal of Austerlitz’s bleak, claustrophobic life is a polemic against forgetting that details the catastrophic consequences of amnesia. While history does not make sense and cannot be viewed in a “synoptic gaze,” which is illustrated in *Austerlitz*

by the nine-page long run-on sentence about the inner machinations of Theresienstadt, light can be shed on individual destinies. While remembering through writing arrests time, reading prolongs its lapse. All of Sebald's texts approach historical periods through the oblique angle of characters' personal memories as well as literary quotations, and they use intertextuality to abolish the constraints of time. Nabokov's metaphor for memory as a "magic carpet" that he folds to overlap time and space illustrates both his and Sebald's methodology of layering intertexts and entwining personal and literary references, thereby expanding the reading experience. Austerlitz's image of time as "ineinander verschachtelte Räume," with fluid borders between the living and the dead, similarly illustrates both remembering and intertextual interweaving and also describes the structure of the work, with its nested narratives, itself. While all narratives are caught in chronological progression or its deliberate disruption and hence cannot transcend time, Sebald's texts shift the perception of time by slowing the reading experience. Time is "folded" by layering different allusions to other writers, a process further complicated by the use of textual as well as photographic quotations in an interpenetrating mode. This methodological slowing produces nested narratives that unfold in multiple mediations and retrospectives and cause a constant stalling of "the plot," until it becomes obvious that they in fact constitute it. In *Austerlitz*, the confusing, associative progression of stories, thoughts, and reminiscences is enhanced by a lack of conventional division into paragraphs or chapters.

In both Sebald and Nabokov, the remembered often looms nearer than the present, and the imagination that illuminates moments of the past becomes more vibrant and palpable than the perception of a now. The philosophical investigation of time, and how it relates to memory, is also a central theme of *Ada*. The novel culminates in a meditation on the nature of time – Van's treatise on "Time's essence" – that argues for the nonexistence of the future ("Sham Time") as a

concept. The past, for Van, is the “storage of Time” and the present is the process of perceiving the past (596). Similar to Nabokov in *Speak, Memory*, Van wants to arrest time by writing in order to revel in the past, “a generous chaos out of which the genius of total recall [...] can pick anything he pleases” (580). Color, sound, and intense and richly detailed visual snapshots are all attributes of the three-dimensional synesthetic recollection of the past, in *Ada* as in many of Nabokov’s texts. Van writes: “I wish to examine the essence of Time, not its lapse, for I do not believe that its essence can be reduced to its lapse. I wish to caress Time. [...] I delight sensually in Time, in its stuff and spread, in the fall of its folds, in the very impalpability of its grayish gauze, in the coolness of its continuum” (571),<sup>64</sup> as if time itself were a text(ile) or text(ure). Austerlitz, however, has first to acquire a past in order to revel in its memory. Dragan Velikic writes, “Im Roman *Das Wahre Leben des Sebastian Knight* erinnert Nabokov Menschen, denen die Vergangenheit die einzige Hoffnung und die einzige Beschäftigung ist” (*Du* 32).<sup>65</sup> Similarly, the past represents the only hope for Austerlitz, and the future is meaningless without having resolved questions of his origin and displacement. Once Austerlitz has seen a glimpse of his past in Prague, he becomes obsessed with the quest of finding out as much as he can about his parents (and their deaths).

Much of Austerlitz’s search is devoted to his mother. His father is a fleeting, almost invisible presence in Austerlitz’s memories, not unlike Nabokov’s father in *SM*, who also gets less attention than his mother in the memoir. Strikingly, in *Austerlitz* Sebald writes elements of Nabokov’s mother Elena into Adela rather than Agáta. Nabokov portrays his mother as a beautiful woman with whom he shares many attributes, such as hypersensitivity, synesthesia, and

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64 Even time has an erotic tinge to it in *Ada*. The name Ardis Hall derives from the Greek *ardis*, tip of an arrow, and often leads to wordplay about “the arrow of time” (573) or “alludes to the arrow of desire in Cupid’s quiver” (Boyd 132).

65 Sebald will incorporate the unusual use of “erinnern” as a transitive verb from Velikic into *Austerlitz*. Cf. also footnote 14.

a sixth sense. Adela also bears resemblance to Nabokovian heroines in the affectionate, subtly erotic way she is depicted. (And in *Austerlitz* Sebald describes women more tenderly than in his other works.) Gerald's mother Adela is described as a young, beautiful, sensitive, and independent woman, who treats her son's friend not as a child but as an equal. Austerlitz places emphasis on Adela's young age ("kaum mehr als 30 Jahre") (118). On their visits to Andromeda Lodge, she picks the boys up from the train station "mit dem schwarzlackierten Pferdewägelchen." In *Ada*, Van also travels from the train station to Ardis by horse and carriage ("hackney coach") and the trip from train station to house also takes half an hour. In the evening, Austerlitz and Adela often play badminton together. Not quite real, a representative of her otherworldly surroundings, "[schwebte Adela] viel länger oft, als es die Schwerkraft erlaubte, ein paar Spannen über dem Parkettboden in der Luft" (165-66). In the twilight of the setting sun they watch the shadow play of leaves on the walls – this passage has a hallucinatory quality, similar to the epiphany scene in Liverpool Street Station. The patterns of moving shadows on the wall "hatten etwas Huschendes, Verwehtes, das sozusagen nie über den Moment des Entstehens hinauskam" (166). The description of this tentative shadow play characterizes Adela's and Austerlitz's relationship, or perhaps the foreplay to an affair that might or might not have been consumed. In *Ada*, Van and Ada also play "shadow games." When the siblings first meet, Ada tries to teach Van "shadow-and-shine" games she invented, involving the shadow play of leaves in the sand (57). Subsequently, they often have sexual trysts while their mother thinks they are out "playing games," and throughout the text sex scenes are paraphrased as naughty play (174). Adela and Austerlitz see "Berglandschaften mit Gletscherflüssen und Eisfeldern [...], Hochebenen, Steppen, Wüsteneinen, Blumensaat, Seeinseln, Korallenriffe, Archipelagos und Atolle, vom Sturm gebeugte Wälder, Zittergras und treibender Rauch" (166). This cinematic

passage of evocative opposites (ice and heat, mountains and oceans) describing dramatic locations and agitated states may mirror their feelings for each other. Adela and the nature of her relationship to Jacques Austerlitz remain mysterious – a premonition for the way his later relationship to Marie de Verneuil is never concretized. The possibility of an illicit affair (like incest with one's mother) is a reference to Nabokov's breach of sexual taboos in *Lolita* and also *Ada*. "Und einmal [...] als wir zusammen hineinblickten in die langsam verdämmernde Welt, da fragte mich Adela, indem sie sich herüberbeugte zu mir: Siehst du die Wipfel der Palmen und siehst du die Karawane, die dort durch die Dünen kommt?" This image of a mirage, which underscores the otherworldliness of Andromeda Lodge and its proprietress, is reminiscent of other desert scenes in Sebald's oeuvre, such as the scene in "Ambros Adelwarth" when Cosmo watches the illusion of a caravan emerging from a stage in the film *Dr. Mabuse* and the Wadi Halfa scene in "Max Aurach" (AW 141, 243-44). The moment and question are "unvergeßlich" for Austerlitz (166). Yet as an adult Austerlitz never sees Adela again – "aus eigener Schuld" (167), similar to the way he loses Marie de Verneuil ("die ich [...] aus eigener Schuld vollends verlor") (313) – and later "war Andromeda Lodge verkauft und Adela mit einem Entomologen namens Willoughby nach North Carolina gegangen" (167). The parallel to his relationship with Marie again suggests that more was going on between them than Austerlitz lets on to the narrator. Van also loses Ada – an ardent hobby entomologist in her youth – to another man; she marries a rancher and moves to Arizona.

The only physical touch between Austerlitz and Adela occurs in a scene that turns out to be lifted not from the erotically charged pages of *Ada* but from *Speak, Memory* and the description of Nabokov's mother. Austerlitz remembers being alone with Adela, after having dropped Gerald off at the train station (which is also the last time he sees her):

Als ich von dort wieder zurückkam – es dämmerte bereits, sagte Austerlitz, und *ein feiner Sprühregen* hing, anscheinend ohne niederzusinken, in der Luft –, *trat mir aus der nebeligen Tiefe des Gartens Adela entgegen, in grünlichbraune Wollsachen gemummt, an deren hauchfein gekräuselter Rand Millionen winziger Wassertropfen eine Art von silbrigem Glanz um sie bildeten.* In ihrer rechten Armbeuge trug sie einen großen Strauß rostfarbener Chrysanthemen, und als wir wortlos nebeneinander über den Hof gegangen waren und auf der Schwelle standen, da hob sie ihre freie Hand und strich mir das Haar aus der Stirn, so als wisse sie, in dieser einen Geste, daß sie die Gabe besaß, erinnert zu werden. Ja, ich sehe Adela noch, sagte Austerlitz; so schön, wie sie damals war, ist sie für mich unverändert geblieben. (165, italics mine)

In the corresponding passage in *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov remembers his mother coming home to Vyra from foraging for mushrooms:

On overcast afternoons, all alone *in the drizzle*, my mother, carrying a basket (stained blue on the inside by somebody's whortleberries), would set out on a long collecting tour. Toward dinnertime, *she could be seen emerging from the nebulous depths of a park alley, her small figure cloaked and hooded in greenish-brown wool, on which countless droplets of moisture made a kind of mist all around her.* As she came nearer from under the dripping trees and caught sight of me, her face would show an odd, cheerless expression, which might have spelled poor luck, but which I knew was the tense, jealously contained beatitude of the successful hunter. Just before reaching me, with an abrupt, drooping movement of

the arm and shoulder and a “Pouf!” of magnified exhaustion, she would let her basket sag, in order to stress its weight, its fabulous fullness. (44, italics mine)

Although Sebald mostly strips his rendition of the original’s joyousness, replacing the basket of mushrooms with chrysanthemums, a flower associated (in Germany) with death (and the scene does occur after a funeral), he still retains its echoes. Adela appears serene and beautiful like Nabokov’s mother, and like her she is tied to memory. In Vyra, Nabokov’s mother frequently encourages her son to remember: “‘*Vot zapomni* [now remember],’ she would say in conspiratorial tones as she drew my attention to this or that loved thing in Vyra” (SM 40). *Speak, Memory* is proof that Nabokov *did* remember and Adela, as an apparition of Nabokov’s mother half a century after the publication of Nabokov’s memoir, shows that her memory was carried on by other authors as well. Therefore, Sebald’s character can be certain (“als wisse sie”) “daß sie die Gabe besaß, erinnert zu werden.” Both women seem to bestow the gift of memory on the young men.<sup>66</sup>

Nabokov’s mother plays an additional, important walk-on part in *Austerlitz*. In Prague, Austerlitz’s recollection of his mother Agáta blends seamlessly into an encounter with Nabokov’s mother and her dachshund. When Austerlitz finally traces his path back to his city of origin and reconnects for the first time in 50 years with his old nurse Věra, he has a memory of his mother. He cannot see her face, but remembers waiting up for her at night as a small child. Immediately after relating this first detailed memory of a forgotten mother to the narrator, Austerlitz recalls a walk he took in Prague the following day:

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66 Sebald gives the unusual (and archaic) use of “erinnern” as a transitive verb to Austerlitz in describing Adela, “als wisse sie [...] daß sie die Gabe besaß, erinnert zu werden,” which perhaps refers to an essay in *Du*. Dragan Velikic writes (quoting Petar Vujcic): “[Wyra] ist [Nabokov’s] verlorenes Paradies, zu dem er in seinen Erinnerungen immer zurückkehren wird. Die Mutter hatte es bei den Spaziergängen in diesen Parks oft wiederholt, das ‘Behalt es in Erinnerung,’ und er hat es wirklich erinnert” (*Du* 32). Presumably, Sebald read all essays in the *Du* magazine on the admired Nabokov closely. (Sebald’s marginalia in fellow *Du*-contributor Peter Maar’s book of essays indicates as much.)



Auf halber Höhe begegnete mir eine alte Dame mit einem dicken, fuchsfarbenen Dackel, der nicht mehr gut auf den Beinen war und ab und zu stehenblieb, um mit gefurchter Braue vor sich hin auf den Erdboden zu starren. Sein Anblick erinnerte mich daran, auf den Spaziergängen mit Věra oft solche alten Damen gesehen zu haben mit griesgrämigen kleinen Hunden, die fast alle einen Maulkorb aus Draht trugen und vielleicht deshalb so verstummt und böse gewesen sind. (237-38)

Sebald extracts this image from chapter two of *Speak, Memory*, which Nabokov devotes to his mother (and which was initially called “Portrait of my Mother”). The chapter culminates in a moving description of her death in exile and in a passage about how the living perceive the ghosts of the dead, a passage Sebald cites, notably, in “Traumtexturen.” Nabokov writes:

[The] final dachshund followed us into exile, and as late as 1930, in a suburb of Prague (where my widowed mother spent her last years on a pension provided by the Czech government), he could be still seen going for reluctant walks with his mistress, waddling far behind in a huff, tremendously old and furious with his long Czech muzzle of wire – an émigré dog in a patched and ill-fitting coat. (SM 48)

In the early 1930s, during the exact time she lived in Prague, Austerlitz encounters Nabokov’s mother and her dog. What is more, he later sees a duplication of this image, re-encountering a specter of Elena, and remembers, as a child “oft solche alten Damen gesehen zu haben.” Thus, Nabokov’s mother is re-remembered in multiple refractions of Nabokov’s initial memory and the image of speechlessness, represented by the dogs’ forced muteness (even dogs lose their language in exile) is counteracted. Sebald points out in his essay “Traumtexturen” that Nabokov was intrigued by spectral haunting (cf. 184, 186-87), and the inclusion of Elena as a spectral

figure is an adoption of a Nabokovian technique layered onto a Nabkovian “character.” At the same time, Austerlitz’s encounter with the émigré women and frustrated dogs as a child is a retrospective symbol of doom, foreshadowing his own eventual exile. For Austerlitz, the trip to Prague restores a lost voice but only superficially cures his sense of displacement. Rather than restoring to him the vision of an alternate childhood, it reinforces the image of himself as a dead twin (a vision Austerlitz has during the *Kindertransport*, and again on the train ride to Germany from Prague).<sup>67</sup> The only other life he could have led was to die, since staying in Prague would most probably have meant death in Terezín. His past robs him of his present in the same way his present had robbed him of his past, and Austerlitz’s quest to learn more about his parents becomes concomitant with learning about their deaths.

In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov reveals that the dachshunds that often make their appearance in his works as ladies’ companions were his mother’s favorite pets. In *Ada* the dogs provide comic relief to otherwise awkward or emotionally twisted social situations or underscore their tragicomic trajectory. Similarly, in *Speak, Memory* the dachshund, “waddling far behind in a huff, tremendously old and furious, [...] an émigré dog in a patched and ill-fitting coat,” provides a tragicomic transition between Nabokov’s memories of a happy childhood and a terse passage about his parents’ deaths. The Nabokovian dog has migrated not only into *Austerlitz*. In *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, a dachshund is the companion of the hunter Schlag/Jäger Gracchus, himself a ghost imported from Kafka. The hunter Schlag (an immigrant) has two constant companions, his dachshund Waldmann and his rucksack, to which the dog is always tied. Waldmann is hence also linked to a symbol of émigré or nomadic existence, like the dog in *Speak, Memory* and its refractions in *Austerlitz*. Austerlitz, too, we hear from the narrator, carries a rucksack wherever

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<sup>67</sup> Sebald lifted the phantom image of a twin from Susi Bechhöfer, who really had a twin sister who later died (cf. Bechhöfer and Josephs: *Rosa’s Child*).

he goes, which is a reference to Sebald's own, similar, habit, as well as to Ludwig Wittgenstein's. However, the dog in SG is also lifted from Adalbert Stifter's "Der sanftmütige Obrist" and hence a time traveler from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although in Stifter it is just a "Hündchen," not specifically a dachshund (Stifter 332-33, cf. also chapter 1). Dogs, like other animals in Sebald's work, are concatenated sites of allusions and memories. A metaphor for the writer's easy reaching into the past to incorporate a work of art from another time is instantiated by the image of a dog running across centuries to bring a souvenir from the past into a painting, which Sebald describes in the essay "Wie Tag und Nacht – Über die Bilder Jan Peter Tripps." Tripp's painting *La déclaration de guerre* depicts a dog that has "fetched" a wooden clog from *The Arnolfini Portrait*, a 15<sup>th</sup>-century painting by Jan van Eyck (cf. LiL 184-88). The shoe becomes a symbol for walking across eras, wandering through the works of others, or in a more playful sense, a souvenir brought by the dog from a bygone era, reminiscent of the theme in A that objects have memories of *us*. In *Austerlitz*, as in Tripp's painting, a dog has crossed the boundaries of time to assist the artist in breaking through chronology. Time-traveling dogs recur in *Austerlitz*. A dog in father Elias's family pictures later reappears as Adela's dog Toby in Andromeda Lodge (144). Just before finding Věra and rediscovering his childhood home, Austerlitz sees a half-relief above a door in Sporkova Street, "das vor einem gestirnten, seegrünen Hintergrund einen blaufarbenen Hund zeigte mit einem Zweig im Maul, den er, wie ich, bis in die Haarwurzeln erschauernd, erahnte, herbeigebracht hatte aus meiner Vergangenheit" (221). The wire muzzle from Nabokov's text and the twig from Austerlitz's childhood memories are mementos brought by dogs that transcend spatial and temporal limits.

In the essay "Ein Versuch der Restitution," Sebald cites a visit to the painter Tripp as a triggering moment in his career as a writer and as influential for his methodology. In comparison

to Tripp's mode of painting, he calls his own writing "geduldige[s] Gravieren" and "Vernetzen, in der Manier der *nature morte*, anscheinend weit auseinanderliegender Dinge" (CS 244).

Writing, he continues, is a way of establishing connections between occurrences, objects, and ideas that lie far apart, a layering of strands of histories and stories. Sebald writes:

Das Andenken ist ja im Grunde nichts anderes als ein Zitat. Und das in einen Text (oder in ein Bild) einmontierte Zitat zwingt uns [...] zur Durchsicht 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. (LiL 184)

In Sebald's texts, the objects and texts-as-objects imported from others become, in their phenomenological existence and metonymical referentiality, devices for the slowing of time and the expansion of narratives. *The Arnolfini Portrait*, transported into the subtext or pretext of Tripp's painting by the dog that bears the wooden clog, becomes a metaphor for Sebald's intertextual approach. The original van Eyck painting depicts two parallel instances of time. The "reflection" in the convex mirror at the rear of the room is not identical with the painted frontal view of the painting, but rather a moment anterior or posterior to it. The mirror shows the couple in a slightly different stance, and two people in the doorframe, a maid and another person (perhaps the artist?) who salutes the viewers. The dog and shoes, however, are absent in the reflection. The reality of the depicted main scene is interrupted by a theatrical flashback or glimpse ahead behind the scenes (what happened before or after the "snap shot" of the painting). The mirror points to the instability of meaning and an unfixed reality. Perhaps van Eyck's dog is missing in the mirror because it is traveling into the 20<sup>th</sup>-century to bring the shoe into Tripp's painting, rather than Tripp's dog traveling to the 15<sup>th</sup> century to fetch it? "Der Hund, der

Geheimnisträger, der mit Leichtigkeit über die Abgründe der Zeit läuft, weil es für ihn keinen Unterschied gibt zwischen dem 15. und dem 20. Jahrhundert, weiß manches genauer als wir,” Sebald comments. “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” (LiL188). Animals are both wild and unknowable, able to communicate with humans. Michael Maar also writes about animals that travel across time and space in his “Sebastian Knight” essay. Nabokov’s texts, like those of Borges, often feature the unexpected fusion of two distinct characters into one, Maar states, which is reminiscent of Borges’s allusion to Schopenhauer’s cat: “Die Katze, die bei Schopenhauer auf dem Hof spielt, ist dieselbe, die schon vor dreihundert Jahren ihre Sprünge machte” (135).<sup>68</sup> Likewise, Sebald uses animals, and intertexts featuring animals, to transcend time and space.

### III. *PNIN*

#### III.1. SQUIRRELS THAT BREAK THE PATTERN

The intertextual connection between *Austerlitz* and *Pnin* is at once more tangible and more elusive than the references to Nabokov in *Die Ausgewanderten*, and manifests in the form of a squirrel. *Pnin* and *Austerlitz* are similar in several regards. Both are character studies about middle-aged male intellectuals – the titular subjects of the texts – who live in a form of exile and who have survived but who bear permanent emotional scars from World War II and the Holocaust. Both stories are told by a narrator who is a writer, is modeled on the author, and who

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<sup>68</sup> Borges quotes Schopenhauer in the essay “A History of Eternity:” “Whoever heard me assert that the grey cat playing just now in the yard is the same one that did jumps and tricks there five hundred years ago will think whatever he likes of me, but it is a stranger form of madness to imagine that the present-day cat is fundamentally an entirely different one” (*Non-Fictions* 127). Cf. also Schopenhauer 483.

uses the hero as a mouthpiece. “V.V.N.,” or “Vladimir Vladimirovitch,” is a fictionalized version of Nabokov, and the unnamed narrator of *Austerlitz* bears biographical resemblance to Sebald – a fact neither author attempts to veil. In each text, the narrators report authoritatively on the protagonists, and in each case the line between the narrator and the hero is at times blurred. As it turns out, not only the narrators but their subjects of inquiry as well are (aspiring) writers, and all four are in a state of emigration or exile. Pnin’s research into the minutiae of Russian Culture for the composition of a “petite histoire” resembles Austerlitz’s research of fortress architecture in that both projects derail due to an overabundance of material that remains unorganized. In each case, the labyrinthine research becomes an end unto itself. Both narrators, however, are successful writers. While all of Sebald’s (autobiographical) narrators struggle with the process of writing and the faithful rendering of memories, they succeed in the end (and readers hold the completed projects in their hands). Similar to the narrator of *Austerlitz*, V.N. is “the one who organizes [his subject’s] memories,” in other words, the one who succeeds at writing and telling a story. While “V.N. has of course throughout the novel used Pnin as a means to amuse us and demonstrate his own superiority [...] Pnin and V.N. form a composite portrait of the displaced writer who adapts to the necessity of camouflage” (Masing-Delic 37). Pnin is a figure through whom the narrator (and Nabokov) can take an unflinching look at Russian émigré culture, caricaturizing the unpalatable aspects of what it means to be an intellectual immigrant – both a sense of superiority and profound displacement. The Sebald-like narrator of *Austerlitz* and Jacques Austerlitz not only form a “composite portrait of the displaced writer” but of second-generation Holocaust survivor and perpetrator. The narrator’s oblique references to the Holocaust are given immediacy and a human face and fate by Jacques Austerlitz and his experience and memories as a victim. When the narrator visits Breendonk all he can do is quote a

dead writer, but Jean Amery's account of brutal torture pales next to Austerlitz's trip to Terezín and his unsuccessful attempt to gain information about his mother – no matter that Jean Amery's account is the lived experience, and Austerlitz's memories are invented. Austerlitz is an extension of the narrator (and of Sebald) who can penetrate into realms of witnessing that are otherwise ethically inaccessible for a non-Jewish German. Both *Pnin* and *Austerlitz*, and Pnin and Austerlitz, allow the narrator/author figures to report on a tragic situation simultaneously from the outside as an observer and from the inside as a participant.

The construct of the narrator in *Pnin* is playfully eroded from page one, as he is both a character in the text, recollecting encounters with Pnin, and an omniscient narrator. In the last chapter, the narrative switches to V.V.N.'s point of view, and here a third perspective on Pnin is added, in the form of parody. Cockerell, a colleague who despises Pnin, subjects V.V.N. to a two-hour long impersonation session during which he ridicules all aspects of Pnin's life. Cockerell's caricature includes all major events described in the text. At the story's closing, the parody turns out to be the basis of the entire book, later embellished further by V.V.N. Paired with Pnin's angry statement about V.V.N. to a mutual acquaintance, "don't believe a word he says. He makes up everything. [...] He is a dreadful inventor" (185), Pnin's story and Pnin's persona are stripped of authenticity in retrospect – which does not diminish the roundness of his character, although the omniscient narrator's reliability is irreparably compromised. As V.V.N. has played with Pnin's biography, Nabokov plays with his readers. Nabokov's genius is that revelations like these, which occur in so many of his texts, and which expose the protagonists as artifice, are counterbalanced by the humanity and grace the invented personas nonetheless retain. The parody may reveal Pnin's story, so tenderly related by his "old friend" V.V.N., as based on a caricature, yet the last glimpses of Pnin are heart-wrenching nonetheless, be it his response to a

prank call (“He is not at home, he has gone, he has quite gone” 189), or the image of Pnin clutching the steering wheel en route to an uncertain future in the company of a mangy dog. Nabokov’s playful texts create affect even while undermining themselves. In *Austerlitz*, as well, the most touching memories (such as the *Kindertransport*) are revealed as compromised – not based on caricature, but based on real Holocaust survivors’ memories. Sebald plants references to Nabokov in *Austerlitz* as playful tags that reveal his story as constructed, and as indebted to Nabokov’s riddles and patterns and to his luminescent prose. Nabokov teaches us that *Austerlitz* as an artwork can be both invented and real, made up of embellished real people, as well as of fictive constructs, and that this strategy does not take away from the impact of his story. The frequent hidden allusions to Nabokov reveal the text as a complexly layered postmodern narrative and serve as intertextual reminders to read it as a fabricated prose piece, which, in all its heaviness, contains lighthearted moments.

Squirrels are an elaborate motif in *Pnin*, a riddle hidden in plain sight, and, as in *Austerlitz*, tied to memory and childhood. Austerlitz encounters squirrels on four occasions and in four different states of being: stuffed, in the window of the Antikos Bazar in Terezín (283-84, 291); recollected, in a childhood memory that Věra restores to him (294-95); alive, through a telescope in a hospital (333); invisible/imagined, in the new library in Paris (397-98). In all instances the squirrel coincides with questions about the limits of memory and archiving. Squirrels mark both Austerlitz’s resurfacing childhood memories and his realization that some memories cannot be restored – those of his mother, and other victims of the Holocaust. All that remains are objects with their tantalizing suggestions of meaning that we cannot decode. As the new library in Paris, where Austerlitz’s quest and the book end, demonstrates, even archival institutions ostensibly devoted to remembering the past are unfit to memorialize it meaningfully



and adequately. Stuffed, alive, imagined, and remembered, squirrels are also present in *Pnin*, occurring overtly at least once in each of the seven chapters (and covertly a lot more often). The squirrel pattern in *Pnin* is at once obvious (the Vintage Books 1989 edition of the text even depicts a squirrel on the cover), and has eluded conclusive interpretation. By incorporating the squirrel into his text, Sebald's *Austerlitz* not only alludes to Nabokov as a forerunner, but also provides a key to the decoding of the pattern in *Pnin*. The disintegrating stuffed squirrel in the "Antikos Bazar" in Terezín derives from several passages in *Pnin*. Austerlitz tells the narrator:

Und dann war da in einer schuhschachtelgroßen Vitrine auf einem Aststummel hockend dieses ausgestopfte, stellenweise schon vom Mottenfraß verunstaltete Eichhörnchen, das sein gläsernes Knopfauge unerbittlich auf mich gerichtet hielt und dessen tschechischen Namens – veverka – ich nun von weit her wieder erinnerte wie den eines vor langer Zeit in Vergessenheit geratenen Freundes.”  
(284)

In its materiality, the stuffed squirrel among bric-a-brac is imported from *Pnin* chapter 7, in which the narrator V.V.N. visits Pnin's house when they are both schoolboys: "through the open door of the schoolroom I could see a map of Russia on the wall, books on a shelf, a stuffed squirrel, and a toy monoplane with linen wings and a rubber motor" (177).<sup>69</sup> Chapter 6 provides the linguistic link to *Pnin* in this passage: Pnin mentions the "Slavic" word for squirrel, *veveritsa*, a cousin of the Czech term Austerlitz remembers. Pnin posits that in the original French Cinderella tale, Cendrillon's shoes were made out of squirrel fur (*vair*) rather than glass (*verre*), and lectures his colleagues on the origin of *vair*, from "*veveritsa*, Slavic for a certain beautiful, pale, winter-squirrel fur" (158). The squirrel's anthropomorphism ("sein gläsernes

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69 The reason for the visit is that Pnin's father is an ophthalmologist, and that the narrator has "a speck of coal dust in his left eye." Incidentally, in *Austerlitz*, the narrator also sees an ophthalmologist (55-60).

Knopfauge unerbittlich auf mich gerichtet,") derives from *Pnin* chapter 2, in which a squirrel is "eyeing [Pnin] with contempt," while he is "trying not to meet the unpleasant eye fixed upon him" (58).

In *Austerlitz*, the objects in the antique shop window trigger questions about the flow of time and its arrested moments. Austerlitz muses: "Was, so fragte ich mich, sagte Austerlitz, mochte es auf sich haben mit dem nirgends entspringenden, *ständig in sich selbst zurückfließenden Strom*, mit veverka, dem stets in der gleichen Pose ausharrenden Eichhörnchen [...]" (284, italics mine). The squirrel tops the list of items in this riddle that Austerlitz is trying to solve, and later that night the penetrating stare of the animal's glass eye spooks in his mind as the last item in a list of haunting objects encountered in Terezín, preventing him from sleeping: "die ganze Nacht hindurch sah ich Bilder aus Terezín und aus dem Ghettomuseum, [...] das gläserne Auge des Eichhörnchens [...]" (291). The repetition of "veverka" and the reiteration that the squirrel has a glass eye (both occur twice) underscores indebtedness to *Pnin* by alluding to the *veveritsa-verre* (glass) passage. In addition, both the question of the squirrel's significance and the image of water are an intertextual link to *Pnin*. Early in the text, Pnin has a seizure during which he remembers a childhood illness and staring at the image of "a squirrel holding a reddish object" on a screen. In his feverish state he perceives the squirrel as harboring some kind of secret that needs to be decoded, and he obsessively and unsuccessfully tries to discern what object it is holding (nut or pinecone?) (23). Pnin eventually solves the childhood riddle. Coming out of the seizure, the first thing he sees is "a gray squirrel [...] sampling a peach stone" (24). Later, a squirrel interferes as Pnin is on the verge of comprehending another mystery: "He seemed to be quite unexpectedly (for human despair seldom leads to great truths) on the verge of a simple solution of the universe but was interrupted by an urgent request. A squirrel under the

tree had seen Pnin on the path” (58). Bizarrely, the animal takes on human characteristics by communicating to Pnin that it wants water, and Pnin operates a fountain to let it drink. The image in *Austerlitz* of a river of time running backwards into itself is reminiscent of Pnin’s water fountain.<sup>70</sup> In *Austerlitz*, the question about the significance of the knick-knacks is really a question about whether objects can retain memory about those who owned them, epitomized in the taxidermied squirrel, which is dead yet given the semblance of life. An eerie sense prevails that these objects might be possessions of former ghetto inhabitants, and yet the only trace the staggering amount of victims in Terezín left behind is a pile of junk.

After his visit to Terezín, Austerlitz travels to Prague and asks Věra for confirmation of the Czech word *veverka*. She provides it, and regales him with a memory from his childhood: Watching squirrels hide their provisions in the fall, and reading a picture book about animals in a snowy landscape would provoke the concerned question from Austerlitz as a child: “Aber wenn alles weiß sein wird, wie wissen dann die Eichhörnchen, wo sie ihren Vorrat verborgen haben?” (295). The question is repeated in Czech in the text and prompts Austerlitz (or the narrator?) to interrupt the stream of memories by interjecting: “Ja, wie wissen die Eichhörnchen das, und was wissen wir überhaupt, und wie erinnern wir uns, und was entdecken wir am Ende?” (ibid). Again there is a mystery to be solved about squirrels, and again the animals trigger existential questions about epistemology, which remain unanswered. The behavior of squirrels is a metaphor for the process of memory: squirrels store provisions (memories) in the ground; buried under snow (time, trauma), they become hard to access later. Moreover, squirrels immediately lead to painful

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<sup>70</sup> “In one sinuous tendril-like movement, the intelligent animal climbed up to the brim of a drinking fountain and, as Pnin approached, thrust its oval face toward him with a rather coarse spluttering sound, its cheeks puffed out. Pnin understood and after some fumbling he found what had to be pressed for the necessary results. Eyeing him with contempt, the thirsty rodent forthwith began to sample the stocky sparkling pillar of water, and went on drinking for a considerable time. ‘She has fever, perhaps,’ thought Pnin, weeping quietly and freely, and all the time politely pressing the contraption down while trying not to meet the unpleasant eye fixed upon him. Its thirst quenched, the squirrel departed without the least sign of gratitude” (58).

memories. Maar points out that Pnin remembers his parents every time a squirrel crosses his path, and Sebald marks this statement in his copy of Maar's text: "Pnin hat immer wieder Herzanfälle und immer wieder Visionen von seinen toten Eltern" (226). The sweetness of Věra's recollection about Jacques's childhood is rendered sad by his foreboding fear that the squirrels might starve. Immediately after this memory, Věra tells Austerlitz that his mother was sent "east," i.e. to her death, from Terezín in 1944. The squirrel precedes a statement about Agáta's death, mirroring the earlier passage when Austerlitz spends a sleepless night plagued by images from his trip to Terezín, which culminates in a memory of the stuffed squirrel and his mother's deportation. "[D]ie ganze Nacht hindurch sah ich Bilder aus Terezín und aus dem Ghettomuseum, [...] das gläserne Auge des Eichhörnchens und die *Schatten* Agátas und Věras, wie sie den bepackten Rodelschlitten durch das Schneegestöber zogen zu dem Messegelände von Holesovice hinaus" (195, italics mine). In *Pnin*, Nabokov points out that squirrel "came from a Greek word which meant '*shadow* tail'" (88, italics mine).

In *Pnin*, squirrels are also linked to painful memories and the Holocaust. *Pnin* is notable as "the pinnacle of Nabokov's Jewish theme" (Shrayer 83) and one of the few of Nabokov's fictional texts in which he refers to the Holocaust and the crimes of the Germans in more than oblique terms. In chapter 5, Nabokov introduces Pnin's memory of his teenage sweetheart and onetime fiancée Mira, who perished in Buchenwald – knowledge that haunts and confuses the protagonist. Sebald writes about this chapter of *Pnin* in "Traumtexturen:" "Im fünften Kapitel von *Pnin* ist des langen und in verschiedenen Stimmen die Rede davon, was man alles einbüßt auf dem Weg ins Exil, neben den Gütern des Lebens nicht zuletzt die Gewißheit von der Realität der eigenen Person" (CS 186). Mira is also linked to the squirrel motif: Her last name, "Belochkin," "derives from the Russian *belochka*, a diminutive of *belka*, a squirrel" (Boyd 282).

During a second seizure in chapter 5, Pnin remembers his love affair with Mira and her unfathomable death. Pnin's seizures are a parallel to Austerlitz's nervous breakdowns, and likewise occur when memories surface.

Pnin had taught himself, during the last ten years, never to remember Mira Belochkin [...] because, if one were quite sincere with oneself, no conscience and hence no consciousness, could be expected to subsist in a world where such things as Mira's death were possible. One had to forget – because one could not live with the thought that this graceful, fragile, tender young woman with those eyes, that smile, those gardens and snows in the background, had been brought in a cattle car to an extermination camp and killed by an injection of phenol into the heart, into the gentle heart one had heard beating under one's lips in the dusk of the past. (135).

Because he does not know how Mira's life ended, Pnin imagines different ways she died, “led away by a trained nurse, inoculated with filth, tetanus bacilli, broken glass, gassed in a sham shower bath with prussic acid, burned alive in a pit on a gasoline soaked pile of beechwood” (ibid). The incomprehensibility of her death causes Pnin to lose, in Sebald's words, “die Gewißheit von der Realität der eigenen Person” (CS 186). *Austerlitz* is of course “about” the Holocaust in its entirety, yet Austerlitz's sighting of the stuffed squirrel in Terezín occurs at the site that brings him physically the closest to the horrors of the Nazi regime. Austerlitz's sudden memory of the word *veverka* “wie den [Namen] eines vor langer Zeit in Vergessenheit geratenen Freundes” in Terezín is a further reference to Pnin's memory of Mira, which resurfaces in spite of his attempts to forget her. In Brian Boyd's analysis, the squirrel in *Pnin* might even represent Mira Belochkin's ghost watching over Pnin from a dimension beyond human existence. The

emphasis placed on the stuffed squirrel in Terezín, where Austerlitz does not find more than a ghostly trace of his mother, and the repeated questions about its significance, suggest that the animal is connected not only metaphorically to memories, or representative of objects that retain memory, but more specifically to Agáta herself.

Agáta's connection to the squirrel is given further emphasis through Pnin's theory about Cinderella's shoes, made out of squirrel fur rather than glass. Pnin has been read as having Cinderella-like attributes himself, for example because of the emphasis on his dainty, effeminate feet (cf. Maar 225, Boyd 283). *Austerlitz* also contains echoes of Cinderella. The vision of a slipper tantalizes Jacques Austerlitz in the State Theatre in Prague, which he visits to reconnect to his mother, an opera singer. Later he learns from Věra that Agáta indeed wore "einen himmelblauen, mit Silberfitter bestickten Schuh" for her role as Olympia in the opera "Les Contes d'Hoffmann" by Jacques Offenbach. Agáta herself is a fairytale-like Cendrillon figure (German: Aschenputtel), wearing "ein aschgraues Seidenmieder," arriving home at night in a "Wagen, der sie aus einer anderen Welt zurückbrachte" to the sound of bells announcing the late hour. For Jacques as a boy, Agáta was transformed on stage into a "zauberhafte [...] Gestalt" (236). As Olympia, Agáta plays an automaton but appears alive through a pair of magic glasses, reminiscent of Cinderella's glass slippers. The key scene is one in which she dances – like Cinderella at the ball – but has to be continuously wound up again. Images of seeing the past as if looking through glass recur in Austerlitz and eyes are a motif throughout. Věra speaks of looking at the past through a "gläserner Berg," which is a quote Sebald lifted from Saul Friedländer, and through "krankhaft erweiterte Pupillen" (232), and the stage on which Agáta once performed seems "wie ein erloschenes Auge" to Austerlitz (235).

Sebald borrows the image of Austerlitz's glimpse of "einen himmelblauen, mit Silberflitter bestickten Schuh" more or less verbatim from Hugo von Hoffmannsthal's *Andreas* fragment, on which he wrote in *Die Beschreibung des Unglücks* ("Venezianisches Kryptogramm – Hoffmannsthal's *Andreas*"). Hoffmannsthal's eponymous protagonist remembers seeing, as a child, "einen himmelblauen Schuh mit Flitter bestickt" on a stage. "Vor vielen Jahren, beginnt die [...] Passage ganz wie ein Märchen," Sebald writes and goes on to quote from Hoffmannsthal at length:

Der himmelblaue Schuh war wunderbarer als alles – Später stand ein Wesen da, das diesen Schuh anhatte, er gehörte zu ihr, war eins mit ihrem blau und silber Gewand: sie war eine Prinzessin, Gefahren umgaben sie, dunkle Gestalten, Fackeln, ein Zauberwald nahm sie auf [...] alles das war schön aber es war nicht das zweischneidig Schwert von zartester Wollust und unseglischer Sehnsucht, das durch die Seele ging bis zum Weinen, wenn der blaue Schuh allein unter dem Vorhang da war. (BU 76-77)

Integrating the shoe, which Sebald identifies as a fetishistic object for Andreas, into Austerlitz's daydreams about Agáta underscores her association with fairytales – specifically with Cinderella, a princess in the making, whose identity is given away to the prince by her shoe – as well as with Nabokov's erotic character Ada. (Sebald's essay on Hoffmannsthal is, like many essays in BU, about erotic and pornographic aspects in the prose of the Austrian authors he analyzes – a fact that strengthens the intertextual allusions to *Ada* in general.) The blue shoe is a souvenir, imported from a different source text and era, similar to the shoe fetched by the dog in Tripp's painting. The intertext also echoes other details of Agáta's story – danger, dark figures, fire – and Andreas's convoluted, intense emotions of pleasure and sorrow characterize the "double-edged

sword” of Austerlitz’s experience in Prague, which simultaneously restores the happiness of his childhood memories and destroys hope of regaining them. Hoffmannsthal’s passage “handelt [...] von der unverhofften Epiphanie der Bilder,” Sebald comments, as if anticipating his own borrowing of this image, and he ends the essay with an assessment about memory that also provides a subtext to his reading of Nabokov: “In solchen Bildern allein restituert sich – aufs schmerzlichste – das Glück jener besseren Zeit, aus der wir vermeinen gefallen zu sein” (BU 77). Inscribing Nabokov’s happy childhood memories into the story of Austerlitz’s past in order to undercut its sadness is counterbalanced by Sebald’s shrewd assessment in “Traumtexturen” that precisely the exuberance and luminosity of these memories reveal the loss they mask.

The association of fairytales with magical recovery in *Austerlitz* as well as in *Pnin* is marked by squirrels. In *Pnin*, squirrel sightings coincide with the protagonist finding his way after having been lost (cf. Boyd 285). Austerlitz too is metaphorically lost, and eventually finds the path to his identity through his past. Squirrels in *Austerlitz* signal the restoration of memory, such as his first language (*veverka*) and his childhood (walks with Věra), and consequently healing. In addition, Austerlitz’s convalescence in St. Clement’s hospital after his collapse is marked by a squirrel: Through a telescope he watches “die ruckartig hin und her springenden, dann wieder reglos verharrenden Eichhörnchen” in an adjacent cemetery (333). Austerlitz’s perspective from above (a window) and from a distance (through a telescope) mirrors a passage in *Pnin* chapter 5, where a squirrel escapes being shot. Nabokov constructs this passage as a riddle, hiding the squirrel by not naming it and only describing its actions: “a gunshot popped, and a twig leaped into the sky. The dense upper boughs in that part of the otherwise stirless forest started to move in a receding sequence of shakes or jumps, with a swinging lilt from tree to tree, after which all was still again” (115). Nabokov’s text illustrates what Austerlitz sees



through the telescope: the animal's jerky movements caused by jumping ("ruckartig hin und her springenden"), "after which all was still again" ("dann wieder reglos [verharrend]"). Sebald also borrows the brief bird's eye view from Nabokov. Earlier in chapter 5, Pnin had lost his way while driving in the country. To describe Pnin's erratic path, Nabokov switches the narrative point of view to that of an imaginary observer in a watchtower. This is reminiscent of Sebald's analysis in "Traumtexturen" of Nabokov's tendency to employ a bird's eye view, thereby privileging an "invisible observer" with an omniscient perspective from above:

Eines der wichtigsten erzähltechnischen Mittel Nabokovs besteht darin, daß er, durch kaum wahrnehmbare Nuancierung und Verschiebungen der Perspektive, einen unsichtbaren Beobachter ins Spiel bringt, der einen besseren Überblick zu haben scheint nicht nur als die Figuren der Erzählung, sondern auch als der Erzähler und der Autor, der diesem die Feder führt, ein Kunstgriff, der es Nabokov erlaubt, die Welt und sich selber in ihr von oben zu sehen. Tatsächlich enthält sein Werk zahlreiche Passagen, die aus einer Art Vogelperspektive geschrieben sind. (CS 188)

The bleak scenery in *Austerlitz* is often rendered from a bird's-eye view, or a slanted, lofty angle of vision, and both seeing and blindness as metaphors for understanding recur throughout the narrative, perspectives Sebald had perfected in *Die Ringe des Saturn*. Unlike passages in that text, where a bird's-eye view serves to pinpoint despair by isolating traumatic incidents, in *Austerlitz* the view from above becomes hopeful in passages that allude to Nabokov: sublime, as the view from the window in Andromeda Lodge, soothing, when seen through the hospital's telescope. Squirrels put Pnin on the right track, and he suddenly finds his way after the squirrel survives being shot at. Austerlitz also finds his path, and consequently a new purpose for his life.

He emerges from St. Clement's hospital if not healed then at least able to function and face the past again and for the first time in the text actively starts piecing together his history.

The last encounter with a squirrel in *Austerlitz* happens near the end, in the artificial nature preserve of the new library in Paris:

Bisweilen ist es mir [...] so gewesen [...] als huschten einmal da und einmal dort, immer an der Grenze der Unsichtbarkeit, jene beiden Eichkatzen herum, von denen eine apokryphe Geschichte, die mir zu Ohren gekommen ist, behauptet, daß man sie hier ausgesetzt hat in der Hoffnung, sie würden sich vermehren und zur Zerstreuung der gelegentlich von ihren Büchern aufblickenden Leser eine zahlreiche Kolonie ihrer Artgenossen begründen in diesem künstlichen Pinienhein. (397-98)

As I argue in chapter 4, mentioning "eine apokryphe Geschichte" is Sebald's self-referential, tongue in cheek comment on the text's falsified memories, but the sighting of the rodents in the library also refers to a humorous passage in *Pnin*. One of Pnin's eccentricities, to the amusement of students, is to "pull out a catalogue drawer from the comprehensive bosom of a card cabinet and take it, like a big nut, to a secluded corner and there make a mental meal of it" (76). In the college library, "his favorite haunt" (72), Pnin acts like a squirrel himself. Again, the animals provide an association with squirreling away, and rediscovering, memories and through them accessing knowledge. The small scene from *Pnin* also memorializes how libraries used to work, with the now anachronistic terms "catalogue drawer," and "card cabinet," the loss of which Austerlitz deplores. Like Pnin, Austerlitz used to love spending days in the old library in Paris, which is expressed in wistful terms. But memories and knowledge have become inaccessible in

the forbidding and dehumanizing new library in Paris, and squirrels – if they exist at all – have been banished to a transplanted pine forest outside.

Squirrels in *Pnin* have been variously interpreted, but the focus is on their connection to an otherworld beyond human perception. According to Brian Boyd, they signify a metaphysical presence, an entity that watches over humankind (particularly Pnin), something akin to “a democracy of ghosts,” as the agnostic Pnin muses (*Pnin* 136, Boyd 286). Boyd posits that the solution of the childhood riddle is indicative that “some other force seems to arrange a kindlier disposition of fate” for the protagonist (283). Maar calls the squirrel ambiguous, “nicht gut oder böse [...] zweideutig, wie die mythischen Götter” (222), a line Sebald marked in his copy of Maar’s essay on *Pnin*. Irene Masing-Delic, who points out that Pnin not only encounters the animals but is surrounded by squirrel-like people, objects, and behaviors, traces the squirrel motif to a fairy tale by Alexander Pushkin, whose works Nabokov frequently used as intertexts, which contains a magical squirrel bearing jewels instead of nuts. She reads the squirrel as a magical link between Pnin and his ex-wife’s artistic son Victor and connects the magic signified by the animal to émigré existence, a state of hyperaware and vulnerable life, in which occurrences are taken as signs. “This is a glimpse of that magical substratum, or supra-stratum, of existence that opens up, at times, especially to people who have been geographically displaced, such as exiles and émigrés, who must carry their spiritual treasures with them if they want to preserve them” (33). Pnin’s state of emigration and consequent alienation lie at the center of the novel. With *Pnin*, Nabokov shines a light on all aspects of émigré existence, the mundane, the tragic, and the comic, making fun of its clichés and plumbing its depths. Exile and emigration are of course crucial Sebaldian topics, and an aura of otherworldliness clings to many

of his emigrants.<sup>71</sup> Through Austerlitz's eyes, Sebald describes glimpses of a supernatural world on the periphery of human perception.

## II.2. SPIRALS THAT TRANSCEND TIME AND SPACE

In *Austerlitz*, a few magical moments stand apart from the description of bleakness and suffering. In each instance, Sebald creates these moments minutely describing colors (pastel tones), the quality of light, and the texture of the air (fog or haze). Andromeda Lodge is such a magical environment, in particular the night of observing butterflies, as are moments when Austerlitz suddenly gains insight into his past. Austerlitz's memory resurfaces in a moment of cascading supernatural visions, which is foreshadowed in the first encounter between him and the narrator. "Noch war der Gold und Silberglanz auf den riesigen halbblinden Wandspiegeln gegenüber der Fensterfront nicht vollends erloschen, da erfüllte ein unterweltliches Dämmer den Saal, in dem weit auseinander und stumm, ein paar Reisende saßen," the narrator recalls (13). In "Traumtexturen," Sebald calls high points in Nabokov's writings "die glänzendsten Stellen seiner Prosa," foreshadowing his own usage of adjectives like "sparkling" in *Austerlitz* whenever he tries to emulate Nabokov's style (CS 185). In mentioning Nabokov's allusions to 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century "Gespensterliteratur," Sebald also presages certain scenes in Austerlitz: "Da gibt es Staubwirbel die über den Boden kreiseln, unerklärliche Luftzüge, seltsam irisierende Lichteffekte, mysteriöse Korrespondenzen und seltsame Zufallsbegegnungen" (CS 187).

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71 Appropriately, in *Die Ausgewanderten* squirrels also make an appearance. In "Henry Selwyn," whose life similarly has been consumed by the difficulty of assimilating as an émigré, two sentences, rendered poetic through unusual syntactical inversions, capture the sadness of Selwyn's life: "In dem Gezweig, das über uns zu einem Dach sich schloß, trieben graue Eichkatzen ihr Unwesen. Der Boden war dicht übersät mit den Schalen der aufgebrochenen Nüsse, und Herbstzeitlose zu Hunderten fingen das schütterte Licht auf, das durch die trocken schon raschelnden Blätter hereindrang" (AW 12-13). (Cf. also the Mr. Squirrel-episode during the narrator's visit to Michael Hamburger in RS about a man who has no capacity for memory, but tries to memorize *King Lear*. Hamburger is a Jewish emigrant who has lost everything, like Austerlitz and Pnin. RS 224-26)

Whereas the latter two aspects describe the primary modes of communication between Sebald's narrator and his protagonist (chance encounters and the cryptic postcard Austerlitz sends), the first three supernatural phenomena characterize Austerlitz's vision in Liverpool Street Station – a six-page long reverie filled with hallucinatory images, the description of light, and celestial imagery (197-203). Similar to the light-colored, light-filled, hazy atmosphere in Andromeda Lodge, in which the world seems to dissolve, and where Austerlitz feels as though he were dreaming (142-43), Austerlitz's vision in Liverpool Street Station is suffused with light and dreamlike visions. Sebald devotes almost a page to describing the quality and texture of the light and the angle and path of sunrays streaming in (recalling Nabokov's "irisierende Lichteffeckte"). The light is characterized as "eisgrau, mondscheinartig," (197) as "ein Staubglitzern" (reminiscent of Nabokov's "Staubwirbel"), as dissolving "in schwarzen Striemen[...] wie Regenwasser," as "gebündelte Strahlen [...] in Spiralen und Wirbeln" (198). Austerlitz sees a staggering sequence of architectural phenomena, "labyrinthische Gewölbe," vast receding chambers, colonnades, cupolas, flights of stairs, populated with ferns, tiny people, and birds, in the center of which he stands "wie ein Geblendeter" (198-200). In "Traumtexturen" – the title already announces Sebald's assessment of Nabokov's prose as having the texture of dreams – Sebald compares Nabokov's evocation of memories in SM as a séance, in which the readers participate and in which "fremdvertraute Personen und Gegenstände" appear, "umstrahlt von jener *claritas*, die seit dem heiligen Thomas von Aquin als das Kennzeichen gilt einer wahren Epiphanie" (CS 189). Sebald's description of Nabokov's prose anticipates Austerlitz, who, faced with a "fremdvertraut" memory, is bathed in light while having an epiphany that affords clear insight into his past.

Sebald writes about Nabokov's obsessive toiling as a writer to achieve such luminous moments and the struggle to create a kind of levitating prose in "Traumtexturen:"

Solch visionären Augenblicken sich entgegenzuschreiben war auch für Nabokov ein überaus mühevolltes Geschäft. Stundenlang mußte oft an einer knappen Folge von Worten gearbeitet werden, bis der Rhythmus bis in die letzte Kadenz stimmte, die Erdschwere überwunden war und der Autor, selber nun gewissermaßen entleibt, über die prekären Konstruktionen seiner Buchstabenbrücke das jenseitige Ufer erreichen konnte. (ibid)<sup>72</sup>

Again, there is a parallel here between Sebald's description of Nabokov's writing and that of Thomas Browne's, whose lines cause a feeling of levitation in their readers (cf. RS 30), and the metaphor of a word bridge echoes Sebald's comment in the foreword to BU about writing as a life line out of misery – as I have argued, the central motif of *Schwindel. Gefühle*. When Nabokov's succeeds, "treibt man auf der Strömung der fort und fort laufenden Zeilen hinein in ein leuchtendes, wie alles Wunderbare leicht surreal angehauchtes Reich, steht, sozusagen, unmittelbar vor der Offenbarung einer absoluten Wahrheit, 'blendend,' wie es am Ende des *Wahren Leben des Sebastian Knight* heißt" (CS 189-90, italics mine). Here once more, Sebald foreshadows a description of Austerlitz, standing in the strangely illuminated Liverpool Street Station waiting room ("wie ein *Geblendeter*") having surreal hallucinations of labyrinthine proportions and finally a real epiphany. To add another reference to Nabokov, Sebald compares the black and white diamond motif of the stone floor in the waiting room to a chessboard on

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72 It is significant to note that Sebald mixes a metaphor for crossing over or traveling to another side with a metaphor for reaching clarity through writing. Traveling and writing converge and become concomitant in his own texts, and Austerlitz reaches clarity through movement, as his nocturnal walks through London, and his travels to Prague and Paris (and walks in both of these places) exemplify. For him, like other Sebaldian characters, "entgegenschreiben" becomes "entgegengehen."

which Austerlitz sees “das Endspiel” of his life play out (200).<sup>73</sup> Once again, Austerlitz resembles a “Nachtfalter,” mesmerized by the light in Liverpool Street Station like a moth drawn to light, and paralyzed by the implication of his newfound memory. The scene as a whole resembles the magical night of observing moths at Andromeda Lodge. Sebald creates not only a few radiant, magical moments within the darkness of *Austerlitz*, but magical *Nabokovian* moments.

Maar, whose essays on Nabokov Sebald knew well, reads *Pnin* as a balancing act, between humor and metaphysics, between the alienated Pnin and the assimilated narrator V.V.N., between lightness and heaviness, theme and form, and finally between life and death. Maar turns to form to solve the pattern and meaning of the squirrel and concludes that it lies on the hinge between these pairs as an emblem for transformation, or rather, for transcendence. Maar’s fascinating analysis counts the chapters of *Pnin* as mirrored pairs fanning out from a thematic and formal center. Thus chapter 1 is paired with chapter 7, 2 with 6, and 3 with 5, with chapter 4 in the middle as an “axis chapter.” Maar locates in the exact center of chapter 4 a sentence about the spiral of the “solar spectrum,” which he calls “Nabokovs Lebensschiffre,” and which recurs in *Speak, Memory*, where Nabokov visualizes Hegel’s triadic structure as a spiral and concludes: “a colored spiral in a small ball of glass, this is how I see my own life” (SM 275, Maar 223-24). In *Pnin* the spiral statement in the center of the book (and Maar’s calculation is correct) is attributed to Victor’s art teacher:

Among the many exhilarating things Lake taught was that the order of the solar spectrum is not a closed circle but a spiral of tints from cadmium red and oranges through a strontian yellow and a pale paradisaal green to cobalt blues and violets,

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<sup>73</sup> Chess is another of Nabokov’s obsessions, and chess patterns turned into storylines, chess metaphors, as well as references to the game occur in many of his novels.

at which point the sequence does not grade into red again but passes into another spiral, which starts with a kind of lavender gray and goes on to Cinderella shades transcending human perception. (96)

“Cinderella shades” refers not only to Victor’s bowl, an important object in the text and gift to Pnin, which is given the attribute “Cinderella colored,” but, as discussed earlier, also to squirrels. Yet Lake’s statement about a spiral of color and light has further implications, and it offers another connection between Nabokov and *Austerlitz*. The art teacher’s theory draws on a mixture of art and physics, or rather on a melding between an artist’s representation of color and a physicist’s representation of light. Physicists represent the spectrum of light emitted by the sun as a line [with (invisible) infrared on one end and (invisible) ultraviolet on the other, with the colors of the rainbow in-between]. Artists, on the other hand, usually represent gradations of colors on color wheels (the circular shape Lake refers to), with violet used as a transitional color between red and blue. Lake’s visualization of the color spectrum visible to the human eye as “not a closed circle but a spiral” uncoils the artist’s color wheel, or twists the physicist’s line.

In *Austerlitz*, a strikingly similar conflation of physics and art in connection with spirals takes place during Austerlitz’s epiphany in Liverpool Street Station, the epicenter of the book, and, as I have argued, a magical Nabokovian passage. “Andere Strahlen wieder beschrieben merkwürdige, gegen die Gesetze der Physik verstoßende Bahnen, gingen von der geraden Linie ab und drehten sich in Spiralen und Wirbeln um sich selber, ehe sie verschluckt wurden von den schwankenden Schatten,” Austerlitz says of sunrays streaming in (198). Another description of light moving in spirals occurs in Andromeda Lodge, when uncle Alphonso takes Austerlitz and Gerald to observe moths at night. The moths swarm in spiral flight paths, “in tausenderlei Bogen und Schraubenbahnen und Schleifen” (136), and seem to trail spirals of light: “Die vor allem von



Gerald bewunderten Leuchtstreifen, die [die Falter] dabei in verschiedenen Kringeln, Fahrern und Spiralen hinter sich herziehen schienen, existierten in Wirklichkeit gar nicht, erklärte Alphonso, sondern seien nur Phantomspuren unseres Auges” (139). Nabokov’s description of the “solar spectrum” similarly illustrates a paranormal phenomenon, or one that is physically impossible. Lake’s “solar spectrum” in *Pnin* furthermore alludes to the spiral shape of the solar system, as well as to the spiral shape of our Milky Way Galaxy, and others, such as, incidentally, the *Andromeda* Galaxy (which is the spiral galaxy nearest to ours). Approaching *Andromeda Lodge* requires following a spiral path: the train carrying Austerlitz “folgte [...] Schleife um Schleife [...] den Windungen des Flußlaufs” (119). In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov writes that the only way out of the “spherical prison” of time is a spiral, “a spiritualized circle:” “In the spiral form, the circle, uncoiled, unwound, has ceased to be vicious; it has been set free” (SM 275). In *Andromeda Lodge* – the spiral galaxy so antithetical to Austerlitz’s prison-like childhood – Austerlitz is set free, as he is in Sebald’s text as a whole. The color of the light in *Andromeda Lodge*, which dissolves “[i]n einem perlgrauen Dunst,” is akin to Nabokov’s “Cinderella shades transcending human perception:” “es gab nur noch fließende, vom Licht durchpulste Übergänge, ein einziges Verschwimmen, aus dem nur die allerflüchtigsten Erscheinungen noch auftauchten (A 143).

The spiral as the – literally – central motif of *Pnin* connects to the squirrel pattern in chapter 3, where pigeons swirl above a squirrel in a tree. The chapter describes a day in Pnin’s depressing, itinerant life at Waindell College, and his constant contemplation of death and suicide:

An elliptic flock of pigeons, in circular volitation, soaring gray, flapping white, and then gray again, wheeled across the limpid, pale sky, above the College

Library. A train whistled afar as mournfully as in the steppes. A skimpy squirrel dashed over a patch of sunlit snow, where a tree trunk's shadow, olive-green on the turf, became grayish blue for a stretch, while the tree itself, with a brisk, scrabbly sound, ascended, naked, into the sky, where pigeons swept by for a third and last time. The squirrel, invisible now in a crotch, chattered, scolding the delinquents who would pot [sic] him out of his tree. (73)

The spiral-shape of the pigeons' flight-path contrasts to the squirrel's linear movement of dashing across the ground and then up a tree. This image suggests that Pnin-as-squirrel breaks through the spiral pattern. In the end, he does not commit suicide (contrary to Nabokov's initial version of the story) (cf. Boyd 256), but drives into a possibly miracle-filled future, liberated from the drudgery of his small town college existence. The second-to-last paragraph of the text ends with: "there was simply no saying what miracle might happen" (191). Austerlitz's future is equally uncertain, yet also hopeful. He breaks ties with his past by abandoning his house in London to travel to Paris in search of traces of his father. In a symbolic act he gives the narrator first a photograph of Agáta, and later his house key (361, 414). In a sense, both protagonists are set free. "Der Tod ist ersetzt worden durch die Abreise," Maar writes of *Pnin* (220), and Austerlitz also departs alive at the end, unlike the majority of Sebald's other protagonists, who commit suicide. The squirrel is part of the spiral pattern Nabokov designed for *Pnin*, yet upends it (sits in a tree and complains about the stifling pattern, and its creator, i.e. Nabokov). The narrative of *Austerlitz* has a free form, as the text contains no paragraphs, and moves in a spiral pattern. The narrator and Austerlitz meet in Belgium in 1967, but the majority of their meetings take place in London and Paris in 1996-1997. In non-chronological flashbacks the narrative dips from there into each decade of Austerlitz's life (born in the early 1930s), always returning to its

anchor point in the late 1990s. Four asterisks divide the text into five parts (the first three signify a change in location or year, and the last one announces Austerlitz's and the narrator's departure from Paris), and at the formal center of the text lies Austerlitz's arrival in Prague. Within these five sections, only images break up the narrative, which is otherwise a continuous stream of words with little distinction between past, present, and future. Similar to a spiral shape in which "[t]wirl follows twirl, and every synthesis is the thesis of the next series" (SM 275), experiences in Sebald's text seamlessly blend into and associatively engender each other, and the chronology is difficult to chart, as are the narrator's and Austerlitz's spatial and temporal locations within it. The squirrel imported from *Pnin*, where it broke the pattern of the narrative, signals that Austerlitz will do the same, and he does. Austerlitz simply exits the text and its spiral, traveling in his own direction, while the narrator completes its last arc by returning to the beginning in Belgium and initiates a new thematic spiral with the intertext from Dan Jacobson.

*Pnin* refers to squirrels in five different languages (English, Russian, French, Latin, and Greek) (cf. Katsell), to which Sebald adds two German terms (Eichhörnchen and Eichkatzen), and Czech. The squirrel becomes a cosmopolitan time traveler, similar to the dachshund from *Speak, Memory* and the dogs from the "Arnolfini Portrait" and "La déclaration de guerre," a trickster that jumps from Nabokov's childhood and previous works to *Pnin*,<sup>74</sup> to land, posthumously, in *Austerlitz*.<sup>75</sup> Yet like *Pnin* himself, the squirrel motif in *Pnin* is both comical

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74 Some critics have doubted whether the squirrel pattern is indeed meaningful, or whether Nabokov creates the illusion of significance through recurrence. Gennady Barabtarlo and Alfred Appel have suggested that it only serves to draw attention to the presence of a "creator"/author figure (cf. Barabtarlo 154-55). Masing-Delic posits that the peach pit refers to Nabokov's own childhood. In the introduction to *The Luzhin Defense*, Nabokov "states that – together with other gifts, such as his French governess – he 'gave' to little Luzhin 'the kernel of a peach, which he had plucked in his [own] walled-in garden.'" She also points out that squirrels recur as a motif in other Nabokov texts (specifically *Lolita* and *The Luzhin Defense*) (26).

75 A dog also becomes an unexpectedly important companion in *Pnin*. The last image is of the protagonist speeding away in a car with a white dog. Apparently, *Pnin* has adopted the stray dog only referenced in passing in the previous chapter. Incidentally, the color composition of the

and sincere. Nabokov makes the banal appear significant, turning the peach pit in the animal's paw into a metaphor for memory. The peach pit – after all a chewed-up piece of trash – solves Pnin's childhood riddle, but it remains unclear to what end. The trivial question whether the squirrel was holding a pinecone or a nut, and the recurrence of this dilemma when Pnin sees his life flash before his eyes during a seizure, may well signify that Pnin has been looking for answers to the wrong – or insignificant – questions all his life. Squirrels act as tricksters, as when a squirrel cheats Pnin out of the answer to “a simple solution to the universe.” Yet both that Pnin would ever have found such an answer and indeed that any solution to the universe would be “simple” is humorous, as is the interruption of such an important moment by an “ungrateful” rodent asking for a drink of water. Masing-Delic speaks of a “touching comicality” as an “aura that surrounds Pnin in general” (30). In Nabokovian fashion, however, humor is just a breath away from tragedy, and the squirrel marks lost love and lost lives. Similarly, in *Austerlitz*, the significance of the objects in the “Antikos Bazar” in Terezín, bordered on either end by the stuffed squirrel, is both deep and shallow. The objects in the shop window – and in the glass case in the concentration camp Kaunas – are both meaningless junk although they hint at possible tragedy, empty vessels that need to be filled with meaning. They *appear* meaningful but are really an empty gesture, pointing inward towards their own lack of meaning.

The riddle Nabokov presents with *Pnin*, and of which the squirrel is part, according to Maar, is whether death annuls life, or whether the ultimate transformation of life into death annuls their dialectic relationship. The (very Sebaldian) answer, in Maar's interpretation, lies in art, which transforms and transcends existence, spiraling into “Cinderella shades.” The squirrel, which derives from Nabokov's childhood, migrates into *Pnin*, and signifies the transformation of

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half-relief in Sporkova Street, which Austerlitz recognizes from his childhood, is reminiscent of Victor's magical aquamarine Cinderella bowl: “vor einem gestirnten, seegrünen Hintergrund [...] einen blaufarbenen Hund” (221).

autobiography into art. The squirrel is part of the superimposed pattern, yet at the same time its unpredictable movements and actions playfully transcend the pattern, as does the squirrel-like main protagonist. Pnin behaves like a squirrel and a squirrel acts human; a squirrel does not get shot and Pnin does not commit suicide. Austerlitz's questions about the squirrel's meaning, his speculations that it harbors some kind of secret, are also directed beyond the text, an invitation to decode the squirrel pattern in *Pnin*. The recurring squirrels that correspond to Nabokov's text also point to the presence of a pattern and its playful disruption. The lines Sebald underlines or otherwise highlights in Maar's essay "Leuchtfisch und Flunder – Nabokovs Meisterwerk *Pnin*" are few, but all correspond to Maar's analysis of squirrels or Nabokov's designing of patterns "[Das Grauhörnchen] ist nicht gut oder böse, es scheint zweideutig, wie die mythischen Götter" (222), "[Das Eichhörnchen ist] kein plattes Symbol Nabokov verachtete die Flundern des Symbols; er schätzte die Leuchtfische des Emblems" (223), "Pnin hat immer wieder Herzanfälle und immer wieder Visionen von seinen toten Eltern," "Kristallgitter der Form" (226). References to and intertexts by Nabokov manifest in *Austerlitz* as a pattern. The states in which the squirrels appear in *A* mirror Austerlitz's metamorphosis and the process of transformation into art: dead in Terezín, like Agáta, and like Austerlitz's emotions, before his memory resurfaces – as a memory in Prague, symbolizing the memory he regains – alive in St. Clement's hospital, as he recovers – invisible or imagined in the new library in Paris, "immer an der Grenze der Unsichtbarkeit." The last squirrel sighting embodies the power of the imagination. Austerlitz invents squirrels because they fit with his story, suggesting that he can go on to invent a new life for himself.

### III. CONCLUSION

Nabokov's gaze backwards in *Speak, Memory* fixes experiences, suspends them in an idealized past, whereas Sebald's manner of looking in *Austerlitz* is wavering and uncovers tragedy. One remembered experience of doom foreshadows the next, which gives way to another one, which anticipates a fourth until the past becomes a series of interconnected and nesting omens and misfortunes. In contrast, Nabokov draws the curtain taut around each memory he highlights, allowing a telescopically focused portion of a view of the past that is luminous yet tightly circumscribed. There is little left to add, as the author's recollection is so exact that there is no other way of imagining it. Nabokov and Sebald represent two ways of remembering. Whereas Nabokov rose-tints his memories, Sebald embellishes their gloominess. The bleakness and more diffuse recollections in Sebald allow for more embellishments by the reader's imagination. And yet, not looking beyond the glossy veneer of an idealized childhood in Nabokov would be as inadequate as seeing only melancholy and despair in Sebald. Exuberant memories in Nabokov are constantly undermined, as in the passages about his parents' deaths, and they are only possible because of the contrasting undercurrents of sadness. Conversely, moments of happiness in Sebald's narrative are measured out as carefully as glimpses of sadness are in Nabokov. Sebald's narrators exaggerate despair until it becomes a caricature. Austerlitz's recollections of his foster home, for instance, are so miserable that they become like a fairytale's exaggeration of unhappiness, reminiscent of the Cinderella motif in Pnin. There was never an open window in the house in Wales, all doors were always closed and on the second floor concealed a suite of empty rooms, it was always cold and silent (c.f. 70f). His foster mother died "im kältesten Winter seit Menschengedenken" (96). Read side-by-side Sebald and Nabokov complement each other.

The presence of Nabokov in Sebald is a sign that memory has a redemptive quality. Nabokov's tracks in *Austerlitz* lighten the load of melancholy that infuses Sebald's oeuvre with sadness and gloom. Austerlitz has proof of his mother's death and through his search has become her witness, but his father may yet be alive. The closing passage of the text is an indicator that the result of Austerlitz's quest is not a foregone conclusion. In Breendonk the narrator reads *Heshel's Kingdom*, a book Austerlitz gave him in Paris. Similar to Austerlitz, the Jewish author Dan Jacobson visits Lithuania to investigate his ancestors' fate during World War II – a fate he and his immediate family escaped because his grandmother emigrated to South Africa between the wars. Sebald summarizes the plot, and cites from chapter fifteen, describing a concentration camp in Kaunas, Lithuania, where 30,000 people were killed by the Nazis. The majority of chapter fifteen, and Sebald's recounting of it, focuses on Kaunas's bleak memorial site and its bloody past, yet the last paragraph (which Sebald does not mention) recounts the successful escape of sixty Jewish prisoners. The oblique and specific reference of the text's otherwise frustratingly mundane last sentence – “Ich las am Wassergraben der Festung von Breendonk das fünfzehnte Kapitel von *Heshel's Kingdom* zu Ende, und machte mich dann auf den Rückweg nach Mechelen, wo ich anlangte, als es Abend wurde” – suggests the possibility that Max Aychenwald, Austerlitz's father, survived, and if not he, then at least others. Austerlitz himself, for example, now has a future because he has regained his past. Life with sadness, for the last protagonist in Sebald's oeuvre, is livable after all. The open-endedness of this last sentence also suggests, as mentioned earlier, that structurally Sebald ends the text with a new, open-ended spiral. “Traumtexturen” concludes with a page-long passage from *Speak, Memory* that Sebald quotes (in his own translation) in its entirety. In it, a happy recollection Nabokov has of a perfect summer day and his father being celebrated by employees at Vyra by being tossed into the air

turns into the moving memory of a wake, which foreshadows his father's death a few pages later. The sky Nabokov sees his father levitate towards becomes the ceiling of a church, the glow of the summer sun a swimming sea of candles (c.f. 30-31). "Dieses zuletzt ins Komische gewendete Himmelfahrtsbild ruft ein anders herauf," Sebald writes "das schönste, das ihm nach meinem Empfinden jemals gelang." Read with this passage in mind, Sebald's own writing and characters are cast in a different and more hopeful light. Sadness, Sebald seems to imply through Nabokov, does not preclude beauty, and even a memory of pain can be intertwined with a memory of joy.

Apart from the light-filled memories of Andromeda Lodge, one scene of Austerlitz's childhood in particular stands out as a Nabokovian moment of remembering. The scene functions as a bridge, connecting Austerlitz's pale past to colorful memories, and thus as a transition between ignorance and knowledge. Věra tells Austerlitz how his four-year-old self used to delight in the ritual of watching, from the kitchen window of Věra's apartment, the neighbor, a hunch-backed tailor, eat his dinner. A vicarious memory at first, Věra's narrative triggers and imperceptibly blends into memories of his own: "diese und andere Bilder mehr [...] reihten sich nun eines an das nächste, und so tief versunken und verschlossen sie in mir gewesen sind, so leuchtend kamen sie mir während des Hinausschauens aus dem Fenster nun wieder in den Sinn" (229). Similar to the memories of Andromeda Lodge, color sets the passage apart from Sebald's usual drab and gray settings: geraniums on Věra's windowsill, the garden below filled with sweet-scented lilac, the yellow façade of the tailor's house, the green cloth of his sewing table. The scene has a quiet sweetness and a completeness that is reminiscent of passages in *Speak, Memory* and that underscores the possibility that, like Pnin's, Austerlitz's future is possibly filled with miracles as well. Austerlitz not only goes on living, but wants to find his old girlfriend and his father: "[ich] werde also weitersuchen nach meinem Vater und auch nach Marie de Verneuil"



(414). He departs for the Pyrenees to search for traces of his father in the concentration camp Gurs, following “a Vorahnung [...] daß er dem Vater sich annäherte,” initiating his own open-ended spiral and thereby disentangling himself from his mouthpiece, the narrator (411). Happy memories foreshadowing hopeful endings represent a significant departure from *Die Ausgewanderten*, whose four emigrants die (three of whom by their own hand); In *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, as I have argued, hope is textual and the narrator’s apocalyptic dream vision of utter destruction is transformed into an intertextual exercise. Stendhal and Kafka die of diseases but the end is, ultimately, hopeful. *Die Ringe des Saturn* peters out, citing all the bad things that happened on a single date in several different years, and ends on a wistful image of the forever-lost beauty of the world. With *Austerlitz*, however Sebald reconnects to the hopefulness of the “Buchstabenbrücke” created in his first prose text.

## APPENDIX 2



beispielsweise in *Das wahre Leben des Sebastian Knight* an der Stelle, wo der Erzähler V. im Gespräch mit Sebastians Studienfreund in Cambridge das Gefühl hat, der Geist seines Bruders, um dessen Geschichte es ihm geht, bewege sich durch das Zimmer im Widerschein des im Kamin flackernden Feuers. Die Szene ist natürlich ein Echo aus der Gespensterliteratur, die im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert im selben Mass florierete, in dem die rationale Weltansicht um sich griff. Solcher Versatzstücke hat sich Nabokov mit Vorliebe bedient. Da gibt es Staubwirbel, die über den Boden kreiseln, unerklärliche Luftzüge, seltsam irisierende Licht-

effekte, mysteriöse Korrespondenzen und seltsame Zufallsbegegnungen. So findet sich V. im Zug nach Strassburg einem Herrn namens Silbermann gegenüber, der im Abendglanz zu einer undeutlichen Silhouette verschwimmt, «als der Zug immer weiterfuhr, geradewegs in den Sonnenuntergang hinein». Silbermann ist von Berufs wegen Reisender und gehört zu den unruhigen Geistern, die die Wege der Erzählfiguren in den Büchern Nabokovs gern kreuzen. Als V. die von Silbermann an ihn gerichtete Frage, ob er selber auch Reisender sei, bejaht, und als Silbermann weiter wissen will, in was genau er denn reise, da gibt

The photograph from the Zoological Museum St. Petersburg as originally published in  
*Du* Nr. 6, 1996, p. 23.

### CHAPTER 3

#### Landscape with the Fall of Icarus: W. G. Sebald's Suffolk

“Als Trost bleibt  
das Unglück anderer Leute  
[...] Prosa aus dem letzten  
Jahrhundert,  
[...] und längere  
Aufenthalte am Fenster.”  
(W. G. Sebald)

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Within the arc of Sebald's oeuvre, his third prose text, *Die Ringe des Saturn* (1995), presents a detour. Whereas SG reflects its intertexts as an uncanny doubling of originals, and AW and A complexly refract the influence of forerunners, intertexts in RS function as coordinates on a geographical grid, through which the narrator reconstructs history.<sup>76</sup> Styled as a travel journal that recapitulates the narrator's journey on foot through the East Anglian county Suffolk on England's east coast, RS uses local geographical cues to link to intertexts and Britain's imperial and colonial past. Reaching from Sir Thomas Browne to contemporary (20<sup>th</sup> century) events, and from Africa to China, the global and temporal scope of this text is larger than in Sebald's other prose works. RS is also Sebald's saddest work, and the narrative voice is more melodramatic. With no trickster figure like Nabokov to lighten the mood, as in AW and A, no Kafkan ghost or carnivalesque element to break the gothic setting as in SG, and no tongue in cheek revelations about imbedded forgeries, the text seems entirely under the melancholy influence of the planet Saturn and devoid of self-referential postmodern humor, depicting a narrator overwhelmed by a history of disasters. And yet, the text is not without playfulness, which becomes visible on a

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76 For the importance of grids as an organizing system in RS, cf. Gray "From Grids to Vanishing Points: W. G. Sebald's Critique of Visual-Representational Orders in *Die Ringe des Saturn*" (throughout).

structural level. In RS, Sebald juxtaposes the 19<sup>th</sup>- with the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, and within the tensions of this juxtaposition lie the text's most intriguing questions. Also juxtaposed in RS are labyrinths as places that obscure vision and elevated places close to the sun that afford an overview. Yet the path out of past predicaments does not necessarily lead to enlightenment, and progress causes destruction, a process which is underscored throughout the text by allusions to the Icarus myth.

While RS continues the theme of traveling and walking Sebald began in SG, the frequent references to paintings, and techniques of painting, echo Sebald's first creative work, the prose poem *Nach der Natur* (1988). In RS, Sebald expanded ideas that only found expression in aphoristic form in his "Elementargedicht." RS was published between AW and A, but resembles NN more so than either of the two. The ambiguity of the title itself – "After Nature" both in the sense of representational art and what remains after ecological catastrophe – informs the themes of RS: the (un)representability of history and the world ending in disaster. The first part of NN, "Wie der Schnee auf den Alpen," is devoted to the life and art of the German Renaissance painter Matthias Grünewald. The visionary, metaphysical quality of Grünewald's paintings also recurs in the last story of AW, about the painter Max Aurach, who experiences an epiphany while contemplating a work by Grünewald (AW 253-54). Part two, "Und blieb ich am äussersten Meer," re-imagines the arctic expedition of the German naturalist Georg Wilhelm Steller and is a forerunner to the chapters on imperialism and colonialism in RS. The third, autobiographical, part, "Die dunckle Nacht fährt aus," depicts the speaker's attempt to trace the origin of his tendency to melancholy and contains many details that are described at greater length in RS, such as a trip to the "desert" of Orford, images of the English countryside destroyed by the effects of industrialization, as well as allusions to the legend of Icarus. *Nach der Natur* culminates in a flying dream and a view of the world from above that is also the ekphrastic

description of *The Battle of Alexander at Issus*, a painting by Albrecht Altdorfer (1529), which illustrates both the confusion of being enmeshed in the battle in the foreground, i.e. the human present, and the liberation of an overview in a removed painterly perspective – topics Sebald returns to in RS.

References to Browne (1605-1682), whose texts play a central role in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, recur throughout NN.<sup>77</sup> In “Die dunckle Nacht fährt aus,” the speaker says of the ominous hour of his birth “daß der kalte Planet Saturn die Konstellation / der Stunde regierte und daß über den Bergen / schon das Unwetter stand,” suggesting that he was born under a bad sign associated with melancholy (76). In *Religio Medici*, which Sebald incorporates into in RS, Browne writes: “I was borne in the Planetary houre of *Saturne*, and I think I have a peece of that Leaden planet in mee” (Browne *Works* 88). The first page of RS implies that the (also autobiographical) narrator is still under the influence of the planet Saturn, as it refers to the escape from inner emptiness, and gives credence to the superstition “daß bestimmte Krankheiten des Gemüts und des Körpers sich mit Vorliebe unter dem Zeichen des Hundssterns in uns festsetzen” (11). However, the reference to “HundSstern” and also to starting his journey during “die Hundstage” (the dog days) of summer (ibid), comes from an entry in Browne’s *Pseudodoxia Epidemica or Enquiries into very many received tenents and commonly presumed truths*, a humorous work that addresses ignorance about scientific advancements in his time and that demystifies the scientific method. In “Of the Canicular or Dogdayes,” Browne refutes the general “opinion, that during those dayes, all medication or use of Physick is to be declined, and the cure committed unto Nature” (Browne *Pseudodoxia* 352). By embarking on a walking tour, Sebald’s narrator does just that, committing the cure for his emptiness “unto nature” during the

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77 Cf. Gray “Roche Limit” 44-46, “Segues” 34-37, 47-49.

“season [...] commonly termed the Physicians vacation.” That the narrator follows a practice “not only erroneous, but unnatural, and subsisting upon foundations either false, uncertain, mistaken or misapplied” (ibid) casts the outset of the journey in a humorous light, especially as he will cite again from *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* on the last page of the text – or rather, will misattribute a quote to that work. The “pilgrimage” is hence framed by tongue in cheek references, which, similar to the coded hints to Nabokov in *Austerlitz*, signal the trickster quality of intertextual allusions in Sebald’s work – even in RS. Misquotation and Browne are linked in another instance as well. In “Und blieb ich am äussersten Meer,” Sebald describes Steller’s silent trade with an Inuit village, where he left behind, among other things, “ein Fetzchen bucharische Seide” (55). This is reminiscent of the archeological artifacts Browne describes in *Hydriotaphia. Urne-Buriall. Or, A Brief Discourse of the Se-pulchrall Urnes Lately Found in Norfolk* (1658), and the narrator’s question: “Das purpurfarbene Fetzchen Seide aus der Urne des Patroklos, von dem [Browne] berichtet, was also bedeutet es wohl?” (RS 39). Browne, however, creatively embellishes the *Iliad* and sneaks purple silk around an urn which Homer had merely wrapped in linen (cf. footnote 107 below). In Sebald’s rendition, the silk covering turns to a scrap (“Fetzchen”) from within the urn, perhaps to better align the passage with his scene in NN. Instances of falsification in RS, similar to A, suggest that Sebald’s third prose text is more playful than given credit for.

In RS the narrator looks at his surroundings from the ground and the vantage point of a pedestrian, which stands for a subversive reading of history from the bottom up. But the text contains numerous tensions that call into question the repeated attempts to examine the past by focusing attention on what is usually omitted. These tensions are epitomized in the near constant juxtaposition of high and low, both literal and metaphorical. The narrator’s travels close to the

ground are often disorienting and he laments a lack of overview. Conversely, the view from above and a static painterly perspective are described as liberating, as many have pointed out (Albes, Gray, Hutchinson). In addition to thematizing the fear of loss of perspective (Strathausen), *Die Ringe des Saturn* enacts an uncertainty about where to place the origin of one's gaze – close up or far away, in the past or in the present – and shows that both ways of seeing have their disadvantages: one risks entanglement and the other a totalitarian point of view. According to Richard T. Gray, “Sebald’s text is structured by [a] dichotomy between exaggerated, obfuscating proximity and the clarity of distance” (“Grids” 519). Distance, however, does not necessarily provide clarity, but rather a detached, imperial view that invites categorizing the world into organized systems, superimposing grids and structuring views along vanishing points, as Gray has convincingly argued. Throughout the text, the narrator stresses the importance of maintaining an overview and flees the ground, seeking out elevated places and the aesthetic of Romantic landscape paintings – a god-like view from above towards the horizon, a “weit aufgefächerter Himmel, große grenzenlose Wolke.”<sup>78</sup> However, how to gain insight into the character of things from above continually eludes him. The question arises if Sebald envisioned a “middle ground” between the two extremes of far away and up close and if *Die Ringe des Saturn* suggests a point of view that actually allows us to see clearly.

The first tension in *Die Ringe des Saturn* is that the alternative history attempted in the close examination of past disasters and their impact on the countryside and its inhabitants is told through the story of the gentry. While walking, especially in the English Romantic tradition mimicked in the “English pilgrimage” *Die Ringe des Saturn*, can be a form of social “lowering”

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. Sebald’s marginalia in James Hamilton’s Turner biography (226). Sebald marked the text throughout, with attention to Turner’s techniques, work philosophy, and eccentricities – the same aspects that interest him in the memoirs of authors he includes in his prose texts. The habit of marginal note writing in itself was a Romantic pursuit (cf. Jackson throughout).

or leveling, the text exclusively describes estates of the rich and edifices of power and never uses the lowered point of view gained by walking for a true reversal of perspective.<sup>79</sup> This mimics the process of historiography, which necessarily relies on written materials and excludes or marginalizes those who left behind fewer traces. Contrary to *Die Ausgewanderten*, which places the fate of ordinary people in the spotlight, thus saving them from being forgotten, *Die Ringe des Saturn* portrays the decay of nobility. Although *Die Ringe des Saturn* contains many overtures towards viewing history, especially the history of (the British) empire, from the perspective of the destruction caused by colonialism, trade, industrialization, and capitalism, ordinary people remain obscure victims of historical blind spots, their stories “unrecounted,” like those of the Indian dancers from Brazil who performed at the Mauritshuis in The Hague in 1644 and then vanished without a (historiographical) trace (103f). Walking in RS is a stylistic and aesthetic choice rather than a pilgrimage. Such pilgrimage as there is happens only to the “shrine” of other writers, who compel the narrator to visit specific locations in the first place. However, in writing Sebald turns this around and it seems the narrator associatively discovers why a place is important in retrospect through literary forerunners. The first section of this chapter, “Walking,” will explore to what extent the narrator’s peripatetic journey in the tradition of British Romanticism brings him closer to – or removes him further from – the terrain he wanders through.

The main tension is the text’s focus on colonialism and British imperialism on the one hand, and the stereotyping of races and cultures other than the narrator’s own on the other hand. The critical tone used to describe colonial endeavors furthermore clashes with the emphasis on an imperial view from above. Colonial territories such as “the Congo” and imperial spaces such

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79 The subtitle of the German edition, “Eine Englische Wallfahrt” (an English pilgrimage), was omitted in the English translation.



as China are not walked through at all, and remain loci of the imagination, recreated through texts of exclusively European origin (such as Conrad and Casement). The white spots on the map of Africa are still present, as nowhere are they filled in to give a contemporary picture. The crash course in Chinese history as retold in *Die Ringe des Saturn* takes on a fantastical tinge and remains inaccessible. Sebald's narrator does not even textually venture beyond the borders of the known and remains instead in a familiar Western European world. Contact with foreigners only occurs in a hybridized space, in the immigrant quarters of European cities, which are portrayed as threatening or grotesque. Stereotypical representations of otherness perform an imperial view and threaten to overshadow the text's concern with the legacy of colonialism. In RS, the diffuse images of foreign spaces created through intertexts frequently segue to allusions to deserts and caravans, which simultaneously stand for exoticism and a romantized notion of nomadism and a dystopian, arid world "after nature." Whether Sebald speaks in the voices of others, such as Joseph Conrad, to recreate or critique colonial and imperial ventures will be analyzed in two subsequent sections, "Africa" and "China." These are followed by "Deserts," which gives an overview of desert images in RS and shows that they are visual rather than textual escapist fantasies.

A third tension is the emphasis on nature, corporeality, and the physical on the one hand, and on texts on the other. Similar to the "Cartesian gaze" of the participants in Dr. Tulp's anatomy lesson in Rembrandt's painting, the narrator's gaze is not so much directed at human suffering but at a history composed of texts. In this instance as well, *Die Ringe des Saturn* seems to favor a view from further away, and representations over bodies. John Beck remarks that "Sebald's stress is on the priority of the imagined over the 'truth' of empirical observation" (88). In concordance with the problematic relationship to the corporeal, *Die Ringe des Saturn* devotes

more space and more sympathy to the decay of nature and architecture and the plight of animals than to human suffering. Throughout RS, the symbol of ecological catastrophe is a lack of birds and birdsongs. The death of herrings, tortured in the name of science, is deplored as a “Leidensgeschichte einer ständig von Katastrophen bedrohten Art” (74). The fate of humans vanishes in the ecological gaze and the foreshadowing of a dystopian future devoid of life. Only artists as individuals engaged in creation rather than destruction are exempt from being glossed over or held accountable for rendering the planet unlivable: architects, painters, but most of all writers, whose biographies provide the coordinates on the text’s grid, and whose worlds of simulacra are easier to navigate than messy reality. The vision of apocalypse in SG follows its Biblical model in so far as it describes an ending that leads to a new beginning. In RS, however, only a dystopian future is envisioned. In “Il ritorno in patria” Sebald uses intertexts by Peter Handke to weave an optimistic outlook into his narrator’s textual dreams. RS does not have such an intertextual “prophet.” The book’s penultimate chapter, which describes the effects of elm disease and the aftermath of a hurricane that destroyed millions of trees, presages a silent and barren earth (315-19). The last chapter of the text describes the inhumane working conditions of 19<sup>th</sup>-century weavers but parallels it with the fate of silkworms. The last section of this chapter, “Bodies,” describes the desire to overcome physicality in RS as a yearning for taking flight to achieve a view from as far away as possible.

By foregrounding the history of landowners, presenting a romanticized reading of colonialism and imperialism, and exaggerating the narrator’s disconnection from corporality, *Die Ringe des Saturn* transposes a 19<sup>th</sup>-century point of view into the late 20<sup>th</sup>-century. In an interview after the text’s publication Sebald described this aesthetic choice – and indeed central structural device – for *Die Ringe des Saturn* thus:

Der Klang des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts [wird] nochmals evoziert [...] Es ist so etwas wie eine leicht nachvollziehbare Repräsentation dieses Zivilisationsbruches, der ja wohl um 1900 eingetreten ist. [...] Es ist wahrscheinlich ein Versuch, diese zwei Jahrhunderte stilistisch und inhaltlich gegen- und miteinander zu konterkarieren.<sup>80</sup> (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 11/22/1997)<sup>81</sup>

The resulting clash between tones – one elegiac and nostalgic, one bitter and jaded – creates a conflicted narrative stance, which lies at the heart of the tensions within this text. Sebald's stated attempt to let the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century fight for dominance in RS also explains the recurring shifts of perspective. The switching of point of view between up close and far away becomes an expression for the uncertainty in which time period the narrative voice is rooted – the past or the present, the 19<sup>th</sup> century or the late 20<sup>th</sup>. At its best, the pilgrimage into the long 19<sup>th</sup>-century performs a sort of anti-Grand Tour, reaching an anti-sublime overview of the past to demonstrate that universal knowledge is unattainable, and that much of history is unknowable. Yet the switching between points of view, a postmodern, fragmented presentation of associative vignettes on the one hand, and a romantic aesthetic on the other, is obfuscating. More often than not, the text's engagement with colonialism as well as with the disparities between poor and rich, remains stuck in emulating a 19<sup>th</sup>-century sensibility without enough of a counterpoint. The text grapples with the question how to walk through and understand a geographic, intellectual, and historical post-imperial European landscape. However, the low points of the journey undermine finding a coherent answer to those questions. The narrator's racism and ablism, the absence of

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80 The term Sebald uses, "konterkarieren," literally means to thwart or foil. Yet he also speaks of "konterkarieren" the 19th and the 20th century "gegeneinander und miteinander" (against and with each other), an unusual usage that suggests he understood the term not only in its meaning of violent opposition that renders something futile, but as a form of comparison. A better translation might be "to counteract," but then it still remains unclear which century is used as an "antidote" to the other, unless they function as a mutual antidote.

81 Cf. also Hutchinson 40.

those whom history destroyed (apart from nature and buildings), filtered through a fussily subjective narrative voice are enhanced by a tone of imperial nostalgia. At its worst, the text is part of the legacy of colonialism and cannot transcend the parameters of critique it ostensibly employs. The attempt to juxtapose the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, to pit them against and enmesh them with each other, creates moments of insight, ranging from melancholy to acerbic, into the way our modern-day miseries – wars, genocide, migration and failed immigration, economic decline – are a result of the past. Yet for Sebald “evoking the tone” of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century often leads to the warped view of nostalgia and not the clarity of distance, whether temporal or spatial.

## II. WALKING

Sebald evokes the tone of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century in *Die Ringe des Saturn* by constructing its narrative frame with Romantic building blocks and around 19<sup>th</sup>-century figures. The narrator is modeled on a Romantic hero, a melancholy pilgrim and outsider figure who is mistaken for a vagrant on his walk (209), and who flees from the petrified “graue Einöde” (gray wasteland) of the city to embark on an edifying and reinvigorating walking tour through the countryside (13). One purpose of the journey, as it unfolds, is an aesthetic pursuit, namely examining the terrain for connections to intellectual history, most notably other artists’ memoirs and autobiographies. (As always in Sebald’s texts, letters, diaries, and journals are given preference over – or at least stand on equal footing with – fictive materials.) The Romantics, too, walked to flee the city, and to satisfy aesthetic curiosity. 19<sup>th</sup>-century British artists thus encountered are William Turner, Edward Fitzgerald (whom Sebald also mentions in NN), and Algernon Swinburne, as well as Joseph Conrad, who, although Polish by birth, lived in Britain and wrote exclusively in English. Triggered by the narrator’s itinerary, the text also discusses other British individuals connected

to Suffolk who wrote about travels, such as Roger Casement (the Casement Report about the Congo Free State) and Charles George Gordon (diary about the Taiping rebellion). Swinburne, Casement, and Conrad are furthermore figures who span the 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-centuries, thus enhancing the fin-de-siècle theme of the text. Sebald also devotes part of a chapter to the French Romantic Chateaubriand, who spent years of exile in England. In addition, *Die Ringe des Saturn* refers indirectly to at least one Romantic poet, via Swinburne's recollection of "Khubla Khan" by Coleridge. The uncovering of forgotten artists is also a Romantic pursuit: Browne was rediscovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Coleridge and others.<sup>82</sup> During the journey, the hero's encounters with nature are both terrifying and soothing. He strives for a sublime overview and contemplates ruins. The solipsistic view from the top and the narrator's lonely individualism inherent in such a perspective are expressed in a focus of the narrative voice on itself, e.g. in long, indignant soliloquies about the lonely traveler's misfortune, such as being served bad food, or having to stay in shabby hotels (57-58, 295). The text is permeated by a negative stance toward industrialization, which goes hand in hand with yearning for a (re)turn to nature and simpler times.

Woven into these romantic motifs – or rather foiled by them, if Sebald's phrase is to be taken literally – is a distinctly modern, 20<sup>th</sup>-century experience. Contemporary aspects that clash with the emulation of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century aesthetic are Sebald's ecocritical ruminations about the destruction of nature, his postmodern nonsequiturs, his frequent references to imperialism, as well as his materialist approach. Nearly every experience, every site, every author is revealed, in a sometimes laconic aside, sometimes extended analysis, to be the product of commercial interests. Throughout the narrative Sebald references the spoils of imperialism and colonial

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82 Cf. Preston 263-70.

exploitation. Sir Thomas Browne, we hear, was the son of a silk merchant, which (so the implication goes) influenced his biography and privileged path to knighthood. Silk is one of the key themes of the text, a material Sebald traces from its genesis and origin (silkworm cultivation in China) along trade routes to consumption by the Western world and sericulture experiments by the Nazis. As for Romantic writers, nature becomes a system of signs in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, but in Sebald's decoding the countryside reflects mostly the depressed state of the region and its inhabitants, as well as its contamination by industrialization and pollution. Postmodern associative elements interrupt Sebald's ruminations on history and biographical summaries of other writers' lives. He mentions, for instance, that Kafka's uncle met Joseph Conrad, a fact that is not relevant to the story, and indeed only relevant insofar as Sebald was obsessed with invisible networks connecting disparate objects, people, and epochs (as well as with Kafka and coincidences).

Whereas *Die Ausgewanderten* is concerned with fleshing out individual *Schicksale* (destinies) against the backdrop of world events, and foregrounding the particular over the general, history in *Die Ringe des Saturn* is presented in broader sweeps. The first line of the text specifies that the journey takes place in the *Grafschaft* Suffolk (county), emphasizing how ownership is inscribed in the map of Great Britain, and the text proceeds to detail the decline of nobility. The dilapidation of manors is a recurring motif in Sebald's prose, as is an emphasis on ruins in the tradition of the picturesque.<sup>83</sup> In NN, the speaker mentions moving to Manchester and taking a room "zwischen den Ruinen aus dem letzten / Jahrhundert" (83). The ruins of fortifications in *Austerlitz*, while not fitting into the category of picturesque predilection, also fascinate the narrator. The former glory of Somerleyton, although the narrator calls the estate a

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83 Examples are the Midland hotel in "Max Aurach" (348-50), the resort towns Deauville and Trouville in "Ambros Adelwarth" (171-178), the Selwyn estate in "Henry Selwyn" (7-22), and the Palace Hotel in the Marienbad episode in *Austerlitz* (300-311).

“letzen Endes aus lauter Absurditäten bestehende[r] Besitz” (49), is described in wistful terms, and its architectural decline is romanticized. In Ireland, the deterioration of the Ashbury house is mourned in similarly elegiac terms (259f). Mrs. Ashbury and her three daughters, leftover gentry who lost their wealth during the Irish revolution, are described as subsisting on an inheritance, incapable of earning a living otherwise. Both passages include views from above, befitting the erstwhile grandeur of the buildings (54, 249). The description of Lowestoft’s former glory as a city that flourished in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is also wistful. The dilapidation, neglect, and destruction of physical structures are obliquely linked to class struggle and colonialism, and yet the main tenor is one of melancholy and loss. On the one hand, the narrator reveals that Lowestoft used to have a pier built of African mahogany planks, and that the “gewöhnliche Bevölkerung” (commoners) could not attend festivities, thereby hinting at class privilege/colonialism. On the other hand, the main authority on the city’s bygone glory is Frederick Farrar, who is part of the upper class and even feels kinship to royalty (62-65). In *Die Ringe des Saturn* even the silkworm’s ascent to elevated spots before forming a cocoon is compared to a rise on the social ladder: “Die Raupe [...] läuft rastlos herum, strebt gegen die Höhe und, gleichsam *die niedere Welt verachtend*, gegen den Himmel an, bis sie den rechten Platz gefunden hat und beginnen kann mit ihrem Gespinst” (326, italics mine). “Die niedere Welt” (the lower world) and its inhabitants are largely omitted in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, as is the impact of economic decline on any but the higher class.

A passage in which nostalgia and critique clash is the narrator’s visit to Somerleyton, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century estate turned into a tourist attraction (43-55). The narrator reaches this tourist destination on foot and through the back door, a fact Christian Moser has called attention to (38). However, the narrator’s description of the architecture and interior decorations are wistful and

rendered in warm colors, and his list of bygone artifacts and goods needed for the upkeep of the manor evoke past splendor. In Lucienne Loh's reading of the Somerleyton passage, Sebald undercuts this nostalgic tone by using what she terms "ironic nostalgia." The narrator later speculates that a former owner might have travelled to Nigeria or Singapore, and mentions "Husarensäbel, afrikanische Masken, Speere, Safaritrophäen, kolorierte Gravüren von einer Schlacht des Burenkrieges" that adorn the walls (49) – details that "foregroun[d] the circuit of trade and industry which lay at the heart of country-manor living [...] [and] underscor[e] rural England's crucial role within the imperial metropolis as well as its dependence on the vast labor circuits of the colonial economy" (Loh 29). According to Loh, Sebald hence "exposes the *myth* underlying notions of imperial history and national heritage" (30). However, even Loh points out that Sebald is not entirely free of un-ironic nostalgia, in the way he "rues" the loss of opulent life and tradition in the estate and concedes that his tone contains some pathos (30): "Und jetzt nichts mehr und niemand, kein Bahnhofsvorsteher mit glänzender Uniformmütze, keine Bediensteten, keine Kutscher, keine geladenen Gäste, keine Jagdgesellschaften, weder Herren in unverwüstlichem Tweed noch Damen in eleganten Reisekostümen" (RS 44). Also, Loh's discussion is limited to a close reading of this one passage and does not consider the tone of Sebald's Africa or China sections, both important for context. To sustain an argument of "ironic nostalgia" throughout the text would be difficult. The country manor, usually seen as a signifier of bygone British glory, and the bucolic landscape of its rural setting, generally regarded as a cornerstone of British tradition, are "blind spots" in the presentation of British history, Loh argues. The visit of Sebald's narrator to Somerleyton, even if approached as a pedestrian, does not do enough to illuminate it from a new angle.



Appropriately for a pilgrimage, Sebald's journey through Suffolk happens predominantly on foot, a mode of transportation that further connects to a 19<sup>th</sup>-century motif and fashion. Moser has read *Die Ringe des Saturn* as following a tradition of literary walking, but mainly continental and within a German context (cf. 41-45). Yet the itinerary of the "pilgrimage" in Suffolk, as well as Sebald's focus on British writers, calls for placing *Die Ringe des Saturn* in the context of the British peripatetic tradition and the origin of the Romantic walking movement. Walking became popular as a pastime in the 1790s, when it lost its stigma as a marker of poverty and became an expression of freedom, independence, and social non-conformism (Jarvis 27). Robin Jarvis locates "oppositionality in the self-leveling expeditions of early pedestrians" (ibid), enhanced by freedom of movement, and distinguishes between three different types of walking: for recreational purposes/as sport, for aesthetic purposes/as contemplation of nature, and for tourist purposes/as sightseeing (19). Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Hazlitt extensively employed walking as a motif in poetry and prose in the 1800s. Paralleling the popular grand tours to Italy and Switzerland, which the Romantic poets documented, pedestrian travel at home functioned as a democratized mini grand tour for the middle class, and served to put the writer/walker on a level with lower classes (cf. Jarvis). The mode of walking literally lowers the pedestrian from coach or horse to the ground and provides an impetus for a sympathetic association with the less fortunate or disenfranchised elements of society, those who cannot afford any other means of transportation and are forced to go on foot.

Sebald's narrators similarly enter the equalizing world of the surface, be it urban pavements or rural roads, as visitors from higher levels of society. According to Margaret Bruzelius, *Die Ringe des Saturn* is modeled upon the conventions of adventure tales in the tradition of Joseph Conrad and Washington Irving (185). A trope of adventure tales is the

behavior of heroes who start their journeys in a moment of idle fancy, stumbling by chance into situations that will change the direction of their lives. However, at the end of the tale, the higher echelons of society are reentered. The storyteller's view of the world from the bottom up is thus temporary. Paradoxically, the act of walking does not bring the narrator closer to the Suffolk of "ordinary" people. Perhaps in keeping with the view of the journey as a pilgrimage, walking is always cast in an ambiguous, and often arduous light. The narrator gets lost, tired, caught in sandstorms. In part one, while setting the stage for recounting the journey, he remembers: "selten habe ich mich so ungebunden gefühlt," and attributes both "schöne Freizügigkeit" but also "lähmendes Grauen" to the act of pedestrian traveling and the impressions gathered in its course (11). Walking puts him "in einen Zustand wachsender Panik" (205) and towards the end of his journey peripatetic travel makes him feel "zugleich vollkommen befreit und maßlos bedrückt" (279), uncertain "ob [er] das einsame Gehen als eine Wohltat empfand oder als eine Qual" (296). In "Die dunckle Nacht fährt aus" the narrator also departs the city for an excursion in the country in the company of his daughter, yet what starts as a peaceful "neue[r] Anfang" soon devolves into a depressing encounter with the deserted landscape and low-hanging, gray skies around Orford. "Kind, sag mir, / drückt dich dein Herz wie mich / meines, Jahr um Jahr / aufgeschüttet von den Wellen / des Meers eine Kiesbank / bis hinauf in den Norden, / jeder Stein eine tote Seele," the narrator asks. Traveling does not provide relief, neither in NN nor in RS. Bruzelius argues that a further feature of adventure tales, which depend on movement and travel, is, paradoxically, stasis. Adventure returns the protagonist and the reader to where (and who) they already were before setting out (185-86). The perspective gained by the protagonist when observing the world from street level neither changes the text's focus on history told through the

stories of the gentry, nor the narrator's return to the higher levels of academia and the comfort of middle-class domestic life.

In RS, landscape provides literary cues that structure topographical prose into a literary atlas. The crags of a coastline, the ridges of the countryside, and the crooked streets of cities become coordinates in a literary topography of Europe. Donna Landry states that from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century “the countryside [was] packaged as a literary phenomenon, a reading experience for urban audiences” (16). According to Landry, walking as a pastime also developed from hunting, an aggressive rather than contemplative interaction with nature. Instead of hunting for animals, walking writers visually consume and appropriate the landscape. “For [them] the palimpsest of tracks trod and views absorbed encapsulated the hoarding of visual experiences they eagerly sought, and sought to disseminate to their readers” (218). Walking becomes a “consumption of landscape [...] – a displacement of hunting by consuming bloodlessly and nonviolently – and an appropriation of nature that hardly left any trace, except in writing” (222). Sebald's narrator similarly consumes the landscape. The countryside provides jumping-off points for his ruminations on history and destruction, and specific places such as towns and buildings are relevant because of the writers who stayed there. For Sebald as well as his peripatetic forerunners, movement functions as an organizing principle for writing, and digressions and associations happen in synchrony with or juxtaposition to the paths taken. Sebald models his peripatetic writing after Benjamin, Handke, and Robert Walser, who have in common a tendency to digress and take topographical phenomena as triggers for (quasi) spontaneous tangents, producing streams of consciousness in reference to landscape (or cityscape) cues. This goes hand in hand with a self-referential awareness of documenting walking, and with grafting semi-autobiographical elements onto a fictive narrative backbone, or vice versa. The “Suffolk”

Sebald walks through is an artificial rather than organic setting that consists of a sequence of cues for associative chains of thought.

What many peripatetic forms of storytelling share is the guiding principle of the aleatory.<sup>84</sup> Walking allows for “chance” encounters and spontaneous shifts of direction, and almost dictates a fragmentary style (Benjamin’s *Passagen-Werk* comes to mind). While “walking [...] is capable of fostering resistance to any idealizing aesthetic tendencies the traveler may start out with,” according to Landry, it “shapes a mentality governed [...] by sequence,” a “progressional ordering of reality.” Pedestrian travelers experience the world “as a sequence or sequences of towns, villages, rivers, roads, paths, hills, vallies [sic], sights, sounds, and so on.” Consequently, “the irreducibility of the line discourages the search for unity and completeness: an acceptance rather than a transcendence, of change and difference is the more likely reward or goal of the committed walker” (69-70). The attitude of Sebald’s narrator towards history and the present shaped by history is, similarly, one of resigned acceptance. The narrative does not provide solutions to mitigating the destruction the narrator sees around him as a byproduct of history, human governance, or natural disasters, but instead describes a status quo, which is not transcended. Without its literary references and quotations, RS would be a sequential travel journal. The narrator walks through the texts of others, sampling pieces as for a travel guidebook to a bygone literary era. Photographs inserted in the text visually expand it and interrupt the narrative flow and sequence of the walk (thus prolonging the experience of reading) while providing a guide to the ranged-over terrain, be it physical (images of the countryside, buildings) or literary (associative images related to the intertexts). In other words, in RS walking functions

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84 Cf. Hankde *Die Wiederholung*, Die *Lehre der Sainte-Victoire*, Robert Walser *Der Spaziergang*, and from within a British writing tradition cf. John Thelwall *The Peripatetic*.

also as a metaphor for intertextual compositions and is hence a structuring principle beyond sequential ordering.

In contrast to the leveling movement of walking, which affords views from close up, stand the frequent moments where the text mimics landscape painting. While walking brings the pedestrian traveler in closer contact with nature, landscape painting elevates and hence distances the gaze. The sequence of the narrator's journey is punctuated by moments of overview. Perspective drawing in painting affords a divine position, placing both the artist and the viewer in the center, and many images in *Die Ringe des Saturn* evoke such a sublime, aggrandizing view. The dichotomy between high and low, ground and sky, the ever-moving perspective gained by walking and the static perspective of a sublime, elevated point of view is set up as early as the third page of the text, when the hospitalized narrator looks down upon the city from a window. Sebald applies the conventions of 19<sup>th</sup>-century landscape painting to the image of a deserted and petrified urban 20<sup>th</sup>-century environment. The narrator "glaubte von einer Klippe aus hinabzublicken auf ein steinernes Meer oder ein Schotterfeld, aus dem wie riesige Findlinge die finsternen Massen der Parkhäuser herausragten" (13). Yet even in this first image of an elevated perspective, which should afford a sense of control, the narrator is paradoxically helpless, as he is on the eve of surgery, and, temporarily crippled by unspecified back problems, had to crawl to the window like "der arme Gregor" from Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. Everything in the city below appears foreign to him. In NN, the speaker describes frequently looking out of the window as a child, also immobilized "mit einbandagierten Händen," and watching nuns move about in a garden, "so langsam [...] / als seien sie vor einem Augenblick / noch Raupen gewesen" (77). The scene presents another static perspective from above that, on the one hand, collapses time and gives insight into evolution, and, on the other, resolves nothing. "Über das, was ich mir

damals ersonnen / [...] bin ich immer noch nicht hinaus,” the speaker says (ibid). Elevation might give the illusion of control but is no guarantee for achieving clarity of vision. Similarly, the aggrandizing aspect of the Romantic sublime, viewed from a 20<sup>th</sup>-century perspective, disintegrates into mannerism.

### III. AFRICA

Similar to SG, the narrator of RS has apocalyptic visions, informed by a view of history in which all human actions have led to ecological disaster, war, and genocide. The inclusion of colonialism is just one among many in a list of transgressions. Colonialism as such is depicted as no more than an inevitable – or at least predictable – step in the trajectory of human atrocities towards a self-made apocalypse. Sebald imbeds multiple references to exploitative imperial trade in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, through which emerges an image of a Europe fattened by material goods such as exotic woods, silk, and sugar. While the descriptions of Europe, specifically Britain, as a hybrid space, laced with colonialism’s exploits and built on wealth obtained by force, open up fissures in the map of European expansion, the vague descriptions of foreign realms paradoxically leave spots on the maps of colonized countries blank. The late 20<sup>th</sup>-century Suffolk that emerges through the pilgrimage of Sebald’s narrator is, like *Die Ringe des Saturn* itself, a dense, intertextually layered space. However, images of China and Africa are filtered through European 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century texts and unspecified history textbooks and remain papery, exotic realms without a present. Consequently, colonialism in *Die Ringe des Saturn* appears more like an affliction of the past, displaced by environmental concerns and overshadowed by the legacy of WW II, specifically the Holocaust. While the tendrils of Britain’s imperial past reach into the present and the desolate state of the Suffolk coastline appears as a

long-term consequence of overseas exploitation, its effects on modern China, for instance, are not charted. Likewise, the “Kongo” of the present (or Zaire in 1995, when *Die Ringe des Saturn* was published) is of no concern to Sebald’s narrator.

The critical stance of *Die Ringe des Saturn* towards colonial exploits notwithstanding, the text is unequivocally and unapologetically told from a Eurocentric point of view. All writers whose biographies are unearthed at the appropriate geographical cues (in Suffolk) are of European descent.<sup>85</sup> Non-European locations are twice removed, filtered through the texts of others. The discussion about colonialism in the Congo Free State is performed by rephrasing and creatively embellishing selected writings by Joseph Conrad and Roger Casement, demonstrating how conceptions of historical and geographical space are generated through texts, and how easy it is to manipulate them. This dichotomy has been remarked on by John Beck, who writes that “[o]n the one hand, the text is clearly contemptuous of a debased contemporary culture of historical amnesia [...] and in favor of a radical skepticism [...] On the other, in defending intellectual labor and textual interpretation, the text appears to favour yet another form of self-legitimised order: the enclosed world devised according to the scholar’s own preoccupations” (81). Paradigmatic for such a closed, invented world (order) is the inclusion of Edward Fitzgerald, whose infamous, orientalized rewriting of Persian poems as *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* for a Victorian British audience remains an example of misrepresentation through adaptation. The narrator of *Die Ringe des Saturn*, however, believes that the quality of Fitzgerald’s “translation” eclipses questions of authorship and foregrounds that the text envisions an alternate history: “[die Verse] verweisen, Wort für Wort, auf einen unsichtbaren Punkt, an dem das mittelalterliche Morgenland und das erlöschende Abendland einander anders als im

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<sup>85</sup> Borges almost qualifies an exception, but he too, though Brazilian by birth, is of European descent.

unseligen Verlauf der Geschichte begegnen dürfen” (238). This attitude of viewing a falsification, which has colored two centuries of romanticized misconception of Persia, is not uncommon for Sebald, who, as I have shown, also creatively embellished Holocaust memoirs and used witness testimonies for fictive texts.

In the context of *Die Ringe des Saturn*, the image of a point too distant to grasp (“unsichtbare[r] Punkt”) at which two cultures converge evokes perspective drawing, as if reading were akin to a view from above, which puts the translator/writer in the divine position of creator. Envisioning an alternate conception of history, which follows a thread begun with references to Browne and Borges’s “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” in the first and third chapter, seems consonant with the appeal of postcolonial critics for the emancipation of postcolonial literature. Homi Bhabha writes that western theories of a nation’s narrative consist of “horizontal homogeneous empty time,” and calls for changing the symbolic structure derived from western nations in postcolonial narratives (303). In revisioning the history of England as intertwined with other, non-European histories, *Die Ringe des Saturn* does attempt an alternate, *transnational* narrative – of Suffolk, that is. A new symbolic structure is built by mixing intertexts, fiction, and nonfiction, and by letting writers contribute to a historical narrative, such as reading Conrad alongside Casement. However, the narrator makes no distinction in tone between, for instance, quoting Browne’s *Museum Clausum*, an article from the *Eastern Daily Press* (81), and the logbook of the guard-ship *Southwold* (116), and seamlessly blends Joseph Conrad’s autobiography and letters with quotations from his fiction. In other words, the fictive is given as much credence and attention as the historical, if not more. Taking Fitzgerald’s process of translating as symptomatic for *Die Ringe des Saturn*, the creative adaptation of reality, here as elsewhere in Sebald’s works, is on equal footing with the rendering of the historical. RS seems to



expand the space of Suffolk by integrating intertexts that reference experiences in Asia and Africa, but the texts are always *about* and not *from* these places. RS is hence a paradigmatic example of Europe's imperial imagination and ideational construction of the world.

The technique of blending the imaginary with the historical, while constitutive of Sebald's intermedial methodology and creative literary historiography, becomes problematic when applied to less accessible realms, beyond the "known," well-trodden map of Europe and its familiar literary representatives. The mash-up of Conrad's autobiography and letters with the story *Heart of Darkness*, which has been remarked on by Anne Fuchs, and, to a lesser degree by Ben Hutchinson turns "the Congo" into a blurry, ahistorical space. To start, "der Kongo," as Sebald's narrator predominately calls the territory, is an imprecise label, which refers at best to the geographic region of the Congo Basin but could designate the Kingdom of the Congo (1400-1914), the Republic of the Congo (between 1970-1991 known as People's Republic of the Congo), or the Democratic Republic of the Congo (known as Congo Free State 1885-1908, Belgian Congo 1908-1960, Republic of the Congo 1960-1964, and as Zaire 1965-1997). While there are many snapshots of the coastline of Suffolk, "der Kongo" is not visually represented at all. Hutchinson, who puts colonialism in *Die Ringe des Saturn* on par with writing as an ineffective purveyor of progress, claims that "Marlowes Kongo-Erfahrungen werden in die Schale von Conrads schriftstellerischen Tätigkeiten geworfen, die ihrerseits von Casements kolonialen Erlebnissen gerahmt werden" (142). This illustrates the "melting pot" aspect of Sebald's venture into colonial critique, which is subordinated to the central focus on biographies, indiscriminately mixes fact and fiction, and sacrifices local specificity and historicity. The "Interdependenz von Lokalkontext und Biografik" in *Die Ringe des Saturn* (Fuchs 98) seems valid only for the narrator's walked-over terrain of Britain's coast, the actual course of his

“pilgrimage.” Whereas Suffolk is enlivened *by* writers’ biographies, the function of “the Congo” is *to* enliven those biographies. Yet colonialism and imperialism – already particular fictions of Western nations, founded on the misconception that foreign territories could be “discovered,” its peoples dominated, its resources exploited – benefit from historical precision and a careful perusing of archives, neither of which are ostensibly present in *Die Ringe des Saturn*. Sebald only cites his literary sources (that is, when he includes citations at all); historical sources are left unnamed, although the passage on the Congo Free State in part five blends Casement’s report with Conrad’s autobiography and novels with one (or more?) unspecified historical textual material(s). This is different than in *Austerlitz*, where Sebald took great care to name his sources of information on concentration camps (the stolen aspects of memoirs notwithstanding). The stakes are higher to correctly represent the Holocaust as a disaster closer to home for Sebald and his readership.

Uwe Schütte rightly points out that Sebald did not reify the Holocaust as a unique event of human atrocity, which “der in *Ringe des Saturn* versammelte Katalog an Massenmorden und Genoziden in China, Irland, dem Kongo, Kroatien, etc.” exemplifies, and quotes from an interview, in which Sebald describes “die von den Deutschen angerichtete Katastrophe” as a logical consequence of European history (Schütte 563), but this stance does not render the foreign realms of China and Africa in RS any less papery and indistinct. One difference between Sebald’s handling of the Holocaust and colonial traumas is that *Austerlitz* and the stories in AW have historic-fictional protagonists who become mouthpieces for Sebald (or his narrators), and a filter for secondary sources (Jacques Austerlitz reads H. G. Adler, for instance, not the narrator of *Austerlitz*). Conrad comes close but is not fleshed out as a character like the writer-personnages Sebald reconstructs in SG (Kafka and Beyle), which also has to do with embedded

intertexts. Sebald (on more than one occasion) imagines Kafka going to the movies, Beyle attending operas, and includes texts they (might have) read and films/operas they (might have) watched as intertexts, such as Grillparzer's diaries, a poem by Ehrenstein, Monteverdi's operas, or Ewers's *Der Student von Prague*, each of which link to a significant overarching theme of the text (doppelgangers, suicide, crossing the alps, art). In other words, in SG intertexts are presented through intertextual personas (e.g. Kafka reading Ehrenstein), but in RS – again corresponding to the image of a flat geographical grid – the biographies of the writers Sebald's narrator "visits" are quoted but do not open up connections to further intertexts. The China section in RS, moreover, entirely lacks a Conrad-like or other intermediary through whom author and readers can create an emotional investment, or an investment in the historical situation or the accuracy with which it is presented. Sebald was a hands-on writer who viscerally researched what he wrote about, with snapshots often providing orchestrated proof of his presence – he went to Terezín, travelled to Bad Kissingen, flew to New Jersey, took the train to Milan. While he did also walk the Suffolk countryside, ironically his other prose texts resemble a travelogue much more so than parts of RS do, at least the Africa and China sections. "Arm chair traveling" does not suit Sebald's intertextual methodology. Perhaps Sebald's different use of intertextuality in RS, and the turn to paintings instead, is explained by the use of a text of his own creation, *Nach der Natur*, and the intermedia (texts, paintings, and personal history) he had created therein, as a primary intertext for RS. Furthermore, the protagonist of RS is the narrator (modeled on Sebald more so than his other works), and the lack of a foil-figure to "konterkarieren" clashing aspects of interpretation in the text might lead to its unresolved tensions.

The focus of part five is on biography rather than history, with Joseph Conrad's life constituting the anchor point. At the end, the excursus on Belgium's colonial terror regime in

Africa transitions to Casement's involvement in the Irish revolution, his homosexuality, imprisonment, and execution, which shifts the focus away from colonialism and towards biography and an individual's destiny for good. Fuchs has persuasively argued that Sebald's blending of Conrad's texts produces a mythopoeic "romantische Geschichtsallegorese" and that the portrayal of Casement as a misunderstood revolutionary is hagiographic (191). Her careful comparison of sources shows that Sebald embellishes and alters the writings of both, fashioning Casement into a tragic-heroic figure, and attributing a kinship between the two men that seems not to have existed in reality (cf. Fuchs 191-205). I agree with Fuchs that Sebald's description of the Congo Free State under Belgian rule is romanticized, and that his strategy – in this text – is, overtly at least, "kein ludistisches bzw. karnevalistisches Spiel." "Die Intertextualität," in her reading, "dient hier [...] keiner postmodernen Dekonstruktion bzw. Parodierung der Prätexte sondern vielmehr der mythopoetischen Überhöhung der erzählten Lebensabrisse" (195) to the end of highlighting the heroism of individuals "gegen die Destruktivität der Geschichte" (196). The question whether part five of *Die Ringe des Saturn* is a postmodern blurring of sources or not is difficult to answer and engenders the larger question whether Sebald deliberately tried to enact a one-sided reconstruction of complex historical events in order to demonstrate the far reaches of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century sensibility into the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. Ironically, although Sebald's narrator laments the history of colonialism as "größtenteils noch ungeschrieben[]," the Africa section in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, although it appears well researched, does not itself contribute to the writing of such a history (RS 143). The section about "the Congo" is not about "the Congo" at all, but precisely about its romanticized reconstruction through limited, embroidered, Western European sources. If that was indeed the point of this section, and Sebald indeed tried to demonstrate the shortcomings of this image, it is a representation without a counterbalance.

While *Die Ringe des Saturn* is concerned with (anti-)colonialism, it is not concerned with post-coloniality, and the colonized spaces are clearly marked as other, almost fantastical foreign realms. “A canon is not a body of texts *per se*, but rather a set of reading practices,” Ashcroft et al. state in *The Empire Writes Back* (186), just as “post-colonialism is more than a body of texts” and “best conceived of as a reading practice” (191). Sebald’s reading practice might be deliberately antiquated, but does not achieve any productive critique on this basis, since it emulates a canon and precursor archive untouched by (post)colonial critique. Bruzelius’s argument that *Die Ringe des Saturn* operates in the tradition of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century romance is once again compelling. If *Die Ringe des Saturn* imitates an ossified western perspective on colonialism, which is stuck in regarding the foreign as exotic, as a canvas for projecting desires of adventure and escape, then it imitates it too well to be read as a critique. Illustrative of the tendency to read Europe’s colonial destruction as primarily a loss for the Western imagination, and a loss of terrain for potentially enlightening experiences for Western Europeans, is a quote from *Tristes Tropiques*, which according to Hutchinson functions as an intertext for *Die Ringe des Saturn*:

Nie wieder werden uns Reisen, Zaubertruhen voll traumhafter Versprechen, ihre Schätze unberührt enthüllen. Eine wuchernde, überreizte Zivilisation stört für immer die Stille der Meere. Eine Gärung von zweifelhaftem Geruch verdirbt die Düfte der Tropen und die Frische der Lebewesen, tötet unsere Wünsche und verurteilt uns dazu, halb verfaulte Erinnerungen zu sammeln. (Lévi- Strauss 31, Hutchinson 139)

Sebald’s romanticized portrayal of Africa idealizes the men who traveled, represented, and fictionalized it and turns the historical into the hyperreal. As in “Tlön,” the cartography of “the

Congo” that emerges replaces an existing map with an imaginary one, only that the map of “the Congo” has always already been blank in the Western imagination.

The skewed 19<sup>th</sup>-century sensibility of Sebald’s narrator towards colonial spaces is noticeable for instance in the antiquated language used to describe them. Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* becomes the impetus for referring to (some place in) Africa in the Somerleyton scene as “[das Herz] des schwarzen Kontinents” (49). Sebald integrates Marlowe’s quote “[Africa] had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery – a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness” in modified form into RS (Conrad 9). “*The white patch had become a place of darkness,*” he writes and continues to say that the exploitation of “the Congo” was one of the darkest chapters of colonialism. Beyond literary reference, such overused equations of the color black with the impenetrable, frightening aspect of Africa invoke precisely the vocabulary of systems that are otherwise critiqued in *Die Ringe des Saturn*. Europe and the Middle East figure respectively as “Abendland” and “Morgenland” (238) and the Arabic-speaking world, including North Africa, as “Arabien” (113). Dark-skinned people are called attention to and are hence singled out in many of Sebald’s works.<sup>86</sup> Wandering through the formerly grand rooms of the estate Somerleyton, Sebald’s narrator loses his sense of place, time, and perspective: “Tatsächlich weiß man [...] manchmal nicht so recht ob man sich auf einem Landsitz in Suffolk befindet oder an einem sehr weit abgelegenen, *quasi extraterritorialen* Ort, an der Küste des Nordmeers oder im Herzen des schwarzen Kontinents” (49, italics mine). The term “extraterritorial” implies a dualistic view of the world as consisting of mapped and accounted-for spaces, and those that are unclaimed (by Europeans, presumably), far-flung, like “the Congo.” Contrary to assertions about Sebald’s postcolonial awareness (cf. Albes, Zilcosky),

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. Schwindel. *Gefühle*. 276, 283, *Nach der Natur* 78, *Die Ausgewanderten* 241-42, *Campo Santo* 36.

locations such as Africa or China are depicted as exotic and marginal, much as they would have appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Albes's assertion that Sebald treats "die äußerste Peripherie in Gestalt der Länder Kongo und China" as central in *Die Ringe des Saturn* begs the question why these locations continue to be regarded as peripheral in the first place, and betrays her own Eurocentric point of view (289).

#### IV. CHINA

Similar to the Africa section, Sebald's China in part six is partially reconstructed from sources by two European figures, albeit less well known ones. The only sources cited for the entire section, which is ostensibly filled with dense historical facts, are Major General Charles George Gordon (1833-1885), probably *Gordon's diary of the Taiping rebellion* (1890), and Baptist missionary Timothy Richard (1845-1919), likely *Forty-Five Years in China* (1916), although neither text is mentioned in *Die Ringe des Saturn*. Specifically, Sebald's narrator turns to these two men as authorities on the Taiping rebellion and the repercussions of government policies on the population, citing Gordon twice (175-76) and Richard once (181). Where the information about empress Tz'u-hsi and her court derives from is murkier. By contrast to the Chinese history lesson poor in traceable sources, the French and German efforts to cultivate silk worms from the Renaissance to the Nazi regime in part ten are corroborated by references to book titles and films, and even by images depicting the books' covers (329, 346). China's last empress (regent, to be precise), whose life Sebald's narrator recounts, is a controversial figure, and Western biographies of her life and court have a fraught history. For decades, Sinologist and linguist Sir Edmund Backhouse's *China Under the Empress Dowager* (1910), which depicts the empress as a ruthless and cruel woman, was the main source of information on the latter period of the Qing

dynasty.<sup>87</sup> However, Backhouse used forged sources (or possibly forged them himself), basing his account on the fake diary of high court official Ching Shan, and furthermore fabricated extravagant stories, such as his own sexual exploits with the empress. Backhouse's biographer Hugh Trevor-Roper provided proof of Backhouse's forgeries and other fraudulent acts in "The Hermit of Peking" (1976, first published as "A Hidden Life"). However, Trevor-Roper was infamous in his own way for "authenticating" the forged *Hitler Diaries* in 1983. Trevor-Roper drew from Backhouse's (at the time unpublished) memoir, which included graphic descriptions of his sexual encounters with men, and has recently been accused of homophobia by the editor of Backhouse's memoir, *Décadence Mandchoue* (Sandhaus xii).

The forgery of the "so-called Ching-shan Diary, one of the best-known documents in modern Chinese history," on which Backhouse's (and subsequent) one-sided views of Empress Tz'u-hsi are based, finally seems to have been proved by Hui-min Lo, who wrote in 1991 that "[i]n spite of evidence marshalled against its authenticity, the Diary continues to exercise a wide and undeserved influence, and remains an enigma for many scholars" (Lo 99). The modern view of Tz'u-hsi is less incendiary and more balanced, leaving room to regard her as a competent politician trying to strike a balance between traditionalism and reform at a time of upheaval and change.<sup>88</sup> Whether Sebald used *China Under the Empress Dowager* as a source text remains to be determined, yet his (narrator's) depiction of the empress is certainly concomitant with her Backhouse-inspired early 20<sup>th</sup>-century image. Incidentally, the text's co-author (or rather, its predominant writer), journalist J. O. P. Bland, lived and died not far from Orford, which Sebald's narrator visits in part eight of *Die Ringe des Saturn*. The controversy surrounding the forged

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87 Sterling Seagrave details the influence of the damning image of Tz'u-hsi propagated by Backhouse (11-17, 440-63).

88 Seagrave's *Dragon Lady – The Life and Legend of the Last Empress of China* attempts to rectify T'zu-hsi's image throughout by removing the layers of legend and falsification that obscure her reign.



diary, Backhouse's fabrications, as well as his life as a gay man and flamboyant con-artist certainly constitute topics of interest for Sebald.<sup>89</sup> Again, Sebald paints an outmoded and biased 19<sup>th</sup>-century image of "China" (or rather, of a brief period in Chinese history) by using 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century texts, which invites a reading of this passage as a reenactment of an unreliable historiographic process. On the flip side, the anachronism and one-dimensionality of the representation of "China" call into question the text's ostensible concern with the legacy of imperialism.

People die in numbers and with at once gory detail yet clinical distance in the China section – "zwanzig Millionen Menschen im Laufe von knapp fünfzehn Jahren," "Hunderttausende" (169); "Zwischen sieben und zwanzig Millionen" (181); "Auf jede nur denkbare Weise rotteten [die Taiping] sich selber aus mit dem Schwert und dem Messer, mit dem Feuer und mit dem Strick und indem sie sich hinabstürzten von den Zinnen und von den Dächern" (169). Described in visual precision are the deaths of three Chinese emperors, however, and the funeral procession for one of them. Sebald's narrator again makes use here of a historiographical method that lists numbers in lieu of individual, mostly inaccessible stories, and operates with records of those with the power to create archives: the nobility and gentry. Beck writes that "the exploitation of nature for profit in *Die Ringe des Saturn* is usually figured as mindlessly cruel, and the text's narrator finds examples of nearsighted greed to be synecdoches for the brutality of empire-building" (76). However, the text often puts the plight of human beings and that of animals and the natural world on an equal level. An example is the destruction of the "magical" Yuan Ming Yuan garden by the British and French during the Opium wars, which is described at length and in wistful terms. The emphasis lies on the loss of architectural

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89 Other writers Sebald cites in RS, such as Swinburne, Casement, and – significantly, for the China section, – Charles George Gordon, were gay as well.

and natural beauty, and while the plundering and burning underscore the boorishness of the troops and the futility of such acts of destruction during war, the absence of harm to people in this passage is striking (174). Similarly, the sugar industry is relevant not so much because of the exploitation of slaves but because of its repercussions on the art world (230). Appropriately, the only image included in the China section is one in which nature dominates, enveloping the three figures (empress Tz'u-hsi, her eunuch Li Lien-ying, plus an unidentified third person) in a forest of what appear to be giant fake flowers, to the point of nearly obscuring them (180).

The China section of *Die Ringe des Saturn* is bracketed by fiction and myth, more specifically by Borges and his description of dragons in *Libro de los seres imaginarios* at the beginning, and the negation of time in “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” at the end. Consequently, the image of China is tinged with a fantastical quality. The trigger for the narrator’s musings about China is a bridge over the river Blyth near Southwold, built in 1875 for a train, which had supposedly been engineered for “the emperor of China” and which bore the emblem of the imperial dragon on its cars. The narrator’s summary from Borges’s *Libro de los seres imaginarios* about dragons sets the tone for China as a mystical, imaginary place, particularly because it blends seamlessly into a history lesson on the opulence and fall of the Chinese court in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Taiping Rebellion, the British presence and military involvement in China, replete with details of barbaric cruelty (167-69). The Chinese throne is referred to as “the dragon throne,” the country as the “kingdom of the dragon” (167, 172). Towards the end of the China section, the narrator speculates that the train had been ordered for the child emperor Kuang-hsu, closing the loop to the beginning of the chapter. After describing Tz'u-Hsi’s death and paraphrasing her last words, Sebald again cites Borges:

Die Leugnung der Zeit, heißt es in der Schrift über den Orbis Tertius, sei der wichtigste Grundsatz der philosophischen Schulen von Tlön. Diesem Grundsatz zufolge hat die Zukunft Wirklichkeit nur in der Form unserer gegenwärtigen Furcht und Hoffnung, die Vergangenheit bloß als Erinnerung. Nach einer anderen Ansicht ist die Welt und alles, was jetzt auf ihr lebt, vor einigen Minuten erst geschaffen worden zugleich mit ihrer ebenso kompletten wie *illusorischen Vorgeschichte*. (185-86, italics mine).

Linking Chinese history to an “illusory prehistory” removes it further from the realm of reality. China is and remains inaccessible to the narrator – and to Western Europeans – yet the image conveyed is still more vivid than that of Africa. China and India in modern literature are often treated respectfully, as the remnants of formerly grand civilizations, whereas Africa appears as “outside history,” an uncivilized negative to the positive of European culture (Ashcroft et al. 157). The framing of the China passage suggests that its purpose is the creation of a fantastical rather than historically realistic space.

## V. DESERTS

In addition to the two chapters dedicated to colonial/imperial territories, which occupy a central position in the text (parts five and six out of ten), representations of foreign spaces and otherness occur reflexively, shortly after or before a recurring motif in Sebald’s text – caravans wandering in the desert, a motif that evokes both nomadic walking and trade routes between Asia and Europe (especially the silk road), and which underscores the preoccupation of the text with commerce. Caravans and deserts are overdetermined in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, as they often also appear in conjunction with a reference to Egypt, evoke homelessness, losing one’s way, or act as

vague vanishing points in a distant space on the periphery of the “known” world (i.e. Europe). Egypt in turn often echoes or precedes Biblical-mythological references to the flight from and to Egypt in both the Jewish and Christian tradition. Deserts and caravans stand in for a foreign, uncanny environment in all of Sebald’s prose texts and provoke or transmit a diffuse image of otherness in a foreign realm, mapping an imaginary geography. Sebald’s uprooted characters often lead a nomadic existence in the liminal space of exile. The desert resists aerial overview and is both the antithesis of a labyrinth and its twin, as it produces a similar disorientation. The desert also stands for nothingness, is nature in harsh, harmful form, and foreshadows the world’s dystopian future. At the same time, analogous to China as a fantastical space, and “the Congo” as colonialism’s *lieu de mémoire* (Fuchs 192), the desert as the site of disorienting and alluring mirages is a canvas for projecting European escapist fantasies and provides romantic images of nomadism and exotic adventures.

The first image of a caravan appears in part three, where fishermen’s tent-like structures on the beach look “als hätten die letzten Überreste eines wandernden Volkes sich hier, am äußersten Rand der Erde, niedergelassen in Erwartung des von allen jeher ersehnten, sämtliche Entbehrungen und Irrwege im nachhinein rechtfertigenden Wunders” (68). The photograph depicting the string of tents on the coast bleeds into the page, as the ocean and the horizon fade into paleness, echoing the narrator’s speculation about the purpose of the fishermen’s position, which is not to fish but to stare into emptiness: “sie werden sich einfach aufhalten wollen an einem Ort, an dem sie die Welt hinter sich haben und voraus nichts mehr als Leere” (69). The image is taken from a cliff or hill and affords an aerial perspective, which foreshadows Ruisdael’s vantage point for the painting *Haarlem with Bleaching Grounds* in the next chapter. The fishermen stare east, and in part six we learn that “der Osten ist gleichbedeutend mit

Aussichtslosigkeit.” Conversely, moving west describes “eine der Grundbewegungen des menschlichen Lebens auf der Erde,” and “[a]uffällig viele unserer Ansiedlungen sind ausgerichtet und verschieben sich, wo die Verhältnisse es erlauben, nach Westen” (191). This statement is illustrated with the colonization of the North American and South American continents, specifically the example of Brazil and the U.S.A, where human habitations still expand westward.

In Brasilien erlöschen bis heute halbe Provinzen wie Feuersbrünste, wenn das Land durch Raubbau erschöpft ist und weiter im Westen neuer Raum aufgetan wird. Auch in Nordamerika wandern zahllose diffuse Ansiedlungen mit ihren Tankstellen, Motels und Einkaufszentren westwärts die Turnpikes entlang, und unfehlbar polarisieren sich auf dieser Achse Wohlstand und Elend. (191)

The point of view is clearly European and not only glosses over Asia and Africa, but begins counting South- and North American history after “discovery.” Collective human experience – “menschliches Leben auf der Erde” and “*unsere* Ansiedelungen” – seems to exclude indigenous populations, as neither North American nor South American native populations turned their backs on the Eastern coast of their respective continents. Puzzlingly, the statement equating the East with “Aussichtslosigkeit” (hopelessness, or literally: a lack of perspective) is imbedded in the China chapter – perhaps in order to illustrate the unviability of imperial projects in Asia. Clearly, the image of the new world painted here – whether factual or not – is not favorable, and westward expansion tantamount to rapacious greed. Similarly, the caravan of silent fishermen, “die letzten Überreste eines wandernden Volkes,” seems like a remnant of western civilization, stranded in a desert with nowhere left to go to fulfill its imperial fantasy and nothing left to hope for but a miracle. In this case, the desert stands for the last refuge of a civilization that has

destroyed itself through greed and the conceit of manifest destiny. Yet Sebald's colonial critique is once again stuck in a Eurocentric point of view, as is demonstrated by the unquestioned dichotomy between East and West, with Europe being the origin of the gaze. The narrator's own perspective does not extend very deeply beyond the perimeter of the Western world, the "äußerster Rand der Erde" the fishermen are sitting on.

The next caravan image, and first desert-caravan-Egypt triptych, appears in part four, which recalls a trip to The Hague and the narrator's experience in an immigrant neighborhood, another "extraterritoriale[] Gegend," that confuses and frightens him (101). Later in the chapter we learn that Diderot called the Netherlands the Egypt of Europe. Above a carpet store, in a rundown building that turns out to house a mosque and that is called *Perzenpaleis* (Persian Palace), Sebald's narrator notices "ein primitives vierteiliges Fresko" depicting a caravan traveling through the desert (100). This image acts as a porthole into an encounter with the other. A photograph records the narrator's gaze from street level to the towering building's roof – the reverse of the earlier photograph of the fishermen. Here the view is up instead of down, from confusing ground to the sky. The gaze is interrupted by an encounter with a Muslim on his way to prayer, "ein dunkelbärtiger Mann, der über einem langen Kleid eine alte Anzugjacke trug" (ibid). A glimpse of rows of shoes in the entryway – metonyms, perhaps, for walking and nomadism – is described as an unforgettable moment and loaded with a significance not further explained. The sense of being dwarfed by a building whose function is hard to determine mirrors the lack of overview and understanding of The Hague, which is unsettling for the narrator. Whereas the contemplation from above led to pronouncements about the fishermen, being on the ground and actually engaging in the act of walking among people is confusing. Several vague markers of foreignness occur throughout the passage. In general, as I will show later, Sebald

rarely gives physical details of people, except of those somehow deformed or not white. People encountered in The Hague are designated as “dunkelbärtig” (100), “dunkelhäutig” and “morgenländische[] Männer” (101). The latter word choice in particular is an unspecific, dated, and orientalist racial marker. The old-fashioned term clashes with the setting, especially as the narrator, passing up various ethnic restaurants, ends up at a McDonald’s, the epitome of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Americanization as a trailblazer of globalization.

Upon this encounter follows a bizarre sighting of a pimp in a gaudy American limousine, an “otherworldly apparition” which mirrors a passage in *Schwindel. Gefühle*. almost exactly. In “Il ritorno in patria,” “ein Neger” (an American GI) with ivory-colored teeth sits at the ivory-colored steering wheel of a purple limousine in W., an image that is described as clashing grotesquely with the Alpine Bavarian backdrop (276). The black man is also inscribed into the last part of *Nach der Natur*, “am Waldrand schaute oft ein Mohr aus einem amerikanischen Panzer” (78). In the scene in The Hague the pimp is wearing a Tyrolean hat and a white suit, blending Alpine setting and the color white as a contrast to the dark environment (101). While the pimp’s race is not specified, the subsequent sentence describes the night’s culmination in a frightening encounter with a dark-skinned man who chases one of his “compatriots” with a kitchen knife. The status of “compatriots” is bestowed on the knife-wielder and his victim because they look foreign. Dark-skinned people are racially marked as “Landsleute” of a country never specified, which elides meaningful distinctions between ethnicities. Whichever region the dark-skinned men originated from is a blurry realm, a “(Morgen)land” that could be anywhere in the world, including of course the Netherlands. The passage is rendered in hyperbole to underscore the narrator’s terror (“langes, blitzendes Messer,” “Augen [die] glänzten vor Mordlust und Wut”) and turns the passage into a grim farce. The narrator of “Il ritorno in patria,”

a boy at the time, has never encountered a black man and therefore assigns to him the identity of Melchior, one of the three Magi, as seen in nativity scenes. The adult narrator of *Die Ringe des Saturn* does not provide a much more mature reaction to an encounter with dark-skinned men, and it remains an instance of alienation. Using terms like “Neger,” although not as loaded in German as in English, and the anachronistic “Mohr,” is problematic in itself. The passage is also significant because of its lack of literary references. Instead, it depicts the Netherlands devoid of literary culture and colonized by foreigners, which creates a confusing mess, like the ironically named *Perzenpaleis*, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century *Bürgerhaus* with peeling whitewash obscuring the windows and an exotic image of a caravan that incongruously conceals a mosque. As the scene set in The Hague demonstrates, ghettoization, hostility, and the clash between cultures are the far-reaching consequences of globalization and colonialism.

In order to resolve this chaos, perspective needs to be restored, and the narrator finds it the next day in the form of a landscape painting in the Mauritshuis, which he visits in search of high culture. Whereas the fresco in the immigrant quarter was “primitive,” the museum houses celebrated European masters, such as Rembrandt and van Ruisdael. Yet looking at Rembrandt’s *Anatomy Lesson* – the reason he travelled to The Hague in the first place – does not provide relief. In Rembrandt’s painting, Dr. Tulp’s spectators are looking without seeing, gazing past the body at an anatomy atlas. The narrator needs a similarly structured perspective to distract him from the proximity of bodies he encountered the night before. Finally he calms down in front of Ruisdael’s *View of Haarlem with Bleaching Grounds*, which seems painted from a bird’s-eye view, an imaginary point “ein Stück über der Welt.”<sup>90</sup> The ekphrastic passage turns both into an art history lesson for the reader and a sublime moment for the narrator, as he imagines that the

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90 For an elucidation about which of Ruisdael’s paintings with similar motifs and titles Sebald is referring to cf. Fuchs 216.



painter could see “alles zugleich” (103). Albes reads Rembrandt’s painting as metonymically transforming into Ruisdael’s (299f); identifying with Aris Kindt’s corpse, the narrator supposedly experiences an “Erlösungshoffnung” in front of Ruisdael’s painting. I would rather follow Gray’s argument that “Sebald’s narrator himself takes flight [from Rembrandt], physically and emotionally, seeking refuge in the artificial, rationalized, carefully mapped representational order that structures Ruisdael’s painting,” and argue that in addition to fleeing “landscapes that enforce involved immersion in their materiality” the narrator flees from the interaction with corporeal human beings, specifically foreigners (Gray “Grids” 519). Rembrandt’s dwarfing canvas and crowding figures, not to mention the corpse, repeat the chaotic, dangerous events of the previous night in the streets of The Hague. Rather than spiritual salvation, *View of Haarlem with Bleaching Grounds* restores a Europe purged – bleached, as it were – of alienating, transgressing bodies: child murderers like Aris Kindt as well as bloodthirsty “morgenländische Männer.”

The image of the “durch die Wüste ziehende Karavane” reappears in the next scene, in which the calmed narrator goes for a walk in search of suburban architectural beauty. However, contrary to his expectations, and Diderot’s assertion about how easy it is to achieve a sublime moment in the Netherlands, he finds only a few “schöne Villen” (104). Shortly after the Diderot/Egypt reference comes an allusion to the Exodus from Egypt. Sebald’s narrator falls asleep on the beach “und glaubte [s]ich zum erstenmal in [s]einem Leben angekommen, zu Hause” (105). Upon waking he feels: “als halte rings um [ihn] her [s]ein Volk Rast auf dem Zug durch die Wüste.” Interestingly, the sensation of having arrived corresponds to belonging to a nomadic tribe. Rather than being stranded without hope like the fishermen, nomad life is romanticized here. An adjacent spa hotel seems like a friendly caravansary, and tent-like

structures in front of it complete the desert image. The scene is presented as an orientalist fantasy and at odds with the harsh reality of the experience in the immigrant quarter. After the disappointing and frightening stay in The Hague, the retrospective excursion to the European continent in RS ends in an aerial view from the plane back to Norwich and a description that continues the romanticized desert image. Concrete locations, such as Newfoundland, Philadelphia, and the Ruhr area are juxtaposed to “die wie Perlmutter schimmernden Wüsten Arabiens” (113). “Arabia” is not only romanticized but another old-fashioned, pre-20<sup>th</sup> century term evocative of myth, vaguely designating an ethnic and religious group in a not clearly delineated geographic space. The seamless transition between the Egypt of the previous desert associations to “Arabia” is also striking. Similar to “Morgenland” it resonates with an orientalist conception of an imaginary foreign space. The narrator’s view of the periphery (everything outside the boundaries of Europe) is blurred, a map filled with white space.<sup>91</sup>

The most poignant caravan/desert image in *Die Ringe des Saturn* occurs near the end of the text, in part eight, when the narrator is caught in a sandstorm on his way to Orford, an incident already announced in one of the subheadings, “Durch die Wüste.”<sup>92</sup> The passage exaggerates again the juxtaposition in the text between a liberating overview from above and the unsettling and disorienting state of being on the ground without a view and hence without an outlook – as his field of vision shrinks and is finally lost in the whirling sand, space becomes constricted. Finally the narrator crawls out, “der letzte Überlebende [...] einer in der Wüste

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91 Deserts and caravans paired with references to Egypt also appear in “Max Aurach” and “Ambros Adelwarth” in AW, and in *Austerlitz*, where the motif is more closely linked to the forced nomadism of displacement and exile. The “Wadi Halfa” passage in “Max Aurach” in particular epitomizes how firmly rooted in a Western European sensibility indeed all of Sebald’s narrators are (AW 240-43). Like the scene set in The Hague, this passage (which also features a “primitive” painting of a caravan), resounds with racist stereotypes and gives another reading of a European urban center (Manchester) that has failed at integrating its immigrants.

92 Surely it is not a coincidence that *Durch die Wüste* is also the title of an exotic adventure tale by Karl May (1892), as well as its filmic adaptation, the first Karl May “talkie” (1936).

zugrundegegangen Karawane” and observes a quiet earth under a haze of dust “welcher zuletzt übrigbleibt von der sich selber langsam zermahlenden Erde” (273). With the narrator’s stylization of himself as the sole survivor of a catastrophe, nomadic existence seems to have lost all romantic touches, if it were not for the melodrama inherent in this scene. The sandstorm was probably not as dangerous as the narrator makes it out to be. After all, it did *not* occur in the Sahara, but in the British countryside, surrounded by habitation. The narrator’s first action after the storm is to climb to the highest point in Orford and look out over fields and distant sea, restoring a sense of order and control. The inserted photograph underscores the openness this view affords and deepens the contrast to the blinding sandstorm. The narrator reenacts the same technique he described for the Ruisdael painting in The Hague, looking “über die grünen Gärten und blassen Marschfelder [...] bis hinab zu dem nord-und südwärts im Dunst der Ferne sich verlierenden Ufer des Meers” (274). “Blass[e] Marschfelder” is reminiscent of the bleaching grounds. Following directly after the apocalyptic sandstorm, the climbing of the hill also seems to allude to the Biblical Exodus (in particular the Israelites at Mount Sinai), especially since the next station on the narrator’s pilgrimage in part nine is none other than Jerusalem. The miniature temple fuses the two ways of seeing in *Die Ringe des Saturn* as it allows both a view from above, and hence a god-like overview (and a chat with its creator), and a close up that is again chaotic and impenetrable, “[trapping] the beholder [...] in a visual labyrinth” (Gray, “Grids” 516).

The desert needs to be crossed in order to arrive at a new homeland (Jerusalem), but first it leads to an alien and uncanny space. In Orfordness, the insular former military compound and supposed secret weapon test site the narrator visits after the sandstorm, he feels like “[ein] nachgeborene[r] Fremd[e], der ohne jedes Wissen von der Natur unserer Gesellschaft herumgeht” (282) “[i]n einem anderen Land,” as the chapter subheading announces

(unpaginated). The deserted and arid steppe, which, at the time of military testing, was as remote as “die Wüste von Nevada” for the population of Orford, is an indefinable space (277). The island fuses disparate images of “ein unentdecktes Land” (279), “ein[e] geheimnisvolle Insel der Toten” (Hades, complete with ferryman), with a “Chinese Wall Bridge” and a “schwarzes Barackenlager” “in der Steppe” (282-83), while during an earlier visit it had seemed to him “einer fernöstlichen Strafkolonie [gleich]” (278). In addition, Orfordness seems, on the one hand, like an abandoned site of religious worship with “tempel- oder pagodenartige Bauten” and structures that recall “Hügelgräber,” and, on the other hand, like a post-apocalyptic wasteland littered with the debris of progress, such as “Metall- und Maschinenschrott” (281-82). The concatenation of images of foreign realms turns the desert-like space into a catalyst for different projections. The confusing space of Orfordness is not resolved, and similarly, the desert stands for many things in the European imagination. The visit ends with a scene that also piles references from different eras and mythologies onto each other:

Als ich auf den Fährmann wartete [...] brach die Abendsonne aus den Wolken hervor und überstrahlte das weithin sich krümmende Ufer des Meers. Die Flut stieg den Fluß hinauf, das Wasser glänzte wie Weißblech, von den hoch aus den Marschwiesen aufragenden Radiomasten ging ein gleichmäßiges, kaum hörbares Sirren aus. Die Dächer und Türme von Orford, zum Greifen nah, schauten zwischen den Baumkronen heraus. Dort, dachte ich, war ich einmal zu Hause, und dann, in dem immer blendender werdenden Gegenlicht, schien es mir auf einmal, als drehten sich hier und da zwischen den dunkler werdenden Farben die Flügel der längst verschwundenen Mühlen mit schweren Schlägen im Wind. (283)

Sebald alludes once more to Ruisdael's painting. All versions of "View of Haarlem" feature a cloud cover with sun breaks; the roofs and spires of Haarlem peek out from among the trees, and in the distance of the horizon windmills jut out of the flat landscape, not unlike modern-day radio towers. Throughout RS, ruined or vanished windmills in the marshes of Suffolk's countryside are both signs of bygone economic prosperity and symbols of loss (42, 187, 191). At the end of "Wie der Schnee auf den Alpen" in NN, windmills also signify doom. The painter Grünewald's death is followed by an image from Dante's *Inferno*: "Späh scharf voran, / dort siehst du im Grauen des Abends / die fernen Windmühlen sich drehn" (33).<sup>93</sup> In RS, the similarity of the Suffolk landscape, with its windmills and marshes, to the Netherlands is perhaps the trigger for the flashback to The Hague earlier. Windmills are also explicitly linked to painting, as the narrator hears "daß einst in der Landschaft eine jede Windmühle gewesen ist wie ein Glanzlicht in einem gemalten Auge" (RS 42-43). The narrator's contemplation of the sunset at Orfordness also references another Dutch painting, Pieter Brueghel the Elder's famous "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus," in which the wide curve of a bay is illuminated by the setting sun, giving a metallic sheen to the water, while "unsignificantly / off the coast / there was / a splash quite unnoticed / this was / Icarus drowning" (as William Carlos Williams describes it in his poem of the same name) (Williams 386). The sails of a windmill are called "Flügel" (wings) in German, which strengthens the allusion to the Icarus myth, and waiting for a ferryman of course also alludes to Greek mythology. The reenactment of paintings in this and other parts of the book, as well as the frequently mimicked perspective of landscape paintings in particular, suggest that the narrator's ambiguous statement "[d]ort [...] war ich einmal zu Hause" refers to the art of painting

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93 Cf. Dante *Inferno* Canto XXXIV.

itself. The narrator of SG vanishes into intertexts at the end, while the narrator of RS disappears into – or emerges from? – brushstrokes on a canvas.

The image of the desert stands in for a blurred foreign space beyond a European “center” and for the confusion of Europeans about how to accurately imagine and navigate this “periphery.” Rather than concretizing the peripheral space and making it accessible, the desert trope further obscures or removes it (the desert is twice removed in the painted caravan scene in *The Hague*). I disagree with Albes about the “für Sebalds labyrinthisches Erzählen kennzeichnende Vertauschung von Zentrum und Peripherie” (299). I arrive at a conclusion similar to John Zilcosky’s but via a different analysis, and with a different impetus. According to Zilcosky, Sebald “resists [...] the attempt to turn the margin into a new center” by “deconstructing the traditional opposition between ‘home’ and ‘away’” (104). In Zilcosky’s reading, Sebald paints an image of a thoroughly mapped world in which it is impossible to get lost. The confusingly layered space of Orfordness, the one-sided textual reconstruction of “the Congo” as an “extraterritorial,” hyperreal space, fantastical China, and the recurring image of the desert as a place of confusion suggest otherwise. In the Western European imagination, the periphery is composed of clichés, literary tropes, and a centuries-old tradition of escapist fantasies. *Die Ringe des Saturn* demonstrates that the periphery is still dwarfed by the center. Those instances in which the periphery has encroached on the center, as in *The Hague*, yield confusing spaces and risk luring the unwary traveler into a mirage. I agree with Gray that, in theory, “[o]nly a strategy that fuses the center with the periphery is capable of arriving at a balanced historical understanding” (“Grids” 521), and that *Die Ringe des Saturn* presents a “negative countermode[l] to Enlightenment rationality” (523). However, I disagree that Sebald achieves – or attempts to achieve – a fusing of center and periphery in *Die Ringe des Saturn*.

Rather, the text demonstrates that, in practice, the periphery is overwhelmed by the center and that merging the two usually comes at a loss of the periphery's distinctiveness.

## VI. BODIES

A third tension in *Die Ringe des Saturn* emerges from the way the physical experience of walking through what is left of nature clashes with the immaterial realm of texts and the remote perspective of (landscape) painting. Walking puts the body in constant contact with the world, yet this current of physicality is barely perceptible, as the text foregrounds an experience of history and a reception of the world as rooted in and mediated through texts and paintings. Corporeality seems to be a given but undesirable manifestation of life, as it is invariably tied either to sickness or death. *Die Ringe des Saturn* begins with immobility and lists (as well as depicts) death after death, until by the end the text has amassed a "Totenberg," giving an implicit affirmative answer to the narrator's rhetorical question posed at the Waterloo panorama: "Stehen wir auf einem Totenberg? Ist das am Ende unsere Warte? Hat man von einem solchem Platz aus den vielberufenen historischen Überblick?" (152). The dead also litter the text in photographs and paintings, for example the bodies of Bergen Belsen and Jasenovac (if these images indeed depict the locations referred to in the text), the bloody vest of Archduke Ferdinand, and the corpse in Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson*. By compiling a mountain of bodies, the text underscores and gives shape to the human tendency towards destruction. Unlike the melancholy Vanitas motif of transience, exemplified by the image of Browne's skull, these dead are a brutal reminder that humans have always obliterated their own kind. *Die Ringe des Saturn* predicts a teleology of annihilation in which nature, as the overarching principle of life, is also portrayed as self-destructive and stripped of its regenerative power. The damage a hurricane inflicts on a park

is described as permanent, the loss of individual trees as an irreversible tragedy, and the earth as slowly grinding itself to death (272-73, 314-15). Paradoxically, however, the ceasing of corporeality is still *begreifbarer* than living bodies, death easier to parse – or touch – than life.<sup>94</sup> Like Browne, Sebald's narrator "begreift die Sterblichkeit besser als die Blüte des Lebens" (36), and when he quotes Descartes's dismissal of the body as "unbegreifliche[s] Fleisch" (26), he echoes his own incomprehension and pinpoints a central problematic of the text.

In the juxtaposition of body and mind, the body lags behind in *Die Ringe des Saturn*. This is not only a matter of intellectual characters being constrained by their corporeality. In addition to being trapped in their bodies, Sebald's characters are "trapped in language" (Strathausen 479) and "dwell in a paper world that no longer represents the real but has replaced it" (Beck 80). The individuality of the narrator often disappears into literary references, transcending his physical limitations and obscuring the narrative point of view. When Sebald's narrator visits Michael Hamburger – a "fahrender Geselle" (traveling journeyman) seeking out his master – he inscribes not only his voice but also his past into that of the admired older writer (208). In a passage that lists strange coincidences and mysterious links between the two, the narrative point of view shifts between reporting on a conversation, recounting Hamburgers biography, and reflections by the narrator until the two individuals are textually merged (216). The narrator of SG emulates Kafka and his character Gracchus in a similar but subtler way. More than just a sense of kinship, the narrator in RS projects an eerily reverential desire to be(come) or have always been the Holocaust survivor Michael Hamburger. This is reminiscent of the spiritual and bodily (in painting) merging between the painters Matthias Grünewald and Mathis Nithart in NN, who may or may not have been one and the same person: "Hier haben zwei Maler in einem Körper, /

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<sup>94</sup> The German "begreifen" gives the same tactile quality to understanding as the English "to grasp."



dessen verletztes Fleisch ihnen beiden gehörte, / ihre Natur ausstudiert [...] Das dargestellte Martyrium ist die / noch an den Wundrändern spürbare / Repräsentation einer Männerfreundschaft” (NN 17-18). Sebald often merges several historical personages into one, and embellishes his characters (such as Aurach and Austerlitz) with the memoirs of Holocaust survivors. The boundaries between individuals are fluid, as are the borders between real and imagined scenarios.

With the exception of Hamburger, the writers paid homage to in *Die Ringe des Saturn* are encountered in a bodiless, representational realm.<sup>95</sup> These “textual wanderings” (Massimo Leone) through the works of others are decidedly more pleasurable than the physical act of walking. Appropriate for a pilgrimage, traveling on foot is arduous. But allusions to the Grand Tour and the 18<sup>th</sup> - and 19<sup>th</sup>-century obsession with pedestrian travel stop short of assimilating the Romantics’ delight in the healthy, rhythmic activity of walking, their pleasure in overcoming obstacles, or savoring nature along the way. The thrill-inducing forces of natural phenomena described by Edmund Burke and his contemporaries become allegories of destruction in *Die Ringe des Saturn*. Eventually, the repercussions of walking destroy the narrator’s back and cause melancholy, which is perhaps a sign that the pilgrimage has failed. In general, almost only negative physical sensations are described in the text. Close contact with bodies, or even visual encounters, are disorienting or repulsive. When the narrator sees a copulating couple on the beach, the naked bodies appear to him like a “vielgliedriges, doppelköpfiges Seeungeheuer, letztes Exemplar einer monströsen Art,” in other words as non-human (88). In *The Hague*, as analyzed above, the encounter with human beings is frightening and even in the representational

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95 Sebald’s narrator also seeks out Alec Garrard, the artist who builds the miniature temple of Jerusalem (286-95). RS hence contains one writer and one visual artist whose presence and works are more than textual or ekphrastic, mirroring the narrator’s engagement with both texts and paintings (although Garrard says of his process that “it’s just research really and work, endless hours of work,” linking the methodology – and perhaps mundane drudgery – of artistic creation.) (The Ashbury sisters, who are also artists, may or may not be fictional.)

world of a museum he prefers the tiny human figures of Ruisdael's landscape painting to the towering closeness of the autopsy spectators in Rembrandt's canvas. "[T]he dialectic between control afforded by a clear-sighted overview and the disorientation of immediate, proximate involvement" that Gray has described for the treatment of landscapes in *Die Ringe des Saturn* extends to the narrator's interaction with human beings (Grids 516). However, this avoidance of physicality undermines Sebald's critique of Cartesian dualism and its conception of the body as a machine, and of Enlightenment rationality with its focus on the mind. The question arises how authoritatively Sebald's narrator can report on the human condition if he constantly flees it, seems disengaged from corporeal existence, and is more at home with the dead than the living.

Sebald's critique of the repercussions of the age of reason is also called into question by his treatment of physical otherness, if we take it to stand in for those on the margin in general. Episodes of real encounter with the "other" are grotesque and fall prey to the superficiality of stereotypes. Corporeality achieves its most alienating effect in the depiction of physical disability, difference, or deformity, which (often in conjunction with mental disturbance) appear frequently in Sebald's texts and are often marked as abnormal in a derogatory way. The sighting of hunchbacks or dwarfs is a bad omen (*Austerlitz*) or tied to carnival imagery (*Aufzeichnungen aus Korsika*). Both are part of a fairytale menagerie for many of Sebald's characters. In *Nach der Natur* the speaker's childhood angst and loneliness coalesce into the vision of a "zwergenwüchsiger Tartare" who comes to represent alienation. In this instance, physical difference and an ethnic marker are fused in one disturbing image:

Die Sinnfigur der nicht näher  
identifizierten Katastrophe ist mir  
seit jener Zeit ein zwergenwüchsiger Tartare

mit einer roten Kopfbinde und einer weißen  
gekrümmten Feder. (NN 77)

These associations of physical difference with folklore and the circus, problematic in their own right, heighten the discomfort with the corporeal manifestation of humanity. In *Die Ringe des Saturn*, physical deformity is even linked to punishment for ancestral sin. Commenting on Joseph Conrad's dislike of Brussels, and corroborating the feeling attributed to the Polish author that all Belgians are collaborators in genocide, the narrator says:

Tatsächlich gibt es in Belgien bis auf den heutigen Tag eine besondere, von der Zeit der ungehemmten Ausbeutung des Kongo geprägte, in [...] einer auffallenden Verkrüppelung der Bevölkerung sich manifestierende Häßlichkeit, wie man sie anderwärts nur selten antrifft. Jedenfalls entsinne ich mich genau, dass mir bei meinem ersten Besuch in Brüssel [...] mehr Bucklige und Irre über den Weg gelaufen sind als sonst in einem ganzen Jahr. (149)

The palpable disdain for physical otherness culminates when the narrator next remembers: “Ja, eines Abends habe ich in einer Bar [...] sogar einem verwachsenen, von spastischen Zuckungen geschüttelten Billiardspieler zugesehen” (italics mine). The formulation “ja [...] sogar” turns encountering disability into a remarkable, uncommon event. The treatment of deformity – also a state of being on the periphery – is a blind spot in Sebald's oeuvre<sup>96</sup> and exemplifies the text's problematic stance towards corporeality. Characteristics of otherness that draw attention to human beings' physicality are unwelcome reminders not of transience but of the burden of being

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96 Others have remarked on the inappropriateness of this passage, e.g. Sigurd Martin who approaches Sebald's scathing stance towards otherness with “tiefstes Befremden” (in Schütte 555). Schütte sidesteps the issue of “Befremdlichkeit” in his essay “Sebald's Eigensinn” and interprets Sebald's correlation of deformity with collective guilt as an extension of Thomas Bernhard, who also linked physical disability to provinciality or mental shortcomings in his work. “Was tun?” in the face of an occasional “Moment des Inkommensurablen” in the work of Sebald, Schütte asks, deferring an answer by blaming the hagiographic reception of Sebald, that has clouded over the idiosyncracies in his (writer) persona (545-55).

alive at all. The body, already a peripheral region of the self in RS, becomes repulsive in a state of disability.

The depiction of nature and humanity progressing towards an end evokes the biblical Apocalypse, and dispersed throughout *Die Ringe des Saturn* are references to the apostle John and quotes from the *Book of Revelations*, turning the New Testament into an intertext of Western culture that deals specifically with the overcoming of corporeal existence in the ascent to heaven of the faithful. These Biblical references are more direct than in SG, which incorporates Apocalypse more as metaphor for suicide. In part seven, Sebald's narrator quotes a few lines from Hamburger's translation of Friedrich Hölderlin's poem "Patmos:" "*For when I heard that one of the near islands was Patmos I greatly desired there to be lodged, and there to approach the dark grotto*" (217). According to the New Testament, the *Book of Revelations* derives from John's visions in a cave on Patmos. The island remains a popular pilgrimage destination and, similarly, Hölderlin's poem becomes a site of pilgrimage – albeit textual – to an admired precursor (two, if one counts Hamburger – there is really no other reason to cite the translation instead of the German original). Furthermore, the inclusion of "Patmos" foreshadows the narrator's imminent visit to the miniature temple of Jerusalem in part nine, another ersatz pilgrimage site, given that the body's presence at pilgrimage destinations is secondary in *Die Ringe des Saturn*. The *Book of Revelations* is a palimpsest, its origin and authorship complicated, and a contested site like the city of Jerusalem itself. German theologian Eberhard Vischer, for one, contested the Christian interpretation of the Book's ontology and posited that the *Book of Revelations* is adapted from earlier Judaic texts. Vischer's treatise *Die Offenbarung Johannis als eine Jüdische Apocalypse in Christlicher Bearbeitung* (1886) describes the *Apocalypse* as an intertextual work of literature.

Eberhard Vischer happens to share a name with Peter Vischer, the creator of the sepulchral monument to St. Sebaldus depicted in part four of *Die Ringe des Saturn* (106-09). The description of the monument concludes with a quote from chapter 21 of the *Book of Revelations*, thus embedding in it a link between the two Vischers – the architect of the monument and the theologian who contested the Christian origin of the Apocalypse – an instance of Sebaldian “coincidence,” recalling the two scientists “mit den seltsamerweise zu ihren Forschungen passenden Namen Herrington und Lightbown,” who studied the phosphorescing of herrings (76). Chapter 21 of the *Book of Revelations* describes God’s creation of Jerusalem, a city of splendor and symmetry, which is also depicted on Vischer’s monument, “die sehnlich erwartete Braut, die Hütte unter den Menschen” (109). In the Luther Bible, after the end of the world “[wird] Gott [...] abwischen alle Tränen von ihren Augen, und der Tod wird nicht mehr sein, noch Leid noch Geschrei noch Schmerz wird mehr sein” (21:4). St. Sebaldus in *Die Ringe des Saturn* is described as a forerunner of “einer Zeit, in welcher uns die Tränen abgewischt werden von den Augen und in der weder Leid sein wird noch Schmerz und Geschrei” (109). These references to the Apocalypse address questions of authorship and originality and implicitly critique the Roman Catholic bastardization and cooption of older Jewish texts, thus presenting a subversive reading of the Bible. In other words, references to the Apocalypse are undermined even as they are generated and serve to illustrate Browne’s observation in *Religio Medici*: “That generall opinion that the world growes neere its end, hath possessed all ages past as neerely as ours” (*Works* 57).

The island Patmos, however, is significant not only for Judeo-Christian eschatology but also for Greek mythology, a layering of references similar to the “waiting for the ferryman scene” in Orfordness (referred to as “*The Island*” by residents of Orford, 278). Patmos lies within

the Icarian Sea, and close to where, according to legend, Icarus fell to his death.<sup>97</sup> The Icarus myth, as a metaphor for the human race destroying itself by striving too high on its path towards progress and enlightenment, emerges as an important motif in RS around which several of the text's themes coalesce. The theme of silk runs through the book like Ariadne's thread, labyrinths are numerous, as is getting lost in them, the narrator constantly escapes from the obfuscating ground towards an elevated spot, and human beings are portrayed as stuck in the labyrinths of their own creation and relentlessly searching for light. Evolution entails the "unaufhaltsame Verdrängung der Finsternis" (77), and "[d]ie Vermehrung des Lichts und die Vermehrung der Arbeit" run parallel to each other, the narrator observes, yoking the invention of electricity to a capitalist history of oppression and literalizing the elucidation of Enlightenment (333). King Leopold's goal for the "civilizing mission" in Africa is "die Finsternis zu durchbrechen" (144), in other words to bring light, and the history of civilization itself is critiqued by Sebald's narrator as "ein von Stunde zu Stunde intensiver werdendes Glosen, von dem niemand weiß, bis zu welchem Grad es zunehmen und wann es allmählich ersterben wird" (202-03). Just as Icarus's proximity to the sun results in his death, Enlightenment leads, paradoxically, to darkness, or death, as rational modernity leads into the barbarian abyss of two world wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century instead of towards elucidation. Similarly, Browne envisioned the course of life and the world as a path to darkness, "auf einer Bahn, die, nachdem der Meridian erreicht ist, hinunterführt in die Dunkelheit" (35), which echoes Sebald's critique of civilization and technology and together with it provides a counter-image to the Enlightenment trajectory of progress. A quote from Hölderlin's elegy "Brod und Wein" (again in Hamburger's English translation) at the beginning of part seven shows the ambiguity of night as both frightening and comforting in RS: "[n]ight,

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97 Cf. Hunger 109.

the astonishing, the stranger to all that is human, over the mountain-tops mournful and gleaming draws on” (206).<sup>98</sup>

The first encrypted reference to the Icarus motif lies in the epigraph from the Brockhaus Encyclopedia about the formation of the rings of Saturn, and is hence echoed in the very title of the text. The planet Saturn’s rings are “wahrscheinlich die Bruchstücke eines früheren Mondes, der, dem Planeten zu nahe, von dessen Gezeitenwirkung zerstört wurde. (→ Roch’sche Grenze)” (unpaginated). According to Édouard Albert Roche, a 19<sup>th</sup> century astronomer and mathematician, Saturn’s moon was drawn – like Icarus towards the sun – too close to a powerful larger force field and destroyed. Sebald also incorporated the Icarus myth, as well as a reference to Brueghel’s *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* in *Nach der Natur*. Meshed with the ekphrastic description of Brueghel’s painting are allusions to poems by W.H. Auden (“Musée de Beaux Art”) and William Carlos Williams (“Landscape with the Fall of Icarus”) that in turn describe the painting:<sup>99</sup>

Neigt sich sein Auge denn,  
stürzt er jetzt ab,  
hinein in den See,  
wird sich, wie auf Breughels  
Gemälde, das schöne Schiff,  
der pflügende Landmann, die ganze  
Natur irgendwie abwenden  
vom Unglück des Sohns? (NN 91)

98 The German original illustrates better how night stands for a cosmic consciousness that renders human beings insignificant: “die Schwärmerische, die Nacht, kommt, / Voll mit Sternen und wohl wenig bekümmert um uns, / Glänzt die Erstaunende dort, die Fremdlerin unter den Menschen, / Über Gebirgshöhn traurig und prächtig herauf” (Hölderlin 254).

99 See appendix for the text of both poems.

*Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, which Sebald reportedly had pinned to his office door,<sup>100</sup> functions very similarly to Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson* – in both paintings the gaze of the bystanders, and hence the audience, is directed away from the dying/dead body. The painter is the only human witness, and by capturing the scene ensures that both the tragedy and his own art do not go “unnoticed” (Williams). The only other witness is a partridge, a bird in the pheasant family, which, according to Greek mythology, represents Perdix, the talented apprentice (and nephew) Daedalus pushed from the Acropolis into the ocean out of jealousy.<sup>101</sup> Pheasants, as will be discussed below, also recur in RS. Significantly, Brueghel's painting is displayed in the Museum of Ancient Art in Brussels, whose inhabitants are accused in part five of oblivion towards the cruelty inflicted upon the Congolese under the flag of their country. In the context of RS, the Icarus myth also signifies that humans are blind to the suffering of others, even those in their midst. Both ignored bodies, Brueghel's Icarus and Rembrandt's Aris Kindt, are “Ausschußprodukte,” in the sense in which Albes reads the images in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, whose sinister motifs such as graves, dead bodies, and dead trees become “Allegorien der Vergänglichkeit, des Todes und der allgegenwärtigen Leere” (Albes 297). The throwaway quality of the images embodies transience, as do the tossed-aside bodies in the two paintings.

Humanity destroying itself as a consequence of ambition and trespassing where it should not have emerges as one aspect of the Icarus motif. Yet Icarus died because his wings melted, in other words, because his flight apparatus malfunctioned. Close to the end of *Die Ringe des*

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100 Cf. Tonkin 11.

101 Athena saved Perdix (called Talos in older versions of the myth) mid-fall by turning him into a partridge (perdix perdix). Consequently, partridges avoid heights and build their nests in bushes rather than trees. Daedalus was banned from Athens for this crime. When Daedalus buried Icarus on the island Icaria, a partridge watched, called out, and “drummed with her wings in loud approval.” Through the presence of the ominous bird, Ovid in *Metamorphoses* Book VIII implies that Icarus's death avenges the death of Perdix (189). Cf. also Hard and Rose 339-40.



*Saturn*, machines are singled out as torture devices that stand for progress. Describing how weavers are harnessed to their looms, the narrator says,

[es] nimmt [...] mich wunder, in welch großer Zahl [...] die Menschen bereits in der Zeit vor der Industrialisierung mit ihren armen Körpern fast ein Leben lang eingeschirrt gewesen sind in die [...] an Foltergestelle oder Käfige erinnernden Webstühle in einer eigenartigen Symbiose, die vielleicht gerade aufgrund ihrer vergleichweisen Primitivität besser als jede spätere Ausformung unserer Industrie verdeutlicht, daß wir uns nur eingespannt in die von uns erfundenen Maschinen auf der Erde zu erhalten vermögen. (334)

Earlier in the text, bodies and machines are also linked, in the context of combustion as the constituting element of civilization: “[d]ie von uns ersonnenen Maschinen haben wie unsere Körper und wie unsere Sehnsucht ein langsam zerglühendes Herz” (203). Human bodies are fallible machines, and both cease to exist due to a process of *zerglühen* – a Celan-like coinage evoking again the death of Icarus after his encounter with the sun and his plummet from light into darkness. In “Wie der Schnee auf den Alpen” in NN, the destructive path of progress is described in both evolutionary terms and as the result of malevolent nature, “[die] blind ein wüstes / Experiment macht ums andre” (24). Human beings and the machines they invent are subject to a frenzied striving inherent in life, “ein Sprossen, / Sichforttreiben und Fortpflanzen, / auch in und durch uns und durch / die in unseren Köpfen entsprungenen / Maschinen in einem einzigen Wust, / während hinter uns schon die grünen / Bäume ihre Blätter verlassen und / kahl, wie oft zu sehen auf Grünewalds / Bildern, hineinragen in den Himmel” (ibid).

The portrayal of life and nature as leading to death without renewal, in other words as linear rather than cyclical, seems to run counter to the recurrence of cyclical forms in RS (such as

rings, the revolving of windmills, and many other references to circles)<sup>102</sup> and the emphasis on repetition in Sebald's oeuvre. Albes appropriately calls *Die Ringe des Saturn* "bestimmt durch die Mechanismen der Wiederholung" (280), and Sebald's defining mode of composition – intertextuality – is of course itself a form of repetition. But repetition is not necessarily cyclical. Strathausen posits that the adventures of Sebald's characters are rhizomatic rather than cyclical in nature and "never really arrive anywhere, but continue to wander aimlessly in an infinitely expanding, labyrinthine space that defies traditional topography" (472). However, Sebald's narrator in *Die Ringe des Saturn* muses that "we" human beings all move in a linear trajectory, "einer hinter dem anderen, entlang derselben, von unserem Herkommen und unseren Hoffnungen vorgezeichneten Straßen" (223). History and the lives of human beings entail a staggered starting over again and Sebald's narrator is plagued by habitual feelings of reliving already lived experiences. Such moments of déjà-vu are marked by an intense awareness of corporeality, a sensation of temporary paralysis, which is "ein Vorwegnehmen des Endes" (224). The body becomes relevant only at the moment in which it foreshadows death. Significantly, the body is again described as a defective piece of machinery in this passage, or rather, a piece of machinery that malfunctions due to bad programming (224). This image perplexingly aligns with Cartesian dualism and furthermore presupposes a sort of design, as do the predetermined pathways leading to darkness.

Other than death, one way to get past the gravitational pull of corporeality – and away from the world – is to take flight, to a place "wo der Winterhimmel immer nur stillsteht und funkelt," as the narrator imagines the highest point on earth (207). Flying is ambivalent in Sebald's works, both described as dangerous and as a means of attaining freedom. Few

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102 On rings as a structuring narrative device in RS cf. Gray "Segues" 28-34.

Sebaldian characters die of natural causes; instead they perish due to circumstances related to warfare and technology, such as extermination in gas chambers, by suicide (train and shotgun), or voluntary submission to torture by electroshock therapy. Yet death related to flying, whether through plane crashes or missiles, occupies a special role in Sebald's oeuvre. After all, an entire book is dedicated to the effects of *Luftkrieg* on Germany's literary landscape. The pilots Gerald Fitzpatrick in *Austerlitz* and his forerunners Gerald Ashman and Douglas X in *Aufzeichnungen aus Korsika* are obsessed with flying. AK features several pages of lyrical description of a night flight to Corsica in a small propeller plane (166-76), Cosmo Solomon, who later goes mad, designs and builds "Flugapparate" (AW 131), and Max Aurach, as well as the narrator of that story, experience clairvoyant moments while flying (AW 219-21, 280-81). The liberating flying dream at the end of NN also has a counterpart in Sebald's short essay "Die Kunst des Fliegens." In both dreams, time and space are folded into one another, conveying a time-lapse view of evolution and the world.<sup>103</sup> Escaping from labyrinths is harnessed overtly at least in one instance to flying and crashing in *Die Ringe des Saturn*. Shortly after the narrator loses his way in the Somerleyton labyrinth, he hears the story of two American fighter pilots whose planes collided and crashed into a lake during a mock fight in 1945 (54). Significantly, just before he hears about this, the narrator encounters a bird in the pheasant family (subfamily *Perdicinae*), in the form of a caged Chinese Quail, which compulsively runs in a line "und [die] jedesmal, bevor sie kehrtmachte, den Kopf schüttelte, als begreife sie nicht, wie sie in diese aussichtslose Lage geraten sei" (50). The bird is also a byproduct of trade and imperialism, as it is imported from China. The pilots' unspectacular deaths ("weder Stichflammen noch Rauchwolken stiegen auf.

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103 Cf. NN 96-97, Zisselsberger 30-34.

Der See hatte sie lautlos verschluckt”) are reminiscent of the disappearance of Icarus in Brueghel’s painting (55).

Pheasants are linked to flying in another instance as well. In part eight, the narrator describes the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century pheasant hunting craze in the desert-like landscape near Orford, where “[s]echstausend Fasane wurden [...] manchmal an einem einzigen Tag geschossen” (269). In particular, Sebald recounts the rise and fall of Cuthbert Quilter, a commoner turned business mogul and baronet, to illustrate the short-lived prosperity of the new upper-middle class that arose through industrialization. Quilter, whose standard was – supposedly – a golden pheasant on a black background, built the ostentatious and eccentric Bawdsey Manor, depicted in RS in a photograph, one of the area’s most famous pheasant hunting destinations (267). But the family’s fortune declined during World War I, and in the 1930s Quilter’s heir Raymond, an avid parachutist, had to sell the estate and only “sein Flugzeug und eine Startbahn auf einem einsamen Feld” were left of his uncle’s fortune, as well as “seine[] ihm über alles gehende[] Flugleidenschaft” (270-71). The details about the Quilter baronets appear to be factual, except for the flag. Rather than a pheasant, the Quilter coat of arms depicts black crows on a white background.<sup>104</sup> While Sebald’s narrator writes scornfully about Cuthbert Quilter’s achievements and *nouveau riche* taste level, drawing attention to the fact that he added a new turret to his “anglo-indische Traumburg” “für jede Million, um die er sein Vermögen vermehrte,” he is more sympathetic towards Raymond Quilter, who was not attached to the fortune he inherited and respected by lower-class members for his chivalry (269). Cuthbert Quilter represents the absurd byproducts of wealth and progress, whereas Raymond represents reconciliation, and a benign aspect of flying for enjoyment rather than purposes of war. Raymond, who was Cuthbert

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104 Cf. <http://www.houseofnames.com/Quilter-family-crest>, and <http://heraldryonline.wordpress.com/2008/02/13/quilter-of-bawdsey-manor-co-suffolk/>.

Quilter's nephew, and for whom the pheasant flag was flown, represents perhaps also reconciliation between Daedalus and Perdix.

Early on in the text, Sebald describes Browne's prose as an act of escaping from the labyrinth:

[Browne] baut labyrinthische, bisweilen über ein, zwei Seiten sich hinziehende Satzgebilde. [...] Zwar gelingt es ihm, unter anderem wegen dieser enormen Belastung, nicht immer, von der Erde abzuheben, aber wenn er, mitsamt seiner Fracht, auf den Kreisen seiner Prosa höher und höher getragen wird wie ein Segler auf den warmen Strömungen der Luft, dann ergreift selbst den heutigen Leser noch ein Gefühl der Levitation. Je mehr die Entfernung wächst, desto klarer wird die Sicht. (RS 30)

Writing, in other words, is like Icarus's act of flying, and both activities are exhilarating and potentially dangerous. The feelings of levitation Browne's sentences can induce in readers are a sublimity reached through "das Mittel des gefährvollen Höhenfluges der Sprache" (ibid). The "Höhenflug der Sprache" is dangerous precisely because of the aggrandizing sublimity and loss of involvement distance can provoke. Embedding Browne in a Romantic framework, Sebald writes that the 17<sup>th</sup>-century physician tried to see things "vom Standpunkt eines Außenseiters, ja man könnte sagen, mit dem Auge des Schöpfers," which recalls again the imaginary vantage point of landscape painters (29). In RS, Sebald entwines the Icarus myth with quotes from Browne to underscore the dynamic of climbing and falling in his own text, and how they are related to the dichotomy between the involved perspective of the pedestrian and a removed overview from a distance. As Browne's sentences rise and fall, the text thematizes the economic rise and fall of a geographical area, the narrator's ascents and descents of physical structures, the

continuous reversals of perspective, as well as his emotional state that oscillates between “schöne Freizügigkeit” and “lähmende[s] Grauen” (11). The Icarus/Browne motif of “Höhenflug (der Sprache)” in RS is juxtaposed early on in the text by a reference to Dürer’s *Melencolia I*. In Dürer’s engraving, the winged angel, “bewegungslos unter den Werkzeugen der Zerstörung [scientific instruments] verharrend,” is holding a closed book, neither flying (nor writing or reading), and hence resembles a fallen angel (RS 19). The emphasis on progress that leads to falling expressed in RS by the Icarus motif furthermore brings to mind Benjamin’s angel of history, who, caught in a storm, cannot close his wings and is propelled towards the future while the debris of human-made catastrophes piles up in front of him: “Dieser Sturm treibt ihn unaufhaltsam in die Zukunft, der er den Rücken kehrt, während der Trümmerhaufen vor ihm zum Himmel wächst. Das, was wir den Fortschritt nennen, ist *dieser* Sturm” (Benjamin *Schriften* 698). Benjamin’s “Trümmerhaufen” resembles the “Totenberg” Sebald’s narrator imagines standing on in the Waterloo panorama (RS 152). The panorama the narrator describes consists both of a three-dimensional scene with dead horses and corpses and a mural. Benjamin’s thesis on the angel of history likewise derives from a painting, Paul Klee’s “Angelus Novus,” and Dürer’s angel of melancholy is, of course, a work of visual art as well. References to these intermedia suggest that a “historische[r] Überblick” is enhanced by visual art, and perhaps that paintings, which are not subject to the same pitfalls (or heights) as texts, provide the middle ground between labyrinths and precipices in *Die Ringe des Saturn* (ibid).

Flying, whether positive or negative, is the opposite of walking, which confines bodies to the obfuscating ground. In addition to describing views from towers and hills, Sebald depicts the narrator’s yearning for heights in RS in a dream about a quasi supra-terrestrial vantage point. In order to achieve clarity of vision, “den vielberufenen historischen Überblick” (152), Sebald’s

narrator dreams of being “am obersten Punkt der Erde, dort wo der Winterhimmel immer nur stillsteht und funkelt.” The dream merges two labyrinths in which the narrator got lost, the Dunwich heath and the “Eibenlabyrinth” in Somerelyton. From above, the latter appears as an “einfaches Muster” but the view of the frozen landscape soon turns into an apocalyptic vision of floods and earthquakes devouring the earth (206-08). Leaving Amsterdam by plane (“das kleine Propellerflugzeug [...] stieg zuerst der Sonne entgegen”), the narrator also observes how civilization turned the earth’s surface into “ein geometrisches Muster” (112). Yet the recognition of a pattern does not lead to parsing it. “Wenn wir uns aus solcher Höhe betrachten, ist es entsetzlich, wie wenig wir wissen über uns selbst, über unseren Zweck und unsere Erde,” he ponders (114). Clarity of vision only leads to a clairvoyant apprehension of disasters or to keener insight into the absence of true understanding. The opposite, gazing into the sky and directing one’s view away from the world, brings more solace. After a hurricane has wreaked havoc in the English countryside and turned it into an underworld, the only beauty left is in space:

Vom hohen Norden bis hinab an den südlichen Horizont, wo früher die Bäume die Sicht verstellten hatten, breiteten die funkelnden Zeichen sich aus, die Wagendeichsel, der Drachenschweif, das Dreieck des Taurus, die Pleiaden, der Schwan, Pegasus, der Delphin. Unverändert, ja schöner, schien es mir, als zuvor, drehten sie sich in der Runde. (318)<sup>105</sup>

An escape into space represents both the most extreme form of flying and the most extreme vantage point from above while liberating the body from gravity – disembodying it, in a way.

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<sup>105</sup> This passage derives from an observation while flying in AK (168-69).

The rings of Saturn, “bestehen[d] aus Eiskristallen und [...] Staubteilchen” (unpaginated epigraph) are also a kind of byproduct, a quasi disembodied “Ausschußprodukt” of a cosmic “catastrophe,” and a logical guiding symbol for the text.

*Die Ringe des Saturn* contains one overt reference to space travel itself. The narrator makes a sardonic aside about the space probe Voyager 2, embedded in a reference to Austria’s president (1986-1992) Kurt Waldheim, who was embroiled in a scandal about his (covered-up) SS membership during WW II. In the 1970s, Waldheim, at the time UN Secretary-General, contributed a recorded message extending peace and friendship for a potential encounter with aliens to the voyager’s “Golden Record.” That a former *Wehrmacht* officer involved in deportations should become a voice representing the world to outer space was later deemed inappropriate and laughable. Interestingly, Sebald relates the well-known facts about Waldheim’s position in the United Nations and his contribution to the “Golden Record” in the subjunctive, highlighting the absurdity of the situation. “In den Jahren nach dem Krieg *soll* [er] *aufgestiegen* sein in verschiedene hohe Ämter,” and as UN Secretary-General “*ist es angeblich auch gewesen*, daß er, für allfällige außerirdische Bewohner des Universums, eine Grußbotschaft auf Band gesprochen hat, die jetzt, zusammen mit anderen Memorabilien der Menschlichkeit [...] die Außenbezirke unseres Sonnensystems ansteuert” (122-23, italics mine). By contrast, embellished pseudo-documentary facts are usually presented in the indicative in Sebald’s works. *Aufgestiegen* suggests an ascent like Icarus’s, followed by a fall, as Waldheim was internationally shunned and diplomatic ties with Austria temporarily cut by many countries. The Voyager 2 was part of, and completed, the so-called (Planetary) “Grand Tour,” a NASA space program that sent unmanned vessels on fly-bys of Saturn, Neptune, Jupiter, Uranus, and Pluto in



the 1970s.<sup>106</sup> The name of this mission echoes, of course, the Grand Tour of Romanticism. Perhaps the only Grand Tour possible in a jaded, frontier-less postmodern era cynical about the way the Romantics have shaped, and still dominate, Western views of landscape and responses to nature, is one into space. The reference to the phonograph containing “Memorabilien der Menschlichkeit” on board the Voyager 2 also brings to mind the clay burial vessels of Walsingham and the archeological remains of civilization Browne catalogues in *Hydriotaphia*, and the imaginary contact with aliens is reminiscent of Steller’s trade in the Inuit log house. In the items that survived decay and destruction, Browne “sucht [...] nach den Spuren der geheimnisvollen Fähigkeit zur Transmigration” that he observed in caterpillars and moths, “weil der schwerste Stein der Melancholie die Angst ist vor dem aussichtslosen Ende unserer Natur” (39). The scraps of silk in the Arctic village and in the Homeric urn of Patroclus, also a golden vessel like the “Golden Record,” signify the possibility that something artistic and beautiful will remain of humanity, a transmigration not of the soul but of an organic, woven material.<sup>107</sup>

## VII. CONCLUSION

The creation of an alternate world through writing fails in RS. Whereas SG envisions and successfully implements therapy through writing, in RS the “Buchstabenbrücke” does not lead out of disaster but only back into it. The travelling narrator of SG escapes into texts and transfigures suicide into a textual exercise. In RS, writing and walking are supposed to be therapeutic but only lead to more infirmity. On his pilgrimage, the narrator gets tired, hot, lost, is

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106 Cf. <http://history.nasa.gov/SP-4219/Chapter11.html>.

107 In chapter III of *Urne-Buriall*, Browne writes: “[I]n the *Homericall Urne of Patroclus*, whatever was the solid Tegument, we finde the immediate covering to be a purple peece of silk” (Browne *Works* 148). However, Browne seems to have mixed images from the burial of Hector and Patroclus. In Book 23 of the *Iliad*, Homer just describes Patroclus’s urn as being covered with “delicate linen” (400). In Book 24, Hector’s bones are also placed in a golden urn and “wrapp[ed] in fine soft mantles of purple” (437). The question of Sebald’s narrator about the piece of silk, “was also bedeutet es wohl?,” may well (also) refer to Browne’s conflation of these two Homeric passages (RS 39).

forced to retrace his footsteps, or is caught in a sandstorm. The journey ends in a hospital, with an injured body incapable of walking, which is where the text begins. Unlike SG, which envisions a future after apocalypse, RS ends with death. Many of Sebald's narrators and characters wrestle with writing, or suffer during the process of research that amasses too many sources (e.g. Austerlitz, or the narrator of "Max Aurach"). However, RS contains the least amount of self-referential commentary on writing, or documentation of its process, of all of Sebald's works. Two laconic statements, one in the first chapter and one in the last, provide the only references to the text's composition. "Heute, wo ich meine Notizen anfangs ins reine zu schreiben, mehr als ein Jahr nach der Entlassung aus dem Spital" and "[h]eute, da ich meine Aufzeichnungen zum Abschluß bringe" is all we hear about the genesis of the text (14, 348). Of course Sebald's intertextual method itself, in RS as elsewhere, betrays an intense engagement with texts, but the usual and overt concerns about writing and the limits of the expressible are more oblique and filtered through the opinions of others in this work. For instance, the narrator references Flaubert's writer's block, which is attributed to a fear of falsifying the truth, by citing his colleague Janine Dakyns. Dakyns's office is described as a fossilized landscape of papers and books, a chaotic "Papieruniversum," whose occupant brings to mind the "bewegungslos unter den Werkzeugen der Zerstörung verharrenden Engel der Dürerschen Melancholie" (another winged figure) (18-19). Paper and books are concomitant with tools for destruction. Similarly, historiography destroys aspects of the past, as it tends to tell the story of those in power.

In its attitude towards writing, *Die Ringe des Saturn* questions the tools of historiography (i.e. writing) as a means of adequately representing the past and understanding the human condition. As an alternative to textual evidence of the past, the text examines ways of seeing, or more specifically, two extreme ways of seeing, nearsighted and farsighted, which represent two

extreme ways of looking at the past. While seeing is a theme in Sebald's other works as well, particularly SG and A, RS presents a painterly view and transfigures the perspective/techniques of landscape painting into written form. However, looking is also flawed, as is suggested by Rembrandt's anatomy lesson, in which the Cartesian gaze ignores the body and sees only the system. Consequently, RS does not present a compromise or middle ground between being entangled in the intolerable "niedere Welt" (lower world) too close to the ground and being removed to a static, imperial point of view from too high up. "Das also [...] ist die Kunst der Rpresentation der Geschichte," the narrator observes in the Waterloo panorama. "Sie beruht auf einer Flschung der Perspektive. Wir, die berlebenden, sehen alles von oben herunter, sehen alles zugleich und wissen dennoch nicht, wie es war" (152). Human senses are underequipped for understanding the human condition. Throughout the text, low-resolution snapshots symbolize the partial view of the world that is accessible to individuals. RS favors a view from above in order to show that history is written top down, that only the story of those in power is well documented. In other words, the text mirrors historiography. Sebald's juxtaposition of the 19<sup>th</sup>- with the 20<sup>th</sup>-century is also a complex comment on historiographic processes. Each century's historians are able to see the preceding one with the false clarity of distance, and are too closely entangled in the present to adequately comment on it. The text is skewed towards a 19<sup>th</sup>-century perspective, and "konterkarieren" – to repeat Sebald's ambiguous term – does not lead to a resolution. Historians' and humans' lack of insight into history is exemplified through the use of dated and one-sided historical material to examine post-imperial environments such as China and Africa. In SG, which also pits two worldviews against each other, a balance is struck between modernity and a religious/superstitious mindset. In RS, however, modernity and progress fail,

which is symbolized by references to the Icarus motif. Flying too close to the sun represents human beings annihilating themselves through their own ambitions.

Writing and mental illness are also clearly linked in Sebald's oeuvre, as are writing and progress. Many writers Sebald was fascinated with went mad, perhaps as a result, or at least byproduct, of their creativity, such as Robert Walser, Hölderlin, or Ernst Herbeck, or suffered from depression, such as Swinburn and Fitzgerald. Weaving, which stands for progress and industrialization at the end of RS, and writing are linked as tortured activities, forcing "Weber und [...] Schreiber" "zu beständigem krummem Sitzen, zu andauernd scharfem Nachdenken und zu endlosem Überrechnen weitläufig künstlicher Muster," which drives them into "Auswegslosigkeiten und Abgründe." Not unsurprisingly, both professions "[neigten] zur Melancholie und allen aus ihr entspringenden Übeln" (334-35). Industrialization leads to mental illness, as does observing the far-reaching effects of progress. Becoming depressed in the course of walking through Britain's destroyed countryside also has a forerunner in NN. In "Die dunkle Nacht fährt aus," the speaker remembers (of his period in Manchester): "[v]iel bin ich damals / über die brachen elysäischen / Felder gegangen und habe das Werk / der Zerstörung bestaunt, die schwarzen Mühlen und Schiffahrtskanäle" (83). Reading about the deleterious effects of industrialization, such as the stunted growth of Manchester's working class, and observing the machinery of modernity, such as airplanes and waste dumps, cause "einen quasi sublunaren Zustand schwerer Melancholie" in the narrator (85).

Texts and writing do not provide therapy in RS, but maybe painting, as an alternative way of seeing, does. Paintings anticipate disasters, as painters assume an imaginary point of view and can see "alles zugleich" (103). In "Wie der Schnee auf den Alpen," the speaker observes about Grünewald's *Lindenhardt Altarpiece*: "Lang vor der Zeit geht der Schmerz bereits ein in

die Bilder” (NN 8). In Sebald’s work, pain and suffering connect human history, and Grünewald’s tortured ghosts fascinate him, as do Frank Auerbach’s (the inspiration behind Max Aurach) dream visions and Jan Peter Tripp’s depictions of mental disturbances. Like Hölderlin, Walser, and Herbeck with their strange, feverish texts, painters have access to a world beyond regular perception in Sebald’s works. Paintings, like texts, contain ghostly traces. Aurach’s technique of continuously erasing and redrawing charcoal lines creates paintings haunted by their alternate versions, “als sei [das Bild] hervorgegangen aus einer langen Ahnenreihe grauer, eingäscherter, in dem zerschundenen Papier nach wie vor herumgeisternder Gesichter” (AW 239-40). In other words, his paintings contain the traces of different versions of history, which still materially exist although they have been erased and painted over. The dust Aurach’s method of erasure produces makes faces appear literally from the ashes. Similarly, in NN Sebald describes how Grünewald’s face and the image of his alter ego, Mathis Nithart, appear in his paintings. In AW, the portrayal of pain in the depiction of the torment of St. Anthony in Grünewald’s Isenheim Altarpiece triggers Aurach’s forgotten childhood memories of his family’s persecution in Germany during World War II. Sebald’s narrator finds himself unwittingly adopting a technique similar to Aurach’s when trying to write down the story of the painter’s life, erasing and rewriting his words until the paper disintegrates. The tortured figures depicted in Aurach’s paintings recur in the palimpsest of the narrator’s erased layers of text and thus the technique of painting is transfigured into writing. In RS Sebald continues this method suggested in last story of AW. In *Die Ringe des Saturn*, more so than in Sebald’s other works, the practice of intertextuality develops into intermediality.

The history of destruction in RS seems to unfurl without redemption. The narrator’s recapitulation of his journey culminates in a melodramatic list of misfortunes that happened on a

single date throughout the years (April 13). However, both NN and RS end with a glimpse of the beauty of the world, a way of seeing that, again, is inspired and expanded by ekphrasis, and mimics the perspective of painting. At the end of “Die dunckle Nacht fährt aus,” the speaker describes the depiction of an ocean and mountains in the distance of Altdorfer’s *Battle of Alexander at Issus*:

Ich weiß jetzt, wie mit dem Aug  
eines Kranichs überblickt man  
sein weites Gebiet, wahrhaft  
ein asiatisches Schauspiel  
und lernt langsam an der Winzigkeit  
der Figuren und der unbegreiflichen  
Schönheit der Natur, die sie überwölbt,  
jene Seite des Lebens zu sehen,  
die man vorher nicht sah. (NN 98)

The view afforded in and by the painting is both artificial (a spectacle) and enlightening, providing not just an overview of the beauty of nature, but through it an insight into an occluded part of life. The passage also echoes the description of Browne’s levitating prose early in RS. “Mit der größtmöglichen Deutlichkeit erblickt man die winzigsten Details. Es ist, als schaute man zugleich durch ein umgekehrtes Ferrohr und durch ein Mikroskop” (30), Sebald writes. In “Traumtexturen,” his essay on Nabokov, Sebald also mentions “Die Welt im Auge des Kranichs, mit dem manchmal die holländischen Maler [...] sich über das flache Panorama erhoben, das sie drunten auf der Erde umgab,” and characterizes Nabokov’s writing, similar to Browne’s, as “in die Höhe getragen von der Hoffnung, daß sich [...] die hinter den Horizont schon

hinabgesunkenen Landschaften der Zeit in einem synoptischen Blick noch einmal könnten erfassen lassen” (CS 188). In the last lines of RS, Sebald paraphrases an intertext by Browne, supposedly from *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, about the practice, in Holland, “im Hause eines Verstorbenen alle Spiegel und alle Bilder auf denen Landschaften, Menschen oder die Früchte der Felder zu sehen waren mit seidnem Trauerflor zu verhängen” (350). The paintings need to be covered so that they do not distract souls in the process of transmigration with a view of their “bald auf immer verlorenen Heimat” (i.e. the “hinabgesunkenen Landschaften der Zeit”). In other words, the receding world is (was) beautiful, and to die means to yearn for it. “[S]eidener Trauerflor” covers the paintings like silk/linen covers the urn of Patroclus/Hector’s bones in the *Iliad*. The colorful “Fetzchen Seide” Sebald imports via Browne from one of the oldest texts of Western literature, a material that is woven like a text and yet not text, is perhaps a metaphor for intermediality and the incorporation of different materials into texts (urns), in the case of RS the medium of painting. The fact that Browne misquotes Homer, or is intentionally sloppy about the purple scrap of silk in the urn of Patroclus, and that Sebald’s narrator cannot locate the intertext about the “seidener Trauerflor” – “an irgendeiner, von mir nicht mehr auffindbaren Stelle” – in *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, the humorous work about “Vulgar Errors” and superstitions, suggests that, even in his saddest work, Sebald has not entirely abandoned the role of Nabokovian trickster.

## APPENDIX 3

## Musée des Beaux Arts (W. H. Auden)

About suffering they were never wrong,  
 The old Masters: how well they understood  
 Its human position; how it takes place  
 While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;  
 How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting  
 For the miraculous birth, there always must be  
 Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating  
 On a pond at the edge of the wood:  
 They never forgot  
 That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course  
 Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot  
 Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse  
 Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away  
 Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may  
 Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,  
 But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone  
 As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green  
 Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen  
 Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,  
 Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on. (Auden 79-80)

## Pictures from Breughel

## II. Landscape with the Fall of Icarus (William Carlos Williams)

According to Brueghel  
 when Icarus fell  
 it was spring

a farmer was ploughing  
 his field  
 the whole pageantry

of the year was  
 awake tingling  
 near



the edge of the sea  
concerned  
with itself

sweating in the sun  
that melted  
the wings' wax

unsignificantly  
off the coast  
there was

a splash quite unnoticed  
this was  
Icarus drowning (Williams 385-86)

## CHAPTER 4

### Falsification as Disruptive Method in *Austerlitz* and *Die Ausgewanderten*

“[I]nterpretation, which corrupts or transforms, begins so early in the development of narrative texts that the recovery of the real right original thing is an illusory quest.” (Frank Kermode)

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Sebald's second work of prose fiction, *Die Ausgewanderten*, and his fourth and last – and most refined – text, *Austerlitz*, deal specifically with the topic Sebald has been, for better or worse, identified with, or for which he has become famous: the Holocaust. Even critics like Uwe Schütte, who makes an effort to write against the “hagiographic” reception of Sebald, and who has correctly pointed out that only two of the four stories in AW have Jewish protagonists,<sup>108</sup> writes “[n]atürlich ist Sebald der herausragendste Dichter des Holocaust in deutscher Sprache,” adding in a note that he wishes to exclude Paul Celan (Schütte 562-63, 566). This comment touches on a pertinent aspect of the reception of Holocaust literature in general, both within Germany and the U.S.: fiction about the Holocaust can still not, with a clear conscience, be put in the hands of a non-Jewish German, an unspoken taboo Sebald was very conscious of. As it turns out, in *Austerlitz* and *Die Ausgewanderten*, witnessing is both complicated by his (unacknowledged) use of authentic Holocaust memoirs, and left intact because Sebald does, in fact, let intertexts represent the voice of victims rather than speaking for them. Sebald's technique of interweaving texts from multiple sources is both scandalous and ingenious when applied in the context of Holocaust literature. The third story of AW, “Ambros Adelwarth,”

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<sup>108</sup> Henry Selwyn and Max Aurach are Jewish emigrants. Paul Bereyter is one fourth Jewish, and although he is not forced to leave Germany, his girlfriend is deported and dies, presumably in a concentration camp. In “Ambros Adelwarth,” the only Jewish characters are Cosmo Solomon and his family, and the story is set in Europe and the U.S., pre-WW I and in the interwar years.

although not about the Holocaust, closely resembles, and therefore anticipates Sebald's intertwining of allusions into intricate textures in *Austerlitz*. Whereas intertextuality in *Schwindel. Gefühle.* took the shape of doubling, in "Ambros Adelwarth" and *Austerlitz* intertexts complexly refract each other in the manner of a *mise en abyme*. In *Austerlitz*, which is also a text about architecture (and told predominantly by an architectural historian and a narrator who evolves, in many ways, into his disciple), intertexts become like a three-dimensional scaffolding. On the level of the intertexts, tragedy coincides with humor in *Austerlitz* and "Ambros Adelwarth," and the falsification of source materials (texts, images, characters) further disrupts the already nonlinear modes of reading necessary to penetrate the depth of Sebald's texts.

The theme of forgery occurs on several levels in *Austerlitz* and *Die Ausgewanderten*. Austerlitz and Ambros Adelwarth (and also Max Aurach) are amalgamated characters, inspired not only by literary characters but by several different historical personages, some of whom have voiced concern at being appropriated for works of fiction. Sebald's oeuvre is of course defined by its textual and visual quotations that blur the line between fiction and non-fiction. A densely woven web of references, allusions, and quotations that commingles the fictive with the historical provides the structural core of his texts, onto which original offshoots are grafted. Sebald is ostensibly committed to maintaining an "acute historical perspective" in his writing (CS 248), and yet images and source texts often not only remain unattributed, but are also falsified/modified and embellished. The quasi-autobiographical tone and documentary character of his texts, which is enhanced by visual material, draw attention to the absence of source attribution as a conspicuous lack. These concerns are mirrored throughout by intertexts that themselves reference falsification as a theme, and by embedded references to diamonds and other precious – and likely to be forged – materials. Key scenes are often set in places where

appearances are not what they seem, such as carnivals, funhouses, or mirror cabinets. Furthermore, both texts contain either swindlers or intertexts that feature duplicitous characters. Intertextuality is inherently a form of falsification, as pretexts are de- and then recontextualized. Sebald announces or acknowledges his forgeries by making the theme of forgery correspond to his method. Falsification emerges not only as an undercurrent theme but as a method of composition which leads to questions of authenticity in memory, historiography, witnessing, and art – in other words the very topics so important to all of Sebald's works. At the same time as his texts blur the line between fiction and non-fiction and thereby generate an indeterminable new space, they dissolve the line between falsified passages and "authentic" ones and profoundly question concepts of authorship and authenticity as such.

Intertextual novels have a history of being heralded as creating new modes of reading and writing. Writing is a form of "reading of the anterior literary corpus," Julia Kristeva (following Bakhtin) states in "Word, Dialogue, Novel," and every text is "an absorption of and reply to another text" (69). Texts are permeable and in dialogue with their cultural and sociopolitical context, and aspects of history and society inserted into a given text are reinserted back into history through the writing process. Texts, according to Kristeva's summary of Bakhtin, are a "mosaic of quotations," whereby "quotations" signify anything from references to the larger literary and societal context to textual citations (66). Issues like source attribution run counter to the anti-hegemonic spirit of the ideal, dialogical novel. De-emphasizing the role of an omnipotent author and questioning the concepts of originarity and artistic genius, Roland Barthes writes that a text is a "multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" and that a writer "can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original" (Barthes 146). If Sebald's compositions seem to neatly continue this post-modern

legacy, his methodology is complicated by the specific sources of culture and history he draws from in A and AW. Sebald's preoccupation with the Holocaust, the literature of its survivors, and individual destinies of displacement clashes with a postmodern mode of disregarding authorship. Historically, texts that bear witness to the traumas of World War II have taken care not to appropriate or alter the voices of victims. For narratives that restage Holocaust experiences and trace victims' paths into destitution and death, the stakes are high to operate with traceable, authentic sources. Sebald conceived of intertextual allusions and quotations as a form of honoring another author's work in his own writing. Accordingly, he calls the process of incorporating lines from others "entlehnen" (borrowing), a term which implies that the textual "item" will eventually be returned to literary history in transfigured form (LiL 139). "Es gibt viele Formen des Schreibens; einzig aber in der literarischen geht es, über die Registrierung der Tatsachen und der Wissenschaft hinaus, *um einen Versuch der Restitution*," Sebald writes (CS 248, italics mine). But the practice of "entlehnen," and the concept of borrowing as restitution are complicated when Sebald turns to memoirs of witnessing as a source of inspiration.

## II. *AUSTERLITZ*: THE SPARKLE OF FALSE DIAMONDS

At the end of *Austerlitz*, the narrator reads and quotes from *Heshel's Kingdom* (1999), a book Jacques Austerlitz gave him in Paris. Its author, Dan Jacobson, travels to Lithuania to research the life of his grandfather, who died after the First World War, and to search – in vain – for traces of his extended family, who perished during the Holocaust. Jacobson grew up in South Africa and

[verbrachte] den größten Teil seiner Kindheit [...] in der neben den

*Diamantengruben* von Kimberley gelegenen gleichnamigen Stadt. Die meisten

dieser Gruben [...] hatte man zu jener Zeit bereits stillgelegt, auch die beiden größten, die Kimberley Mine und *die De Beers Mine*, und da sie nicht eingezäunt waren, konnte, wer es wagte, bis an den vordersten Rand der riesigen Gruben herantreten und hinabblicken in eine Tiefe von mehreren tausend Fuß. (A 419-20, *italics mine*)

For Jacobson, the gaping chasm of the abandoned diamond mines symbolizes the absence of his relatives who, like other victims of the Holocaust, vanished without a trace into “a darkness that gives back nothing” (Jacobson xi). For Sebald, too, the image of an abyss on the last pages of *Austerlitz* functions as a visual reminder of the rupture created in European history (and his protagonist’s life) by the Second World War and represents the “untergegangene Vorzeit” of individual destinies obliterated by the Nazis’ organized machinery of extermination. And yet, beyond symbolizing an unrecoverable history, the diamond mines, and particularly the mention of the De Beers Mine, wrap up the theme of diamonds, false crystals, and forgery in *Austerlitz*, and point to a more playful side of Sebald that is often overlooked.

The paradigmatic example of Sebald’s unacknowledged indebtedness to a Holocaust survivor is Susi Bechhöfer, whose biography inspired aspects of *Austerlitz*. Bechhöfer’s story, first presented in a BBC documentary in 1991 (“Whatever happened to Susi?”), and her subsequent memoir *Rosa’s Child* (1996, co-authored by Jeremy Josephs), resembles that of Austerlitz in broad strokes. Separated from their mother at age three, the Jewish twins Susi and Lotte arrived on a *Kindertransport* in England in 1938 and were raised under false names by a Calvinist preacher. The presence of a twin (Lotte later died from a brain tumor) is echoed in *Austerlitz* on the train ride to Germany from Prague, blended with resurfacing childhood memories of the *Kindertransport* trip (A 324). Like Austerlitz, Susi Bechhöfer first heard her

real name from a teacher at boarding school (Josephs 40) but spent years in denial until the burden of not knowing about her past became too much to bear and she researched her origins. While Sebald does not mention Bechhöfer in *Austerlitz*, he did later acknowledge her story in interviews and corresponded with her personally. In an interview with Maya Jaggi Sebald says: “The details of Susie Bechhofer’s [sic] life, with child abuse in a Calvinist Welsh home, are far more horrific than anything in *Austerlitz*. But I didn’t want to make use of it because I haven’t the right. I try to keep at a distance and never invade” (Jaggi “Recovered Memories,” unpaginated). Bechhöfer felt differently. “What few people who have read *Austerlitz* realise is that it is based on a true story – mine. [...] Without my knowledge, a great chunk of his research was to be taken from my material,” she said in an interview (Duncan, unpaginated). Her anguish at Sebald’s silent appropriation of details of her life and suffering was inadequately resolved through Sebald’s death and is still argued over by Bechhöfer and Penguin (the first publisher of the English translation of *Austerlitz*).<sup>109</sup>

A similarly murky issue is the likewise unacknowledged resemblance of aspects of *Austerlitz* to Saul Friedländer’s autobiographical text *Wenn die Erinnerung kommt*.<sup>110</sup> Friedländer is born in 1932 and raised in Prague where he spends an idyllic childhood of long walks with his nurse Vlasta in the parks of the Hradshin. In 1939 the family flees to France, where the parents eventually arrange for the boy to hide in a Catholic boarding school. (Jacques Austerlitz too is born in the early 1930s, lives in Prague until he is five years old, and has a Czech nurse, Věra. After reaching Wales on a *Kindertransport* in 1939 he is raised by a Calvinist preacher and his wife.) Friedländer’s parents are deported and later murdered in Theresienstadt

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<sup>109</sup> For a detailed account of Bechhöfer’s grievances, as well as which elements of her memoir Sebald used, cf. Modlinger.

<sup>110</sup> Sebald’s extensive marginalia, some of which mention Jacques Austerlitz, in his copy of Friedländer’s memoir in the Literaturarchiv Marbach provide a link beyond textual similarities.

(where Austerlitz's mother dies). His years in Catholic school are bleak and suffocating, but the boy gradually takes on a new identity, a new name (Paul-Henri Ferland), and eventually converts (Jacques Austerlitz spends sad years with his monosyllabic foster parents, under the new name Dafydd Elias). Austerlitz's "false" name also provides a hinge between Sebald's protagonist and Friedländer: Saul and David are the first and second king of Israel, respectively. After the war, Friedländer represses his true identity; it takes years before he can identify again with his Jewishness, and even longer before the pain of the loss of his parents sinks in. Friedländer later emigrates to Israel and starts a new life as a successful academic, gradually learning how to access his buried childhood memories and through them articulate the unspeakable injustice committed against the Jews. "Es hat sehr lange gedauert, bis ich den Weg zu meiner eigenen Vergangenheit wiederfand. Die Erinnerung an die Ereignisse selbst konnte ich nicht vertreiben, doch wenn ich davon sprechen wollte oder wenn ich zur Feder griff, um sie zu beschreiben, war ich jedesmal wie gelähmt," Friedländer writes (108). The description of paralysis vis à vis the past is again reminiscent of Jacques Austerlitz, who seems increasingly like Friedländer's twin shadow – more so than Susi or Lotte Bechhöfer – not only mute but initially unable to remember. The marginalia on page 108 in Sebald's copy of *Wenn die Erinnerung kommt* attests to the link: "Austerlitz aber hat diese Phase nie erinnert." The list of adapted motifs goes on. As an adult Friedländer travels back to Prague and has an emotional reunion with his former Czech governess. Together they go for walks on the paths of Saul's childhood, just as Věra and Jacques do. The first time Friedländer sets foot in Germany he is overcome with disgust and gripped by panic at the sudden ubiquity of Germans, a further experience he shares with Sebald's character. Friedländer's moving account develops in disjointed spurts, halted by doubts about the value and purpose of his writing. Discouraged by the perceived inadequacy of his memory he jumps



between the past and the present, using short paragraphs to convey memories that trail off into ellipses. The urgency of bearing witness and the difficulty of doing so are palpable, inimitable undercurrents – or so it would seem.

By partially replicating Friedländer's and Bechhöfer's unique experiences, Sebald's text seems to commit the unspeakable: appropriating the victim's voice and hence rendering it imitable. This kind of borrowing raises a series of questions about the ethical dimension of a work of fiction that was evidently inspired by a Holocaust memoir and in rough steps follows the biography of a survivor. Does Sebald's adaptation/falsification of the memoirs taint their unique status as witness reports? Are the distorted details rendered inauthentic? Who owns this memory, or has it become part of a collective memory? Sebald's silence about his source texts implies that Friedländer's and Bechhöfer's memoirs are not a particular, unique experience. The perhaps most provocative question is whether, more than half a century after the event, a "universal Holocaust memory" has crystallized from survivor testimonies. Arguably, the amalgam of the voices of others in Sebald's prose makes their traces (re)readable and resuscitates them.

Friedländer is a historian and has published extensively (and almost uniquely) on the Third Reich, the extermination of Jews, and the limits of representing the Holocaust. Using aspects of his autobiography as a source text opens the possibility of dialogue with Friedländer's other works, and ensures that *Wenn die Erinnerung kommt* remains – albeit in altered form – in circulation. The limited circulation of Bechhöfer's text (which was produced in collaboration with a journalist) likewise might have increased through *Austerlitz*. But would it not have been easier to mention their names, if literature as "a form of restitution" were at stake? While unattributed quotations are playful "tags" – markers for intertextuality – waiting to be decoded, they create different narrative spaces for initiated readers (those who are familiar with the source

text) and non-initiated readers (those who are not).<sup>111</sup> Jörg Helbig has called the dialogue between author and privileged readers, who decode buried cues or recognize the resemblance to a source text, “augenzwinkernde Kommunikation mit dem Eingeweihten” (a wink to those in the know) (Schedel 45), highlighting both the playful aspect of an intertextual methodology and its dependence upon an erudite readership. But can one write about the Holocaust with a playful wink?

The first reference to the glint of precious materials and mirror cabinets accompanies the initial sighting of Jacques Austerlitz, who sits in the mirrored waiting room of the Antwerp train station, “Noch war der Gold-und Silberglanz auf den riesigen halbblinden Wandspiegeln gegenüber der Fensterfront nicht vollends erloschen, da erfüllte ein unweltliches Dämmer den Saal, in dem weit auseinander, reglos und stumm, ein paar Reisende saßen” (A 13). The waiting room seems warped to the narrator like a “verkehrtes Miniaturuniversum,” akin to the “Nocturama,” the night exhibit at the Antwerp zoo. Austerlitz seems to be a denizen of this topsy-turvy underworld. Another chance encounter between them also coincides with the mention of precious materials and mirrors (and also occurs in a train station). The narrator has just received the diagnosis of his strange vision impairment, as well as an injection, which blurs his eyesight: “[es] kreisten die schummrigen Ballonleuchter, die Spiegelflächen hinter der Bar und die bunten Batterien der Spirituosenflaschen mir vor den Augen, als säße ich auf einem Karussell” (A 61). The scene is reminiscent of a carnival. Again, the people around him seem to be a strange species of animals transferred from the “*goldmines*” of the city to the “watering hole” of the bar. Both times, Austerlitz’s presence is akin to an apparition in a transient space

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111 For a description of the different orders of Sebald’s tags see Susanne Schedel, who analyzes Sebald’s intertextuality from a structuralist perspective, isolating citation, allusion, and paraphrase as Sebald’s foremost methods. Cf. also Helbig, who identifies four stages of intertextuality: “Nullstufe” (unmarked), “Reduktionsstufe” (implicitly marked), “Vollstufe” (explicitly marked), and “Potenzierungsstufe” (thematized intertextuality) (88-131). While useful, this system does not leave enough room for Sebald’s blurring of these stages.

(the train station) that is transformed into a mirror cabinet, a disconcerting realm whose unreality is given away by its sparkle. Precious metals like gold and silver signal that Austerlitz is a character forged from various parts of specific literary history and collective historical memory, while mirrors underscore that he leads his life under a false identity.

Mirrors also accompany the meeting between the narrator and Austerlitz in Alderney Street, and Austerlitz's solitary research sessions in libraries in Paris – in other words, locations associated with talking or reading about the past. In Alderney Street, shortly before Austerlitz launches into the long narration of the discovery of his true identity, he and the narrator ponder the “Unbegreiflichkeit von Spiegelbildern.” The narrator remembers: “Ich [...] entsinne mich, wie gebannt ich gewesen bin die ganze Zeit, während Austerlitz in der Küche die Teesachen richtete, von dem Spiegelbild des Feuerchens, das jenseits der verglasten Verandatüre, in einiger Entfernung vom Haus, zu brennen schien zwischen den fast schon nachtschwarzen Büschen im Garten.” Austerlitz, the narrator continues, “erwiderte daß auch er oft nach dem Einbruch der Nacht hier in diesem Zimmer sitze und hinausstarre in den draußen in der Dunkelheit reflektierten, anscheinend bewegungslosen Lichtpunkt” (176-77). The beginning of one of Austerlitz's stories is once again complicated by the presence of a mirror, casting doubt on the authenticity of the character while conveying that Austerlitz's stories are reflections of the stories of others. This passage is also reminiscent of a scene from *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, which Sebald mentions in “Traumtexturen” to illustrate Nabokov's penchant for spectrality. Sebald attributes a “ghost-like quality” to Nabokov's prose, such as when V. senses the presence of his brother's ghost moving around in Cambridge “im Widerschein des im Kamin flackernden Feuerscheins” (CS 187). In *Austerlitz*, which was influenced by *Sebastian Knight* in several ways, Sebald replicates this phrase when the narrator notices the “Widerschein der bläulich

flackernden Flammen” (176). The image of a windowpane acting as a mirror and simultaneously blurring an interior with an exterior space also appears in *Pale Fire* – the novel among Nabokov’s oeuvre in which he plays most overtly with themes of confabulation, unreliable narration, and falsified/forged biographies. At the beginning of “Pale Fire” (the poem), John Shade announces his tenuous grip on life, similar to Austerlitz’s: “I was the shadow of the waxwing slain // by the false azure of the windowpane; // I was the smudge of ashen fluff – and I // Lived on, flew on, in the reflected sky” (33).<sup>112</sup> The bird is fooled by the mirror yet the speaker imagines continuing its flight as a ghost in a reflected world, in other words a simulacrum. The first lines of “Pale Fire” thus signal that poem and commentary, mediated by John Shade’s “editor” Charles Kinbote, are apocryphal.

Sitting in the new national library in Paris, Austerlitz makes a similar observation: “Mehrfach ist es auch vorgekommen, sagte Austerlitz, daß Vögel, die sich in den Bibliothekswald verirrt, in die in den Glasscheiben des Lesesaals sich spiegelnden Bäume hineinflogen und, nach einem dumpfen Schlag, leblos zu Boden gestürzt sind” (398). Glass becomes the threshold or interface between reality and illusion. Glass in *Austerlitz* is also a metaphor for the translucent yet impenetrable barrier between the present and memory. “Wenn einem die Erinnerung kommt, glaubt man mitunter, man sehe durch einen gläsernen Berg in die vergangene Zeit,” says Věra (232).<sup>113</sup> The fact that the library becomes an incidental death trap for birds proves to Austerlitz that large-scale, complex systems are necessarily flawed, threatened by “chronisch[e] Dysfunktion” and “konstitutionell[e] Labilität” (399). Similar to the

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<sup>112</sup> *Austerlitz* brims with birds, similar to *Pale Fire*, but the bird imagery seems also to have been inspired by *The Book of Nightingales* by Richard Mabey (1997). Sebald’s heavily marked-up copy in the Literature Archive in Marbach contains the following marginalia: “Austerlitz, dem die Vögel teuer sind. Und die toten Vögel in den Schachteln” (98), and: “Die Mutter von Austerlitz eine Sopranistin” (49).

<sup>113</sup> This quote reflects the title of Friedländer’s memoir, *Wenn die Erinnerung kommt*, and alludes to a quote from Gustav Meyrink’s *Golem* within this text: “Allmählich, wenn das Wissen kommt, kommt auch die Erinnerung. Wissen und Erinnerung sind dasselbe” (Friedländer 25). In Friedländer’s memoir, similar to *Austerlitz*, knowledge is a catalyst for memory, not vice versa.

window, which fools birds, the building's architecture fools visitors: after a perilous ascent on narrow steps, visitors have to take a moving walkway to descend again to the ground floor in order to enter. The forest in the library's interior courtyard likewise tricks Austerlitz. He hallucinates "Zirkusartisten, die sich mit ihren an den Enden zitternden Balancierstangen Fuß vor Fuß in die Höhe tasteten" as well as squirrels, "von denen eine apokryphe Geschichte, die mir zu Ohren gekommen ist, behauptet, daß man sie hier ausgesetzt hat in der Hoffnung sie würden sich vermehren [...] zur Zerstreuung der [...] Leser" (397-98).<sup>114</sup> The imagined circus artists and squirrels, whose purpose also is to entertain, further tilt the library from archive (or perhaps death trap) of information into a farcical, carnivalesque realm. Explicitly mentioning an "apocryphal story" at the end of *Austerlitz* is a playful reminder to read the text and its borrowed memories/falsified memoirs as fiction. The remainder of the first stanza of "Pale Fire" continues the projection of an illusory world, and ends in a reference to diamonds and their – potentially – false gleam:

And from the inside, too, I'd duplicate  
 Myself, my lamp, an apple on a plate:  
 Uncurtaining the night, I'd let dark glass  
 Hang all the furniture above the grass,  
 And how delightful when a fall of snow  
 Covered my glimpse of lawn and reached up so  
 As to make chair and bed exactly stand  
 Upon that snow, out in that crystal land! (33)

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<sup>114</sup> The image of birds crashing into the window follows directly upon the reference to squirrels, which Sebald lifts from *Pnin* (see chapter 2). Several scenes in *Austerlitz* contain staggered references to Nabokov, and each describes a locale where images, memories, and intertexts overlap: Andromeda Lodge (*Speak Memory, Ada*), Prague (*Speak Memory, Sebastian Knight*), and the new library in Paris (*Sebastian Knight, Pale Fire*) are such locations.

The idea of a “crystal land” in the mirror underscores the reflection of reality as false. *Pale Fire* and *Sebastian Knight* are both parodies and contain obviously fake and duplicitous personages. References to these works in *Austerlitz* suggest an invitation to read its characters and situations in a similarly constructed manner.

The new national library in Paris is not what it seems, and neither is the view from it. Just a few pages before Sebald mentions the De Beers diamond mine in South Africa, Austerlitz meets the librarian Henri Lemoine, who turns out to be on loan from early 20<sup>th</sup> century Paris via Marcel Proust, and in whom the forgery theme literally crystallizes. Like Dan Jacobson, Austerlitz and Henri Lemoine also gaze into an abyss: “Wir standen einen Fuß nur hinter der bis an den Boden reichenden Verglasung. Sowie man den Blick in die Tiefe senkte [...] erfaßte einen der Sog des Abgrunds, und man war gezwungen, zurückzutreten um einen Schritt” (406). They gaze down onto the former “Lagerplatz Austerlitz-Tolbiac,” a gruesome Nazi depot of goods confiscated from Jews, nicknamed Galeries d’Austerlitz, its history now (supposedly) erased, “im wahrsten Wortsinn begraben [...] unter den Fundamenten der Grande Bibliotheque unseres pharaonischen Präsidenten” (409). Lemoine, who whispers these “facts” to Jacques Austerlitz, recognizes him from his period of research in the old national library. The two men bond over nostalgia for the rue Richelieu library, where everything went its dusty old-fashioned way, where the soft lights of the reading room illuminated the hushed industriousness of readers. In contrast, the new library is cold and disorienting, a locus of vertigo-inducing suffocation. The modern building is described by Austerlitz as an architectural disaster, “[ein] in seiner ganzen äußeren Dimensionierung und inneren Konstruktion menschenabweisende[s] und den Bedürfnissen jedes wahren Lesers von vornherein kompromißlos entgegengesetzte[s] Gebäude” (392). Lemoine echoes this sentiment, referring to the library as a building “das durch seine ganze Anlage ebenso

wie an seine ins Absurde grenzende innere Regulierung den Leser als einen potentiellen Feind auszuschließen suche” (405). The passage voices disapproval with the manner in which information is archived, and history preserved, a comment perhaps on the failure of France to address its collaboration with Nazi Germany, as well as on the ambiguous role of any archival processes. Rather than a safe haven of information and democratic stronghold that facilitates access to history, the new *Bibliothèque Nationale* becomes a labyrinthine prison that hides the information it harbors (and an incidental death trap for birds). The encounter between Lemoine and Austerlitz blends into a description of the archive in Theresienstadt, and the link to a meticulous record keeping of cruelty further emphasizes the critical historiographical commentary. Hushed like the manner of approaching history, the conversation between Lemoine and Austerlitz is performed sotto voce.

However, the peacefulness is shattered when the origin of the informer’s name is considered. The historical figure Henri Lemoine was an infamous con man who scandalized and held all of Paris in awe in the Nineteen-teens with the purported claim of having discovered the formula for producing artificial diamonds. The “affaire Lemoine” caused a scandal and eventually a highly publicized lawsuit during which Lemoine was sentenced to six years in jail. Lemoine had sold the chairman of the De Beers Mine in South Africa his “formula” for a sizable sum of money, and countless people had invested in the company as a result. Even during court proceedings, prominent eyewitnesses maintained to have seen diamonds emerge from Lemoine’s crucible (cf. “France Hoping for Cheap Diamonds”). The scandal around the diamond forger inspired Marcel Proust to use it as the subject matter for a series of pastiches published in *Le Figaro* (1904, 1908) and subsequently in book form as *Pastiches et Mélanges* (1918). In each pastiche, Proust recounts the affair, emulating the writing style of a canonical French author (e.g.

Flaubert, Balzac, Saint-Simon). Proust thus composed a series of stories in a borrowed voice, like a string of false diamonds. The borrowed character Henri Lemoine turns out to have been *überschrieben* (written over) in the manner of a palimpsest. His migration from a literary text of another as well as from a historical context into Sebald's work has an array of hyper-textual implications. First and foremost, what are the implications of Sebald choosing the name of a diamond forger, tinged with counterfeit and irrational belief, for a figure who reports on the Holocaust in *Austerlitz*?

James L. Cowan tries to make the case that Sebald took considerable artistic liberty with the description and location of "Les Galeries Austerlitz." While a camp where "goods were processed for shipment to Germany by Jewish prisoners" did exist, it "was located [...] approximately 500 meters south of the site of the Grande Bibliothèque," not directly underneath it, as Lemoine asserts, and destroyed by the Germans in 1944, a fact Sebald omits (Cowan I 68). However, at the time Sebald was working on *Austerlitz* in the late 1990s, hardly any publicly accessible records about such a camp existed and its history was indeed buried. Sebald's source of information was, in fact, one of the first newspaper articles published about the camp, a 1997 *ZeitMagazin* article, called "Die Türme des Schweigens," in which Alexander Smolczyk cynically juxtaposes the inauguration of the new library to the silenced history of the "Lagerplatz Tolbiac."<sup>115</sup> The article, which is accompanied by photographs about the site, critiques the new library in terms similar to Henri Lemoine's as a monolithic structure consisting of absurdities, and contains many details familiar from the pages of *Austerlitz*, such as "ein Eichhörnchenpaar ausgesetzt" in the central "Pinienwäldchen" (11).<sup>116</sup> Sebald's description of the camp, its goods, prisoners, and purpose likewise derives from witness reports, facts, and numbers presented by

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115 Cf. also Cowan I 69-77 for a comparison of parts of this article to Sebald's text.

116 Cf. chapter 2.



Smoltczyk (“vierzigtausend Wohnungen,” “siebenhundert Eisenbahnzüge” “eine Saloneinrichtung für die Villa im Grunewald,” etc. A 407-09). Cowan mentions that a French publication detailing the history of the camp concluded that Sebald’s account of its interior “‘est en total décalage avec la réalité dont elle veut témoigner’ (is in complete discrepancy with the reality to which it claims to bear witness)” (I 70-71) – a charge that should have been leveled against Smoltczyk, if anything.<sup>117</sup> Likewise, Cowen’s assessment of Sebald’s adaptation of facts becomes moot when his reliance on the source text is considered. Lemoine’s claims “auf dem Ödland zwischen dem Rangiergelände der Gare d’Austerlitz und dem Pont Tolbiac, auf dem heute diese Bibliothek sich erhebt, war [...] bis zum Kriegsende ein großes Lager” (407), and “die ganze Geschichte [ist] im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes begraben unter den Fundamenten der Grande Bibliotheque unseres pharaonischen Präsidenten” (409) reflect the wording of Smoltczyk: “[u]nd auch jene Eisenbahn- und Lagerschuppenödnis Tolbiac, auf der sich die vier Glastürme der neuen Nationalbibliothek erheben, hat ihre Geschichte,” and the words of his informer: “[e]s hat hier ein Lager gegeben,” sagt er. ‘Ein Arbeitslager’” (12).

Ironically, the man Smoltczyk interviews about the Camp Austerlitz is a puppeteer and former professor of linguistics, in other words a performer of a theatrical fringe art form, which recalls the carnivalesque, and someone cognizant of the ambiguous truth value of words. Together he and the journalist look down on the gruesome site of the former camp from the fifth-floor window of his workshop next to the library. The concluding scene of the Lemoine episode in Austerlitz is reminiscent of the mood and image presented in the *ZeitMagazin* article. Austerlitz and the librarian watch the lights of Paris illuminate the metropolitan dusk from the upper floor of the National Library in a moment of silence. Paris, “die jetzt in ihrem Lichterglanz

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<sup>117</sup> Cowan quotes from Dreyfus, Jean-Marc and Sarah Gensburger. *Des camps dans Paris: Austerlitz, Léviton, Bassano (juillet 1943–août 1944)*. Paris: Fayard, 2003

funkelnde Stadt” evokes again the De Beers Mine and Lemoine’s sparkling diamonds.<sup>118</sup>

Lemoine, the ambivalent forger/literary character of pastiche, has perhaps become a blank slate again precisely because he has been overwritten so much. A desirable form of ambivalence, Kristeva writes, is a form of serious repetition rather than imitation, a “claiming and appropriating [...] without relativizing,” and a form of “a writer’s exploitation of another’s speech – without running counter to its thought – for his own purposes” (Kristeva 73). *Austerlitz* claims, quotes, and incorporates texts from literature (Proust’s *Pastiches et Mélange*), history (the Lemoine affaire of the early 1900s), and journalism (the *ZeitMagazin* article). The name Henri Lemoine functions as a marker for the constructedness of Sebald’s story and ruptures the documentary character of the text. The passage also exemplifies the complex mirroring of intertexts in *Austerlitz*. Proust mirrors the Lemoine affair (as well as the style of his forerunners) in his parodistic stories, and Sebald mirrors elements of both while embedding the scene in a historical framework that mirrors yet another source. The library scene, once decoded, is a reminder, close to the end, that *Austerlitz* needs to be read with a distance. Especially concerning Holocaust memorial literature, distance is paramount.

By incorporating forged items, unreferenced text passages of other writers, and alluding to texts that thematize falsification, Sebald’s texts deliberately engage with forgery. Beyond providing a metaphor for intertextuality, forgery becomes a mode of intervention. In addition to the definition of forgery as “the making of a thing in fraudulent imitation of something; also, *esp.* the forging, counterfeiting, or falsifying of a document,” the OED offers the – now obsolete and only poetically used – meaning of forgery as “invention, excogitation; fictitious invention,

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<sup>118</sup> The passage is also reminiscent of the Feuerreiter passage in Améry’s *Lefeu oder der Abbruch*. Before the painter Lefeu sets fire to his studio and dies of a heart attack, he ecstatically hallucinates all of Paris succumbing to flames and implicitly burning for its “sins” during WWII. The passage also echoes the firebombing of Camp Austerlitz in 1944.

fiction.” A conception of forgery as a reworking of the old to make it seem authentic is the antithesis of a “master narrative.” In K. K. Ruthven’s definition *all* literature is spurious, and forged literature merely an aspect of an essentially spurious art form. Forged literature provides a meta-commentary on the society and culture from which it arises. “Like literature, every literary forgery has two lives: first as a cultural intervention, and second as a symptom of the culture into which it intervenes” (193). The presence of diamond forger Lemoine in the library is symptomatic of, and reveals the hegemonic aspect of an archival institution that, according to Sebald’s narrator, complicates users’ ability to access the information in a Kafkaesque manner.

The tracks of Henri Lemoine the diamond forger lead to Proust, but the theme of diamonds leads, once again, to Nabokov and *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. Sebald often embeds stolen or borrowed textual and visual quotations in passages that reveal a connection to the literary trickster Nabokov. Falsification and intertextuality as a form of creative thievery, literary device, and theme also appear in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. Structurally, *Sebastian Knight* resembles Sebald’s narratives. An epistemological project, it charts the search of a narrator to gain knowledge and document a dead man’s life and demise, the narrator V.’s brother Sebastian. Like V., Sebald’s narrator – and Austerlitz himself – are engaged in piecing together the “real life” of Jacques Austerlitz, and similar to Nabokov, Sebald leaves considerable doubt about the identity of his protagonist, questioning the concept of reality itself. Sebastian was a writer and through writing his biography the narrator retroactively creates male camaraderie and affinity between himself and the (half) brother he barely knew. V. (who is a Russian émigré in Paris) emphasizes the similarity between himself and his subject of inquiry, or rather constructs them as similar personae (like Kinbote does with Shade in *Pale Fire*), and it remains inconclusive whether they might not even be the same person. Frequent interruptions of

the narrative and references to the writing process as such, an emphasis on artifice and the visibility of patterns, are further elements this novel shares with all of Sebald's narrative texts. In other words, Sebald structurally mirrors Nabokov's novel. With the addition of references and structural and thematic similarities to *Pnin*, *Ada*, and *Speak, Memory* (as I have argued in chapter 2), Sebald stages *Austerlitz* in a cabinet of mirrors that reflects Nabokov in multiple ways. Although the tone is different – *Sebastian Knight* is a parody of (auto)biography as a genre – autobiographical elements abound and Nabokov draws on scenes from his own childhood, which is described in *Speak, Memory*.<sup>119</sup> Sebastian's last novel was supposed to be a "fictitious biography" (like *Austerlitz* and *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* itself), and there is some doubt whether the biography V. sets out to write might not be fictitious as well. What is treated with seriousness and often somberness in Sebald due to the Holocaust material (narrators on a quest to unearth the stories of the dead) is performed with a wink in Nabokov. Yet in *Austerlitz* as well, the wink never quite disappears.

Like Sebald's texts, *Sebastian Knight* is also rife with mock coincidences. V.'s wild-goose chase into the murky private life of his brother leads him to fantastical "chance" encounters with people and places. As in many of his texts, Nabokov plays with the genre of parody. *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* parodies the detective novel, (auto)biography, and the gothic novel, sometimes all at once. In a self-referential twist on parody as a device, one of Sebastian's books quoted by V., *The Prismatic Bezel*, "is based cunningly on a parody of certain tricks of the literary trade," a parody of a detective novel and "many other things" (SK 92). In explaining Sebastian's parody-writing techniques, Nabokov describes his own. By including

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119 Autobiographical material from *Speak, Memory* includes V.'s boyhood in St. Petersburg, images of Russian winters, the country estate Vyra, studies at Oxford as a Russian emigrant, a traumatic incident of the father fighting a duel, visiting a former governess in Switzerland, and the dead father's wedding ring fastened with thread on his mother's finger to hers. Nabokov also incorporates some of these scenes into other texts, such as *Ada* and *The Luzhin Defense*.

references to *Sebastian Knight* in *Austerlitz*, Sebald breaks the somberness of his tone, adding an undercurrent of playfulness. The title of Sebastian's book – *The Prismatic Bezel* – refers to diamonds, and its narrative style echoes Proust's *Pastiches et Mélanges*.<sup>120</sup> As V. describes: "the heroes of the book are what can be loosely called 'methods of composition.' It is as if a painter said: look, here I'm going to show you not the painting of a landscape but the painting of different ways of painting a certain landscape" (SK 93). "Prismatic" refraction describes not only the different angles of composition within this fictional text, but an intertextual writing process. Intertexts – other authors' "gems" – are reflections of an original pretext. The references in *Austerlitz* to a constructed character like Sebastian Knight and to the unreliable narrator V. deliberately signal the undercurrent theme of forgery/falsification in Sebald's text.

Even the old library in rue Richelieu in Paris is not exempt from critique. Shortly before Austerlitz meets Marie de Verneuil, he ponders whether it is "eine Insel der Seligen" or "eine Strafkolonie," foreshadowing the split role of the new library as sanctuary or prison of information, and the split role of the military buildings Breendonk and Theresienstadt, originally constructed to shield and protect from aggressors and later converted to prisons and extermination camps. He lets his gaze wander out the window and notes "die hohen Fensterreihen des jenseitigen Traktes, in denen die dunklen Schieferplatten des Daches sich spiegelten, die schmalen ziegelroten Kamine, der strahlende eisblaue Himmel und die blecherne schneeweiße Wetterfahne mit der aus ihr ausgeschnittenen, blau wie der Himmel selbst aufwärts segelnden Schwalbe" (372). In the medley of contrasting colors and intersecting planes form and content merge – the protagonist's interest in architecture becomes blended with the descriptive

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120 The OED defines bezel as follows: "1. A slope, a sloping edge or face: esp. that of a chisel or other cutting tool. 2. *The oblique sides or faces of a cut gem; spec. the various oblique faces and edges of a brilliant*, which lie round the 'table' or large central plane on the upper surface, comprising the 8 star-facets, 16 skill-facets, and 8 lozenges. 3. 'The groove and projecting flange or lip by which the crystal of a watch or the stone of a jewel is retained in its setting'" (italics mine).

narration. The passage turns into an “inexplicable” surge of emotion: “Die Spiegelbilder in den alten Glasscheiben waren etwas gewellt oder gekräuselt, und ich weiß noch, sagte Austerlitz, daß mir bei ihrem Anblick aus irgendeinem unbegreiflichen Grund die Tränen gekommen sind” (372). Again, the library’s windows act as a mirror. Part of the library itself is reflected, in a warped way, in the glass-as-mirror façade of another part of the library (“Trakt”). This scene is reminiscent of a scene from *Lost Property* in *Sebastian Knight*, another fictional text within Nabokov’s text, which V. takes to be his brother’s “most autobiographical book” (SK 6).

When one morning I went to see the editor of a review [...] a particular stammer he had, *blending with a certain combination of angles in a pattern of roofs and chimneys, all slightly distorted owing to a flaw in the glass window-pane*, [...] sent my thoughts on such long and intricate errands that, instead of saying what I meant to say, I suddenly started telling this man [...] about the literary plans of a mutual friend, who, I remembered too late, had asked me to keep them a secret.

(SK 65-66, italics mine)

The character from *Lost Property*, whose thoughts, similar to those of Austerlitz, roam in an associative manner, divulges information he should not have. The distorted reflections, in both Nabokov’s and Sebald’s examples, suggest the altering of information – a danger in any kind of quotation of printed material – that even the archiving system of the library cannot prevent.

Also in this passage is a reference to the short film *Toute la mémoire du monde* (Alain Resnais 1956), in which the (old) national library in Paris is depicted as a prison of words. In Austerlitz’s recollection, the film portrays the researchers within the library as parasitical creatures feeding on and generating words (371-72). *Toute la mémoire du monde* is as critical of the old library as Austerlitz is of the new one, suggesting that history repeats itself. The explicit

reference to Resnais distracts from the omissions of other sources in *Austerlitz*, sources by Resnais included. The Marienbad episode in *Austerlitz* is an allusion to Resnais's film *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (1961).<sup>121</sup> Resnais and Sebald are in agreement about the ambivalent status of libraries – so much so that the *Toute la mémoire du monde* complements the library scenes in *Austerlitz* almost too neatly. The film as a source text does not open much new territory for the understanding of Sebald's text, with one exception: it also contains a forgery. To illustrate the complexity of the archiving process, Resnais follows the path of a single book from acquisition to cataloguing and shelving. This book, *Mars* by Jeannine Garane, is not only fictional but a futuristic spoof. Published by Editions du Seuil in a series called "Petite planète," it is a tourist guide to Mars, but not recognized as such: shown in one frame alongside the guides to Switzerland and Germany, *Mars* is nonetheless miscategorized as "Astrophysique" by the librarians.<sup>122</sup> Together with the emphasis on flawed windowpanes causing warped reflections, the references to *Sebastian Knight* and *Toute la mémoire du monde* with their fake books suggest that the library may excel at archiving information, but that the material it houses may be forged or become falsified.

During his first stay in Paris, Austerlitz sublets a room from Madame Amélie Cerf in 6, rue Emile Zola. The street name is a reference to Paul Celan, whose address in Paris – 6, Avenue Emile Zola – Sebald borrows for his fictional character.<sup>123</sup> Celan resided at this address at the time of his suicide. Austerlitz has the first of two mental breakdowns in the period of living there. Amélie Cerf, however, is a reference to Sebastian Knight's former lover, a woman who

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121 The French director also filmed one of the first Holocaust documentaries, *Nuit et brouillard* (1955).

122 The "Petite planète" series did exist and was overseen by Chris Marker, Resnais's assistant on *Toute la mémoire du monde*. Cf. <http://www.seuil.com/page-hommage-chris-marker.htm>

123 There is no "rue" Emile Zola in Paris. Sebald falsifies real place names in this subtle manner throughout *Austerlitz* to create not exactly fictional but slightly warped ones. He turns Les Galeries Austerlitz into "Les Galeries d'Austerlitz" (cf. footnote 8) and Alderney Road into Alderney Street (cf. chapter 2).

assumes the name Madame Lecerf. While searching for the women who broke Sebastian's heart, his brother looks up Madame von Graun in Paris only to become entangled in her confidence game. Unbeknownst to him, Madame von Graun pretends to be her friend, Madame Lecerf. V. describes her as "a small, slight, pale faced young woman with smooth black hair" (150). "I thought I had never seen a skin so evenly pale," he writes, en route to falling for her the same way his brother did (assuming Sebastian and V. are two distinct personalities), and later: "I thought her transparent skin and dark hair quite attractive" (154). Sebald describes the Madame Cerf Austerlitz encountered in the 1950s as "eine ältere, beinahe durchsichtige Dame" (363), "[die] als eine körperhafte Person kaum noch vorhanden gewesen ist" (370). Nabokov's Madame Lecerf, who encounters V. in the 1920s, would indeed have been an elderly lady in the 1950s. Pale and with black hair she is recognizable as a femme fatale archetype of Nabokov's fiction and resembles Ada from *Ada, or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*. Mark M. Anderson points out in "The Edge of Darkness: On W.G. Sebald" that the name Cerf, which means stag in English, or *Hirsch* in German, is also an intricate reference to two characters in *Die Ausgewanderten*: Henry Selwyn (aka *Hersch* Seweryn) and Paul Bereyter, with whom the narrator first bonds through the image of a leaping stag on his sweater. According to Anderson, the stag becomes "a literal emblem of identification between the character and the text's fictional Jewish characters" that is expanded in *Austerlitz* through the recollection of Madame Cerf (107). Her placement at the exact address of Paul Celan transcends the fictional, moving between playful incorporation and historical tragedy (Celan's suicide). As Anderson observes, "fictional and historical characters intersect in an endless series of seeming coincidences: Hersch leads to Sebald who leads to Cerf and then back to Hirsch; Paul Bereyter leads to Paul Celan, especially because Bereyter's father, Amschel Bereyter recalls Celan's given name, Antschel [...] and the list goes on in dizzying



concatenations” (ibid). Nabokov’s *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and Madame Lecerf are another link in this dizzying chain of associations.

Austerlitz’s new address in Paris during his second sojourn, when he meets Henri Lemoine, is 6, rue des cinq Diamants (362). This street name (which exists and which Sebald does not alter) foreshadows the Lemoine-theme and hints at other diamonds in the subtext, or rather, in the pretexts of the intertexts, both real and fictional – *Sebastian Knight’s Prismatic Bezel* and Proust’s *Pastiches et Mélanges*. False diamonds also play a role in *Ada*, which, as I have shown, is another important source text for *Austerlitz*. The French governess in *Ada*, Madame Larivière, is the author of a romance novel, called “La Rivière de Diamants.” The story’s theme is futility – a woman borrows a diamond necklace from a wealthy friend, loses it, and spends the rest of her life toiling to restore it to her only to find out in the end that the diamonds had been false. Nabokov here reworks two stories with the same plot, E.T.A. Hoffmann’s “Das Fräulein von Scuderi” (1819) and Guy de Maupassant’s “La Parure” (1884). Ada later receives a diamond necklace as a gift from her lover/brother Van, but he rips it off her neck in a fit of jealousy, quoting a line from the story: “mais ma pauvre amie, elle était fausse” (202). The string of diamonds, unlike Ada’s faithfulness, was not false. Madame Larivière later has a successful career as a writer of romance novels, but like the diamonds in her story she is a fraud who possesses no talent. The pun of its title, “La Rivière de Diamants,” becomes concomitant with her name. Deception is an overarching theme of *Ada*, where twinned objects and characters stand in for each other. Rue 6, Emile Zola similarly draws from multiple literary and historical backgrounds and precursor texts. 6, rue des cinq Diamants and 6, rue Emile Zola both signify on several interconnected levels – they link historical personages (Celan, Nabokov, Proust, Lemoine) with fictional ones (Sebastian Knight, Madame Lecerf, Ada) and with the

thematic undercurrent of diamonds, whose facets refract light like Sebald's text refracts intertexts. Like Borges's Pierre Menard, *Ada's* governess writes a story that has already been written – similar to Sebald, who inscribes into his text an experience that has already been written in Holocaust memoirs.

Sebald also uses street names to pay homage to Walter Benjamin's *Das Passagen-Werk*, whose chapter on street names in Paris echoes throughout *Austerlitz*. Benjamin is only a footstep away from all of Sebald's characters who walk through cities and landscapes with their senses tuned to absorbing the history and stories of the pavement or the soil. Austerlitz in particular walks through Paris with the shadow of Benjamin's *Flaneur*. "Den Flanierenden leitet die Straße in eine entschwundene Zeit," Benjamin writes (524). Paris is also the city where Austerlitz's father's tracks lead and stop. Maximilian Aychenwald fled to Paris from Prague. Austerlitz imagines "daß er südwärts gefahren, zu Fuß über die Pyrenäen gegangen und irgendwo auf der Flucht verschollen ist" – in other words, a trajectory similar to Benjamin's, who killed himself on the French-Spanish border in 1940 (366). At the end of the text, Austerlitz finds out that his father had been deported to Gurs, a camp in the French Pyrenees. Austerlitz's research project, the history of prisons and military forts, and the history of the architecture of Paris, especially of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, correlates with Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and the attempt to amass records that describe Paris as the "capital of the 19<sup>th</sup> century." Indeed, Austerlitz's unfinished writing project, for which he accumulates endless sources in the (old) National Library, resembles the fragmented state of Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*, which he worked on for thirteen years and which remained unfinished. Benjamin also researched in the rue Richelieu, to which images appended to vol. 1 attest, and Rolf Tiedemann speaks of "die toten Buchstaben, die Benjamin

aus den staubigen Beständen der Pariser Nationalbibliothek zusammentrug” (Tiedemann 14).<sup>124</sup> Maxim du Camp, an author Austerlitz studies while researching at the old library, and whose six volume oeuvre on Paris he calls “das für [seine] Forschungsarbeit richtungsweisende [...] Werk” is also extensively quoted by Benjamin (A 405-06). The writers Benjamin excerpts, such as du Camps, Baudelaire, and Grandville, to name but a few, charted life in the underbelly and crevices of the cityscape of Paris and were equally bewildered and awed by technological progress. Benjamin’s assemblage of voices contributes to the continuing production of Paris as a mythical place that retains a charmed aura of mystique and grandeur in spite of modernity’s vicissitudes. The Paris section in *Austerlitz*, with its scathing critique of the new library, the revelation of suppressed knowledge about Nazi camps, and the description of the city’s sprawl as “eine Art von Exkreszenz [...] mit [...] konzentrisch sich ausbreitenden Verkrustungen” dismantles the charm but uses street names as a link to history and Walter Benjamin in its subtext (A 405).

In the last two sections of the text Austerlitz and the narrator meet at the “Bistrobar Le Havane am Boulevard Auguste Blanqui, unweit der Métro-Station La Glacière,” where they will also have their ultimate encounter, and where Austerlitz spends hours trying to imagine his father (363-64, 409). While looking for traces of his presence, Austerlitz wanders along the Boulevard Auguste Blanqui and its surrounding streets. Benjamin quotes Blanqui’s work *L’Éternité par les Astres* in the exposé “Paris Capitale du XIX<sup>ème</sup> Siècle” (cf. 75-77). Sebald’s dystopian vision of progress echoes through this passage of Benjamin’s exposé.<sup>125</sup> In *Austerlitz*, the protagonist’s

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124 Smolczyk in “Die Türme des Schweigens” also mentions that Benjamin spent “einen Gutteil seines Lebens in der Rue Richelieu,” that he composed “[i]m Dämmerlicht des Kuppelsaals [...] sein Hauptwerk über die Pariser Passagen,” and that the manuscript survived the war hidden in the stacks (11). Sebald refers to “der Kuppelsaal” and its “gutes, beruhigendes Licht” as well (391).

125 The passage Benjamin cites is a metaphysical musing about human beings, eternal in each second of their lives, and the planet earth is described as merely one of many equal worlds, all of which share the inescapable fault of aggrandizing themselves into extinction: “Ce que nous

name itself is an entangling of images that interpenetrate: Napoleon's battle at Austerlitz with place names in Paris, such as the Gare d'Austerlitz, Champs d'Austerlitz, and Galeries (d')Austerlitz. In "Die Straßen von Paris," Benjamin quotes a passage by Charles Vildrac on the Pont d'Austerlitz that illustrates how names can enter a personal mythology and can become divorced from their origin or name-giver.

Pont d'Austerlitz! Son nom prestigieux évoquait pour moi tout autre chose que la bataille [...] *c'était la bataille qui tenait son nom du pont*. Une explication s'était élaborée en moi, faite de mes reveries, de mes reminiscences d'écolier distrait, *d'analogies dans le gout et le son de certains mots*. [...] La voici: Au temps des guerres, des croisades et des revolutions, le soir des batailles, les héros se rendaient avec leur drapeaux sur ce pont, vieux comme le Monde, pour y vider solennellement une coupe d'austerlitz. L'austerlitz, breuvage des forts, c'était tout simplement l'hydromel des nos ancêtres les Gaulois, mais plus amer et avec beaucoup d'eau de Seltz. (645, quoted from Charles Vidrac's "Ponts de Paris," italics mine)

This quote illustrates the reversal of the usual trajectory of pretext-text (*c'était la bataille qui tenait son nom du pont*), expanding the concept of intertextuality and intermediality by a synesthetic dimension. Vildrac's image of "l'austerlitz, breuvage des forts" illustrates the intermingling of substances as an ingestion of names. Influence is not chronologically fixed, reminiscent of Borges's remark that "every writer *creates* his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future" (Borges 72). In the image Benjamin

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appelons le progrès est claquemuré sur chaque terre, et s'évanouit avec elle [...] L'univers se répète sans fin et piaffe sur place. L'éternité joue imperturbablement dans l'infini les mêmes représentations" (76). Benjamin closes with a quote from Baudelaire, who describes modernity as "le monde dominé par ses fantasmagories" (77).

quotes, subjects, objects, and names interpenetrate, which suggests that the search for an origin is superfluous. The question of Jacques Austerlitz's identity and "real life" is less important than the images and associations this character evokes. As Austerlitz walks along the streets close to Maximilian Aychenwald's last known address he feels his father's presence, and time seems to collapse into space. In Paris, he experiences "beinahe körperlich, wie sich die Strömung der Zeit im Gravitationsfeld der vergessenen Dinge verlangsamt." All instances of a human life seem gathered "in einem einzigen Raum beisammen" (367). Sebald's texts likewise collapse multiple forerunners into a single "room," the new text.

Architectural models for time, specifically the simultaneity of past, present, and future recur in *Austerlitz*. Sebald's prose expands from the two-dimensionality of the page into a hypertextual, three-dimensional architectural narrative model. Tiedemann, the editor of the critical edition of *Passagen-Werk*, compares the vast corpus of Benjamin's fragments to "Baumaterialien für ein Haus [...] von dem gerade erst der Grundriß abgesteckt oder die Baugrube ausgehoben ist," following notes by Benjamin about his own conception of the finished work (Tiedemann 12-13). The passage immediately following "Pont d'Austerlitz" is "Exkurs über die place du Maroc," in which Benjamin attests to the power of some street names to fold the "topographical vision" they evoke into their "allegorical meaning," while remaining anchored in their specific locality. The layers of references and allusions extend to the very surface that supports the architecture of a city.<sup>126</sup>

Und in der Tat sind Straßennamen [...] wie berauschende Substanzen, die unser  
Wahrnehmen sphärenreicher und vielschichtiger machen. Man möchte die Kraft,  
mit der sie uns in einen solchen Zustand versetzen ihre vertu évocatrice nennen –

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<sup>126</sup> On the same page as the "pont d'Austerlitz" and the "place du Maroc" entries Benjamin also quotes Maxim du Camp. In other words, p. 645 provides a triple connection to *Austerlitz*.

aber das sagt zu wenig, denn nicht die Assoziation sondern die Durchdringung der Bilder ist hier entscheidend. Dieses Sachverhalts hat man auch bei gewissen pathologischen Phänomenen sich zu erinnern: der Kranke, welcher stundenlang bei Nacht die Stadt durchwandert und die Heimkehr vergißt, ist vielleicht unter die Gewalt jener Kraft getreten. (645-46)

The wanderer in his or her journey through a city becomes entangled in the images conjured by the archeological layers of a city and its streets, their names and buildings. Austerlitz fits Benjamin's description of "der Kranke," wandering the city alone, and on the verge of a mental breakdown. The image of a deranged solitary walker also brings to mind the narrator of "All'estero" who becomes more and more distraught as he walks through the streets of the former Jewish quarters of Vienna. The streets, Sebald insinuates in this passage, have retained a memory of the atrocities they witnessed against Jews, a dark version of the "vertu évocatrice" Benjamin articulates. Ironically, the narrator of SG is restored to sanity by a visit to Ernst Herbeck, a real (mentally ill) "Kranker." Benjamin's likening of the entangling effect ("Verschränkung") – when street names correlate with their physical appearance – to intoxicating substances that render our perception "sphärenreicher und vielschichtiger" is another perspective on intertextuality (and intermediality) and the collapsing of several works into a new one. Like the interpenetrating meanings of 6, rue des cinq Diamants and 6, rue Emile Zola, and the pretexts by Friedländer and Bechhöfer, multiple meanings of images blend into each other. Benjamin's image expands on other, more two-dimensional metaphors for intertextuality. Kristeva's vision of a "mosaic of quotations," for instance, remains one in which particles touch, bound by narrative plaster. The particles are assembled into a new image but do not become entangled, as in Benjamin's example. Barthes's idea of text as a "tissue of quotations" (146)

evokes a more literally textual metaphor of fibers woven together, but still does not achieve the same blending effect Benjamin describes with “Durchdringung” and “Verschränkung” der Bilder.” According to Tiedemann, Benjamin had conceived of the finished *Passagen-Werk* as consisting predominantly of quotes, in other words, of intertexts – “eine gegenüber jeder gängigen Darstellungsform neue Konstellation [...] in der alles Gewicht auf den Matreialien und Zitaten liegen und Theorie und Deutung asketisch zurücktreten sollten” (Tiedemann 13). The architecture of *Austerlitz* (as well as Sebald’s other texts) similarly consists of quotes and images that blend together and whose meaning emerges through juxtapositions of original voices.

At the same time as Sebald constructs an architectural model for the narrative structure of his text, he undermines it by staging a key scene in a carnival-like setting. Performance spaces like fairgrounds and circuses as venues for an enactment of the carnivalesque occupy a special place in Sebald’s work and the topography of his cities. Circus tents and carnival booths are transient, nomadic spaces outside conventional architectural classification. Places of gaudy facades, they are populated by acrobats, clowns, and “carnies” – figures that pivot between the tragic and the comic, respectability, and the demi-monde. They also open a door to other worlds.<sup>127</sup> In *Austerlitz*, the protagonist and Marie de Verneuil watch a cheap circus performance in the no man’s land between the Gare and the Quai d’Austerlitz (387-91). The four-page long passage culminates in a rare moment of tenderness. Austerlitz is deeply moved by the off-tune performance of a piece of music, performed by the Wanderzirkus Bastiani members, but cannot discern whether he feels pain or happiness. A white goose in the dilapidated tent is described as a being sentient of its fate and treated more tenderly than any human being in the book. As is

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127 In *Schwindel. Gefühle* in the German consulate in Milan, the narrator also encounters an exotic family of circus artists, the Santinis, who seem to have migrated into the present from the 1930s. Impressed by their aloof beauty and impeccable if anachronistic attire, he imagines the acts they perform in the circus arena (SG 127-28).

revealed later, the industrial neighborhood where the circus performance takes place is situated close to the former camp Austerlitz. Several years after the Circus Bastiani performance, the new national library is constructed a few blocks south of it. The Nazi depot of stolen goods and the library both represent archives. At the time of the circus performance, one had been destroyed, the other not yet built. The two locations, one in the past, the other in the future, temporally bracket an encounter with the carnivalesque: a circus arena with its spectacle that eludes archiving. The strangely affecting musical performance (“fremdländisch[e] Nachtmusik”) Jacques Austerlitz and Marie witness functions as a requiem for the camp in a way the yet-to-be constructed library will not – or cannot. The encounter with the goose draws a nonhuman yet anthropomorphized creature into the process of memorializing. The emotional power to commemorate the Holocaust is provocatively put into the hands of a troupe of circus artists, and that of a bird, rather than those of Holocaust survivors whose memoirs are appropriated but not given credit for in the text.

Other references to theatrical performances are scattered throughout *Austerlitz*. Austerlitz’s mother Agàta was an opera singer, and the only image he can obtain of her is from a theatre archive in Prague. Appropriately, there is some doubt whether the image of an actor, who takes on different roles, really depicts his mother. Although Věra identifies Agàta “zweifelsfrei,” she is earlier described as shortsighted, wearing “tief geschliffen[e] Gläser” (230), and Austerlitz appears less certain. He does not even keep the photograph of the woman, “die mit meiner verdunkelten Erinnerung an die Mutter übereinzustimmen *schien*,” and instead gives it to the narrator as a souvenir (360-61, italics mine). Significantly, Austerlitz himself appears in costume. One of only two pictures of Austerlitz – used as the cover photo for both the German and English editions of the text – shows him dressed as a pageboy for a masquerade: “Du



durftest Agáta auf einen Maskenball begleiten [...] und eigens zu diesem Anlaß wurde das schneeweiße Kostüm geschneidert für dich,” Věra explains to Austerlitz (266-67). The outfit of this “páže růžové královny,” which Sebald translates as “Schleppenträger der Rosenkönigin,” is reminiscent of a pierrot costume. Austerlitz is alienated rather than charmed by this childhood photograph in Věra’s apartment and does not recognize himself. Only the hairline of the boy seems familiar and he refers to him exclusively in the third person as “de[r] Knab[e],” “der Kinderkavalier,” and “de[r] fünfjährig[e] Page.” The only other image of Austerlitz also does not depict him in regular clothing but in rugby uniform (114). The striped jerseys and knee-length stockings of the rugby team bring to mind the iconic striped costumes of mimes, or prison uniforms. This photograph lands in the narrator’s hands as well, as Austerlitz sends him a copy. Masquerade describes Austerlitz’s performance as a composite of other characters, real and fictional. The images of him in clown costume are furthermore reminiscent of Nabokov’s last book *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974), which is an autobiographical parody that fictionalizes Nabokov’s previous books and their narrators that resemble Nabokov. In addition to the dense layering of voices and images that defines Sebald’s narratives, the references to spectacles and carnivals deconstructs the notion of origin and originality further.

Who is Jacques Austerlitz? As in Sebald’s other texts, the narrative is always mediated by an unnamed narrator. It is the narrator who encounters Jacques Austerlitz, listens to his stories, reports on his memories, archives his personal photographs, and ties all information into a coherent (if not chronological) narrative. Austerlitz is well read, drops references to books about the Holocaust, and interweaves text passages of others with his own journeys – but so is the narrator. Austerlitz is interested in historical European military architecture and the atrocities committed therein – and so is the narrator. Austerlitz, in other words, who exists only through

the voice of the narrator, becomes his mouthpiece, supplying the “authentic dimension” of a victim. By constructing Austerlitz as an amalgam of authentic Jewish voices (Friedländer, Bechhöfer) and displaced persons (Nabokov), Sebald can approach depths of witnessing otherwise inaccessible to someone who, as a non-Jewish German, inherited the weight of second-generation perpetrator guilt. The documentary character and tone of the text, its photographs, dates, and realist setting, the resemblance of the narrator to Sebald (or, rather, his resemblance to other narrators who biographically resemble Sebald) are all elements that elaborately weave a web of authenticity around the dim figure of Austerlitz. The text unfolds in a progression of mediated voices, such as: “so Věra, sagte Austerlitz” (writes the narrator, writes Sebald) and it is easy to lose track of whose point of view is being presented. This nesting of voices, reminiscent of Thomas Bernhard, and the filtering of every detail through a not necessarily reliable narrator, reminiscent of Nabokov, is a distancing technique Sebald employs in all of his narratives but perfects in *Austerlitz*, a strategy that heightens the strength of documentary evidence at the same time as dissolving it. Doubtful authenticity, once it is recognized as such, arguably creates a more vigilant reader – another aspect of distancing, akin to a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*. There is no lack of authorities on a given subject matter – on the contrary, there are too many voices that transmit information, and not a single authoritative one. The unnamed narrator, who suffers from blurred or distorted vision (“central serous chorioretinopathy,” 59), and whose identity is even dimmer than Austerlitz’s, is the agent mediating, sifting, appropriating, and distorting voices.<sup>128</sup>

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128 While this affliction is a genuine visual impairment whose cause is unknown, the doctor’s explanation that it mostly affects men “die zuviel mit Schreiben und Lesen beschäftigt [sind]” is Sebald’s fabrication, a self-referential and humorous aside suggesting that a writer’s point of view (such as the narrator’s) is not to be trusted (A 59).

Falsified items and carnivals in *Austerlitz* may constitute an ironic commentary on authenticity and may deconstruct notions of originarity, yet the question remains whether the unattributed assimilation of Holocaust memoirs into a work of fiction – however intricately spun – is ethical. *Austerlitz* “intervenes” – to recall Ruthven – into a type of text that has generally not been made available – and many would argue is simply unavailable – for creative intervention. Bearing witness entails responsibility, and texts on how to do justice to Holocaust survivor testimonies and traumatic experience in literature abound, ranging from psychology to literary criticism to history and philosophy. Indeed, the lines between disciplines and approaches engaging with texts about trauma are as blurred as Sebald’s lines between fiction and documentary.<sup>129</sup> Dominick LaCapra, in “Holocaust Testimonies: Attending to the Victim’s Voice,” attests to the inconclusive stance historians have taken towards Holocaust survivors’ testimonies. Historians, according to LaCapra, are not secondary witnesses and should abstain from emotionally identifying with trauma victims. A desirable response, according to him, is empathy, specifically an “empathic unsettlement,” rather than a vicarious experience of suffering (in Postone 220). It could be argued that Sebald, using a survivor’s memory as scaffolding for a work of fiction, performs the role of a witness to the witness, mirroring embedded narratives and reweaving memories into the fabric of literary history and hence keeping them in circulation. Each reader of his text then performs his or her part in bearing witness to the having-borne-witness, and plays a part in a responsible chain of witnessing. Sebald’s distancing techniques forestall identification with trauma victims and visualization of the death camps and call instead for an intellectual engagement with the problematic of appropriated voices and bearing witness. His texts are “empathically unsettling” precisely because they thematize appropriation and the

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129 Canonical texts about trauma and witnessing by Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub (not to mention Freud) that oscillate between literary criticism, psychoanalysis, psychiatry, and sociology are an example of the field’s interdisciplinary nature.

inaccessibility of the Holocaust, and not because they try to emulate traumatic experiences.

Ambiguous characters like Lemoine are profoundly “empathically unsettling” once decoded, as are carnivalesque environments like the Circus Bastiani.

Giorgio Agamben provocatively posits that the Holocaust cannot be borne witness to at all, since the atrocities of the camps can only be described from the fringes, never from the center, i.e. never by those who perished in it (13, 82).<sup>130</sup> Perhaps, rather than threatening to become, as Primo Levi has said of memories being evoked too often, “fixed in a stereotype” (24), Sebald’s text has loosened a stereotype, by blurring the lines between fiction and survivor testimony and merging the now strangely familiar genre of “Holocaust memoir” with a text that questions distinctions between genres and critiques the “witnessability” of the death camps and other traumatic experiences. While in a sense *Austerlitz* as a whole is a project about concentration camps – Austerlitz and Sebald’s narrator study military fortifications, especially those adapted by Nazis into concentration camps or torture and interrogation chambers – iconic images from within the camps are absent. The ten-page-long sentence in *Austerlitz* detailing the inner machinations of Theresienstadt that reveals, and at the same time deconstructs its absurdity through structural mirroring, is as close as Sebald’s narrator gets to the center of the camp. The ten-page sentence derives from H.G. Adler and his (800 page) book *Theresienstadt, 1941-1945*. Both Adler and his text are directly referenced in *Austerlitz* (335-50). References to Adler also bookend the monster sentence (339, 349). The view from within the camp is thus mediated through the voice of a survivor. Friedländer’s and Bechhöfer’s texts, although war survivors’

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130 Agamben adapts this idea from Primo Levi (*The Drowned and the Saved*). Dori Laub has expressed a similar view in “An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival” (in Felman and Laub 75-92): “[W]hat precisely made a Holocaust out of the event is the unique way in which, during its historical occurrence, *the event produced no witnesses*. Not only, in effect, did the Nazis try to exterminate the physical witnesses of their crime; but the inherently incomprehensible and deceptive psychological structure of the event precluded its own witnessing, even by its very victims” (80).

testimonies, are not memoirs by concentration camp survivors, and indeed Sebald never appropriates the voice of a witness to the camps unreferenced. Austerlitz only goes to Terezín as a tourist, and otherwise approaches the camp through witnesses and literature. Bechhöfer and Friedländer skirted the war because their parents managed to hide them or send them abroad in time. They are witnesses to a particularly heartbreaking aspect of the Holocaust, of orphaned children forced into a new identity, whose parents sacrificed themselves, but they are not camp survivors like Jean Améry, H. G. Adler, and Primo Levi.

The other perspective on Theresienstadt, apart from the narrator's rendition of Austerlitz's post-war journey to it, is through a Nazi propaganda film made for a Red Cross delegation. The film, which stages an appearance of normalcy, falsifies the atrocities of the camp and is hence a piece of forgery, embedded in *Austerlitz* as another indicator that forged items are a commentary on witnessability. A flawed and fragmented view of Theresienstadt is all that can ever be achieved, the passage suggests. Illustrated by the postage stamp which freezes an image of Theresienstadt as a bucolic fantasy, its ontology and historicity remain beyond reach (343). Rather than engaging with ghastly familiar images of the Holocaust (emaciated prisoners seen always from the outside, through barbed wire), Sebald's characters move in circles around the camps and the extermination of Jews. Following Austerlitz's slow and circuitous path to remembering, the narrative lands in the center of a depopulated Theresienstadt, an epitome of the Holocaust's viciousness, presented through documentary textual and falsified filmic evidence, at the distance of a birds-eye overview. *Austerlitz* suggests simultaneously that knowledge is only possible through historical accuracy and that historical accuracy can never be achieved. Whatever makes access to the past possible (memories and texts, images and films) also obscures it. Historiography is inherently flawed since it is a text-based discipline, yet texts are

prone to be falsified and memories are inherently fallible, “a threadbare truth,” as Levi writes (23). While traumatic memory is rooted in real events, it is fragmented, prone to changing, drifting, or becoming embellished over time, as witness reports have demonstrated. Sebald’s texts suggest an alternative way of remembering and memorializing: a dense and unhierarchical layering of a multiplicity of subjective memories and historical documents, and a perspective from a variety of angles. A single informer on the Holocaust cannot tell the whole story, can in a sense only be fraudulent unless put into dialogue with other voices. Sebald’s texts—fragmented, seemingly randomly assembled, necessarily subjective narratives that elude classification—constitute a paradoxically more “faithful” form of representing the messiness of history, one closer to the subject and at the same time distanced and anti-authoritarian.

Another way to conceive of Sebald’s incorporation of Friedländer and Bechhöfer is as a Borgesian rewriting process. With Pierre Menard, the fictional author who rewrites *Don Quixote* word for word, Borges has created one of the most intriguing meditations on forgery in literature. Menard’s *Quixote*, (re)written from the perspective of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, becomes a different book, “more subtle” (8), “infinitely richer” (9), and in every way superior to the original – although it *is* the original. Borges concludes the short story with a critique of the concept of authorship: “Thinking, analyzing, inventing [...] are not anomalous acts; they are normal respirations of the intelligence. To glorify occasional performance of that function, to hoard ancient and alien thoughts [...] is to confess our laziness and our barbarity. Every Man should be capable of all ideas and I understand that in the future this will be the case” (11). Sebald’s prose provocatively implements Menard’s “re-writing” process by recontextualizing source texts like Friedländer’s and Bechhöfer’s memoirs, Nabokov’s novels, and Proust’s *pastiches*. “Every man is not only

himself [...] men are lived over again,” Thomas Browne writes in *Religio Medici*.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, the world is lived over again, experiences are not unique, and literature is written over again. Sebald’s hybrid narratives cannot be fixed, and through their interaction with other media they liberate the voices of others from a fixed interpretation as well. Sebald’s incorporation of a variety of texts and images is an enactment of a complexly layered historiography, a kind of performative literary architecture that is hyperaware of its forerunners and at the same time questions the concept of precursors itself. In *Austerlitz*, Sebald’s intertextual and intermedial methodology is an act of creative and playful thievery. Sebald not only borrows but also deliberately falsifies materials in order to undermine the documentary character of his texts, destabilize cohesive meaning, and disrupt narrative linearity in order to challenge the untouchability of the Holocaust as a “genre.” In its usage of falsified intertexts Sebald’s fiction fuses methodology and theme in a playful and postmodern carnivalesque manner and provocatively suggests that the only way to adequately represent history is to draw attention to the inadequacies – and falsifications – of any historiographical process.

### III. “AMBROS ADELWARTH:” LOST IN THE FUNHOUSE

Falsification and carnivals as sites of distortion and illusion are also themes in the third chapter of *Die Ausgewanderten*, where they function as a coded critique of modernity and give way to simulacra. “Ambros Adelwarth” contains the perhaps most mysterious and shadowed characters of Sebald’s fiction: Ambros, the narrator’s great uncle, and his employer, travel companion, and

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131 In Barth “The Literature of Exhaustion,” where Barth comments on Borges’s allusion to Browne in “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” (*Friday Book* 62).

(presumably) lover Cosmo Solomon, a Jewish American millionaire and notorious gambler.<sup>132</sup>

The pair travels from New York to famous European casinos and seaside resorts in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, enjoying the spoils of one uncanny winning streak after another. The story is structured around themes that string all the stories of *Die Ausgewanderten* together: a woman as the transmitter of stories and keeper of history, an emphasis on Jewish emigrants, protagonists in states of profound displacement, lives ending in suicide or prolonged, lonely dying, allusions to Nabokov as “the butterfly man,” and references to films. However, “Ambros Adelwarth” contains a remarkable exception: For the only time in Sebald’s fiction, a narrator takes on the United States of America and sets foot in the new world. While the chapter initially foregrounds America as a world of immigrants (both Jewish and non-Jewish) and an escapist locus of the imagination, the fascination with the land of opportunity soon tilts into a bleak and cynical picture of America as a simulacrum and becomes a critique of 20<sup>th</sup>-century globalization and consumerism. Both Solomon and then Ambros die, profoundly unhappy, in a mental institution. And yet, the new world is depicted as a refraction of the old world and the fading of empires is thematized throughout. Cosmo and Ambros discover that in the 19-teens Jerusalem is no longer a promised land but “la terre maudite” (208). “Von dem unvergleichlichen Reichtum des gelobten Landes [war] nichts mehr übrig als der dürre Stein und eine ferne Idee in den Köpfen seiner inzwischen weit über die Erde hin verstreuten Bewohner,” Ambros writes in his diary (209-10). Similarly, the narrator finds the seaside resort Deauville, which was glamorous in 1913, “hoffnungslos heruntergekommen.” The bleak depiction of New York State and New Jersey is not so different, as the whole world is being ruined by the effects of modern life, “genau wie jeder andere Ort, den man heute, ganz gleich, in welchem Land oder Weltteil, besucht” (171-72).

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132 Cosmo Solomon is, incidentally, also named after a king of Israel, the third one. The mythological Solomon is wise, travels on a magic carpet, rules over a land of unimaginable riches, and has demons as servants.



The story itself becomes a comment on a (post)modern world gone awry, a fragmented *Scheinwelt* in which things and people are not what they seem.

“Ambros Adelwarth” contains several intertexts that emphasize simulacra, deception, and characters and objects that take on a disguise. Ambros has a forerunner in John Barth’s paradigmatic postmodern character Ambrose from *Lost in the Funhouse*. Embedded in the narrative is furthermore an overt reference to Fritz Lang’s movie *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1922). While Matthias Frey (226) has noted that most of Sebald’s filmic references are allusions to German cinema, the “Ambros” story goes beyond this context and alludes to two American noir films, *Shanghai Express* (Josef von Sternberg 1932) and *The Lady from Shanghai* (Orson Welles 1947), which culminates in an exceptional scene in a “magic mirror maze.” With references to these three films, Sebald also embeds the story in the popular culture relevant to its settings and follows the trajectory and hybridization (Germany-to-America) of the protagonist: a silent movie of the German 1920s, when Cosmo declines and dies, an early talkie by an Austrian-American Jew shot in the US in the early 1930s (and featuring German-American actress Marlene Dietrich), and an American film noir from the post-war period, when Ambros deteriorates and dies. All four intertexts thematize the distortion of reality and feature characters in costumed disguise, and as such set the stage for the playfully “forged” diary included in “Ambros Adelwarth.” Uncle Ambros’s diary, which is quoted from extensively and shown in three images, implicitly functions as evidence for the protagonist’s authenticity and the narrator’s reliability, but was (ostensibly) composed and photographed by Sebald himself, as his handwriting in two photographs of the “Agendabüchlein” “prove” (AW 194-95, 200-01). The diary has been called an instance of *Scheinintertextualität* (Schedel 64), but rather than inventing its contents, Sebald copied Ambros’s and Cosmo’s itinerary, in part, from a 19<sup>th</sup>-century

travelogue by François-René de Chateaubriand, *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem et de Jérusalem à Paris* (1811). Beyond the “Ambros Adelwarth” story, intertexts about deception announce the falsified character of other “authentic” documents used in AW, most notably the diary attributed to Max Aurach’s mother. The concept of fake *Scheinintertextualität* leads back into the funhouse and its distorted and disorienting mirror reflections that simultaneously lure the reader/funhouse visitor into a simulated world and reveal their falsification while concealing the original texts/images.

The narrator’s relationship to America is structured around ambivalence. Inspired by the colorful presence of U.S. soldiers in Bavaria after WWII, America is the only foreign country he can imagine as a child. Yearly visits by family members who emigrated to New York in the 1920s further supply him with a desirable image of the country, and engender a “amerikanische[r] Wunschtraum,” assembled through bits and pieces of popular culture:

In den endlosen Schulstunden vorallem und in der Abenddämmerung habe ich mir meine amerikanische Zukunft in allen Einzelheiten und Farben ausgemalt. Diese Phase der imaginären Amerikanisierung meiner Person, während der ich streckenweise zu Pferd, streckenweise in einem dunkelbraunen Oldsmobile die Vereinigten Staaten in alle Himmelsrichtungen durchquerte, erreichte ihren Höhepunkt zwischen meinem sechzehnten und siebzehnten Lebensjahr, als ich die Geistes- und Körperhaltung eines Hemingway-Helden in und an mir auszubilden versuchte, *ein Simulationsprojekt*, das aus verschiedenen Gründen, die man sich denken kann, von vornherein zum Scheitern verurteilt war. (AW 102-03, italics mine)

This passage foreshadows the motif of the funhouse, a locale whose constituting feature is the simulation of an imaginary environment, a “Simulationsprojekt” like the narrator’s imaginary Americanization, doomed to failure.<sup>133</sup> The fantasy soon gives way to an aversion to all things American. When the narrator later does travel to New Jersey to learn more about the mysterious life of his great uncle Ambros, he is immediately absorbed into a disorienting funhouse setting and confronted with iconic negative images that depict the downside of modernity, progress, and consumerism. He almost steers his rental car into a ditch at the sudden appearance of a dinosaur-like airplane against the backdrop of a mountain of trash beside the freeway. The jumbo, “ein Untier aus ferner Vorzeit,” becomes an allegory of progress: a nightmare creature spewing environmentally harmful exhaust that rises from the detritus of capitalism (105). It seems to be alive – the narrator has encountered his first simulacrum.

Modern identity in John Barth’s “Lost in the Funhouse” (1967) is also revealed as a simulacrum. The short story<sup>134</sup> weaves together a meta-text on how to write a short story with a narrative about a teenage boy, Ambrose, who becomes lost in a funhouse during an excursion to an ocean resort with his parents. The voice of an exasperated author constantly interrupts the narrated action to comment on its progress: “We should be much farther along than we are; something has gone wrong; not much of this preliminary rambling seems relevant. Yet everyone begins at the same place; how is it that most go along without difficulty, but a few lose their way?” (79). The funhouse in the story, where Ambrose loses his way, is a scary place of mirrors

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133 In *Schwindel. Gefühle*, America even becomes akin to the holy land. The narrator, as in AW in part modeled on Sebald, remembers as a child having encountered a purple limousine with a pale green roof, steered by a black driver. The figure of a black man gliding through the remote Bavarian village in such a grotesque vehicle is so novel that the only reference the boy has is the Biblical Melchior, one of the three magi, which removes America even further into an unreal fantasy realm (SG 267).

134 “Lost in the Funhouse” is the eponymous story in Barth’s “series” (“neither a collection nor a selection”) of short stories, all loosely connected, in *Lost in the Funhouse – Fiction for print, tape, live voice* (unpaginated Author’s Note). Ambrose appears as a character in most of the stories.

and hidden traps, a catalyst for sexual fantasies that becomes a Baroque place of initiation in which *Schein* and *Sein* are kept in tandem as its gears are simultaneously revealed (Ambrose catches a glimpse of a room in which an old man controls an array of pulleys and levers) and concealed (the boy cannot find his way back to this control room). The funhouse in Barth's text stands for an ambivalent and disorienting modernity, with Ambrose as its paradigmatic fragmented subject at once too aware of himself and the myriad shapes his life could take, and paralyzed by this same insight. The boy shares this aspect of disorientation with Ambros Adelwarth, who is described as increasingly devoid of characteristics. The narrator's aunt Fini explains "daß er gar nicht existiert hat als Privatperson," consisting instead "nur mehr aus Korrektheit" (144). A similar fate awaits the character in Barth's story as his characteristics are effaced by the meta-text that casts him as an everyman: not an individual, or "Privatperson," but a cliché of a teenager and short story protagonist ascending and descending the prescribed arc of Aristotelian narration. Sebald's borrowing of the name Ambros(e) becomes both homage to a precursor text, and an inscription of Barth's intertextual methodology. Barth's text references James Joyce, the *Odyssey*, and Shakespeare, and constructs a parody of a manual on how to write a short story, made up mostly of cliché.<sup>135</sup>

Like "Ambros Adelwarth," Barth's short story highlights the constructedness of the protagonist's life and critiques capitalism. Modernity, symbolized by America, is a dead end, "fun [...] perhaps for lovers, otherwise a *place of fear and confusion*" (Barth 72). After Ambrose enters the mirror maze, the text contains doubled and multiply replicated syntactical parts (94-97). The ending is a metaphor for writing and the responsibility of authorship: "He wishes he had never entered the funhouse. But he has. Then he wishes he were dead. But he's not. Therefore he

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<sup>135</sup> Ironically, "Lost in the Funhouse" has become canonized now, alongside the canonized texts it draws from, as a textbook example of American postmodernist fiction.

will construct funhouses for others and be their secret operator – though he would rather be among the lovers, for whom funhouses were designed” (97). The theme Barth touches on here, of a writer’s alienation from the world, is also a central theme in Sebald. Ambros and Cosmo resemble funhouse operators as well. During their casino sojourns they do not socialize and cultivate instead a mysterious air of aloofness. Cosmo’s fantastical unbroken winning streak suggests that they have outwitted the system. The gambling scene in Normandy in 1913 is described like a funhouse, a playground for the rich. Its subsequent collapse during World War I highlights the thin veneer of all carnival settings, behind which lurks decay. In 1991, in the middle section of “Ambros Adelwarth,” the narrator visits Deauville and Trouville. Disappointed not to encounter any aspect of past glamour, he remarks that the resort has become a victim of globalization that equalizes the difference between different parts of the world, and is now irreparably dilapidated, “ruiniert vom Autoverkehr, vom Boutiquenkommerz und der auf jede Weise und immer weiter um sich greifenden Zerstörungssucht” (171-72).<sup>136</sup> Barth’s Ambrose likewise remarks that “Ocean City was worn out, the place of fathers and grandfathers, straw-boated men and parasoled ladies survived by their amusements” (89). Circus and carnival imagery characterize Sebald’s depiction of Deauville in the 1990s. Japanese tourists populate the casino, gambling “in den in allen Kaleidoskopfarben funkelnden [...] Automaten Sälen” (176). The croupier manning the roulette tables derives straight from the circus, wearing “[die] Uniform eines Manegendienerers” (177). In the casino “lag der alte Spielsaal verdämmernd im letzten Abendglanz” and “[d]ie Strahlen der untergehenden Sonne brachen sich in den Gläsern und blinkten an dem silbernen Schlagzeug” (178). The scene is reminiscent of the atmosphere in the *Salle des pas perdus* in Antwerp, when the narrator of *Austerlitz* first encounters Austerlitz: “die

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<sup>136</sup> The twin resorts were also the inspiration for Proust’s seaside resort Balbec. The narrator’s dream sequence in this section has a Proustian quality.

Sonne [senkte sich] ... Noch war der Gold und Silberglanz [...] nicht vollends verloschen, da erfüllte ein unterweltliches Dämmer den Saal” (A 13). Sebald conveys the glamour of the legendary gambling summer of 1913 through a carnival setting that appears to the narrator in an elaborate dream (vision) (“Traumphantasien”) during which he imagines a multicultural bourgeoisie indulging in lavish pleasures such as horse racing, gambling, and partying. 1913 marks the celebration before the catastrophe of WW I, an atmosphere that colors “Ambros Adelwarth” throughout. The date also alludes to the magical year of *Schwindel. Gefühle*. The dream sequence is reminiscent of scenes in a silent movie.

In the dream, the narrator takes the train to Normandy in the company of a glamorous “feathered” lady who bears resemblance to Marlene Dietrich in *Shanghai Express*.

In meinem Abteil saß eine gefiederte Dame mit einer Menge verschiedener Hutschachteln. Sie rauchte eine große Brasilzigarre und sah durch den blauen Qualm manchmal auffordernd zu mir herüber. Ich aber wußte nicht, wie ich sie ansprechen sollte und starrte in meiner Verlegenheit fortwährend auf die weißen Glacéhandschuhe mit den vielen kleinen Knöpfen, die neben ihr auf dem Sitzpolster lagen. (179)

In *Shanghai Express*, set on a train from Beijing to Shanghai during the Chinese civil war, Dietrich plays Madeline, aka Shanghai Lily, an infamous courtesan who has “ruined a dozen men up and down the coast.” Dietrich wears several elaborate hats and costumes with feathers and is often pictured with her pile of luggage (including a hatbox), smoking cigarettes, and glancing suggestively at other passengers. When asked at an inspection why she is traveling to Shanghai she says: “I want to buy a new hat.” Leather Gloves feature prominently in the film. Dietrich wears two different pairs, and in the film’s last frame, which shows her reunited with

her former fiancé, she languorously lets his gloves drop behind his back as they kiss. An earlier reference to a dubious lady from Shanghai in “Ambros Adelwarth” also mentions gloves. “In die Londoner Zeit fiel die geheimnisvolle Episode mit der Dame aus Shanghai, von der ich nur weiß, daß sie eine Vorliebe für braune Glacéhandschuhe hatte,” says the narrator’s aunt Fini, and: “sie stand am Anfang meiner Trauerlaufbahn, sagte [Ambros] einmal” (115). In addition to Shanghai Lily, who drops her alias and goes back to being Madeline in the end, *Shanghai Express* features another character in disguise. On board the train is the leader of the Chinese rebel army, Chang, who pretends to be a businessman but is revealed as an unscrupulous gangster. The disreputable Shanghai Lily turns out to have a heart of gold, and the other courtesan on the train kills Chang to revenge her honor. Deception – the hallmark of funhouses – is a theme that connects all intertexts in “Ambros Adelwarth.”

Sebald’s text depicts a world in which “fun” can take a turn to gruesome at every turn, as Ambros and Cosmo’s glamorous life segues to electroshock treatments for mental illness. A funhouse, paralleled to a descent into madness, is also depicted in the 1947 Orson Welles film *The Lady from Shanghai*, the other film to which Fini’s statement about the “Dame aus Shanghai” refers. In the movie, an unsuspecting sailor falls for a beautiful lady with a mysterious past in Shanghai and becomes entangled in her unhappy marriage to a corrupt lawyer. Plot twists and a sense of pending doom pervade the narrative and the film’s aesthetic until in the end the antagonistic husband and wife are revealed for what they really are – bloodthirsty and unscrupulous, leaving the duped sailor’s life in shambles. The showdown occurs in the “magic mirror maze” of a “crazy house” that simultaneously reveals and obscures the characters through multiplied reflections. In a shower of shattering glass they shoot at each other’s mirror images until they kill each other. Through the oblique reference to the film, the beginning of the

narrator's research of Ambros's past is tagged as a descent into a mirror maze in which the real is difficult to distinguish from its refractions.<sup>137</sup>

Duplicitous characters that turn random bystanders into pawns and coldly watch them perish also abound in *Dr. Mabuse*. Lang's film touches on pertinent political and societal issues of Germany in the 1920s, the period of dawning National Socialism: class unrest and economic crisis. The evil "doctor" is an amalgam of personified Weimar Republic fears – corruption and greed, workers' exploitation, an oppressive ruling class. Mabuse is a megalomaniac con man and hypnotist, a frightening combination of performer and self-styled psychotherapist with occult powers and supreme cunning. Mirrors also figure in the film, especially in the second part, in which Count Told becomes the power-hungry doctor's pawn. Cosmo, who is so affected by the events of WWI that he falls into irreparable despair, sees *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* in a movie theatre and believes himself a victim of mass hypnosis performed in one of the film's last scenes. Cosmo perceives the movie as "ein Labyrinth [...] in dem er gefangen und durch Spiegelverkehrungen verrückt gemacht werden sollte," in other words as a funhouse, and the experience promptly triggers a mental collapse (AW 141). The hypnotizer Dr. Mabuse stands for a mechanism behind the scenes that controls experience, like the funhouse operator, or like the mental illness that controls Cosmo. While the mad doctor has been read as an allegory for fascism, Erik Butler reads him not as embodying "the charismatic traits of an ego ideal such as Hitler, but rather the parade of simulacra that Jean Baudrillard sees as characteristic of the (post-) modern society of consumption" (Butler 493). Embedded as an intertext in "Ambros Adelwarth," *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* underscores the story's critique of modernity (epitomized by America), while signaling the presence of duplicitous characters and forged elements disguised as real, such

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137 Orson Welles tumbles down into the mirror maze via a long and winding slide.



as the diary. The filmic references to funhouses and deception underscore an image of modernity that has turned the world upside down.

In addition to the master of disguise Dr. Mabuse, “Ambros Adelwarth” features other con artists – most notably Cosmo and Ambros. Sebald does not explain how and why Cosmo always wins at gambling. Because of his uncanny winning streak, the pair is accused of “Hochstapelei” and “verbrecherisch[e] Machenschaften,” and Ambros is rumored to be a “Magnetiseur” (185). Aunt Fini mentions the infamous swindler Marthe Hanau, who also scammed casinos in 1913, in one breath with Ambros (135), and the German/French double agent Mata Hari in conjunction with the first “Dame aus Shanghai” reference (115). Similar to these two notorious women with the curiously similar names, the female character in *The Lady from Shanghai* plays the naïve but turns out to be a con artist. As Barth’s “Lost in the Funhouse” leads into the bowels of a fairground, all three films, *Dr. Mabuse*, *The Lady from Shanghai*, and *Shanghai Express* lead into the demi monde, populated by shady characters. Each intertext features theatrical locales where glossy appearances conceal the mundane or threadbare. Other references to carnival and costumes abound. When the narrator’s aunt dies, his mother “mußte, mitten in der Fasnacht, eine Todesanzeige ins Anzeigenblatt einrücken lassen” (101). Why this “had to be” accomplished on Fat Tuesday, the culminating day of carnival (which people celebrate in costume, with parades and pranks in southern Germany) is not explained. Cosmo is pictured in a photograph in “Arabischer Kostümierung” (137). Ambros always wears his butler’s uniform, and even dies in it, “in Lackstiefeln und sozusagen voller Montur” (171). Accustomed to pretense as a gay couple (in hotels they pretend to be brothers), Ambros and Solomon are happiest in Constantinople, a theatrical, unpredictable city. The city becomes a funhouse in which every excursion is “voller Überraschungen, ja Schrecken” and time loses its meaning. “Sind wir nicht

mehr in der Zeit?" Ambros wonders (196). Constantinople is a maze, and interiors give way to exteriors: "Du besuchst ein Theater und gelangst durch eine Türe im Vorraum hinaus in ein Wäldchen. [...] Du steigst ewig einen Hügel hinan und findest dich wieder in einem beschatteten Tal, trittst in ein Haustor und stehst auf der Straße" (192-93). Further underscoring the carnival setting, Sebald describes that they rent a house near a square populated by "Zigeuner, Seiltänzer und Bärenführer." The carnival emerges as a liminal space of encounters in the twilight, a world of pretense and spectacle and metaphor for mental illness, brought on by modern existence.

In addition to fantasizing about Ambros and Cosmo in the dream sequence, the narrator envisions a mysterious Austrian countess calling herself "Gräfin Dembowski." Matilde Viscontini Dembowski, whom Sebald mentions in SG, was Stendhal's object of unrequited desire and inspiration behind *De l'Amour*. At the end of the Deauville passage, the vision of this mysterious woman devolves into a grotesque image. The narrator's fantasy merges with reality as he encounters the garishly made-up countess promenading on the waterfront. However, the image is too bizarre to be real and segues directly into the long last section of the chapter that reconstructs Ambrose's past based on the forged diary.

Auf das geschmackloseste zusammengerichtet und auf das entsetzlichste geschminkt, kam sie daher, mit einem hoppelnden weißen Angorakaninchen an der Leine. Außerdem hatte sie einen giftgrün livrierten Clubman dabei, der immer, wenn das Kaninchen nicht mehr weiterwollte, sich hinunterbeugte zu ihm, um es ein wenig zu füttern von dem riesigen Blumenkohl, den er in seiner linken Armbeuge hielt. // Vor mir auf dem Schreibtisch liegt das Agendabüchlein des Ambros [...]. (186)

Unusually rich in color and surreal imagery, the encounter with the countess functions as a warning tag for what is to follow: the hoax of the diary, passed off as an authentic heirloom. The white rabbit, the hideous duchess, and her green (frog or fish) footman are all characters from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), an iconic fantastical realm. The reference to Stendhal through the name Dembowski provides a connection between "Ambros Adelwarth," *Austerlitz*, and "Beyle oder das merckwürdige Faktum der Liebe." Similar to other characters in AW and *Austerlitz*, the mysterious countess also appears in disguise, first as an ethereal noblewoman and on the next page as a painted clown. Interestingly, in the narrator's reality she appears as a fantastical character from *Alice in Wonderland*, whereas in his dream vision she is a normal person. This represents one of the mirror reversals that characterize *Austerlitz* (and hints at Lewis Carroll's *Alice* sequel, *Through the Looking Glass*). Inscrutable and of indeterminable age, a "*femme au passé obscur*," Dembowski is not the countess's real name and she is described as "eine ungeheuer feingliedrige, beinahe transparente Person" (185). Amelie Cerf in *Austerlitz*, the duplicitous character imported from Nabokov's *Sebastian Knight*, is portrayed in similar terms as a "beinah[e] durchsichtig[e] Dame," "die [...] als eine körperhafte Person kaum noch vorhanden gewesen ist" (A 363, 370). In *Austerlitz*, this ghostly figure crosses over from Nabokov to Sebald, and in AW she bridges the narrator's dream vision and "reality," announcing the "forged" diary.

Chateaubriand's travel journal (or rather what he published as such), from which the text of Sebald's visual forgery of Ambros's diary derives, chronicles a journey the French author undertook in 1806-07, mostly by boat, from Paris via Venice (where Ambros and Cosmo embark on their trip) to Greece, Constantinople, Jerusalem, Egypt, and Tunis. Chateaubriand, whose texts and memoirs Sebald also references, emulates, and incorporates in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, is

ambivalent towards Constantinople, relishing the views of the bay like Ambros does, but also mentioning that “[l]es tristes sons d’une mandoline sortent quelquefois du fond d’un café et vous apercevez d’infâmes enfants qui exécutent des danses honteuses devant d’espèces de singes assis en rond sur de petites tables” (942), which is in stark opposition to Ambros’s favorable depiction, in words and a photograph, of the “Kinderderwisch” (AW 199-200). Chateaubriand’s account of Jerusalem, however, is predominantly filled with elegiac accounts of historical religious monuments and the moving impact they have on him, which is completely absent in Ambros’s journal (although there is one paragraph in *Itinéraire* that directly corresponds to the unfavorable view of Jerusalem in “Ambros Adelwarth”).<sup>138</sup> This switching of affinities between Jerusalem and Constantinople is akin to a structural mirror reversal, which exemplifies that Sebald does not just appropriate the pretext whole cloth, but plays with it, embedding the diary within the funhouse/mirror cabinet motif of the story. Several other details throughout Ambros’s diary, which comprises almost a fourth of the story (26 pages), derive directly from *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem et de Jérusalem à Paris*. One example among many is the start of the boat trip, which Sebald shifts from Trieste on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1806, when Chateaubriand set sail, to Venice at the end of August 1913. Sebald writes:

Vor der kroatischen Küste [...] Die sich türmenden Wolken. Nachmittags um drei so gut wie finster. Unwetter [...] Um 7 Uhr abends der Sturm in voller Stärke. Wellen brechen über das Deck herein. Der österreichische Kapitän hat in seiner Kajüte eine Ölfunzel angezündet *vor dem Bildnis der Ib. Frau*. Er kniet am Boden und betet. Auf italienisch, seltsamerweise, für die armen verschollenen Seeleute *sepolti in questo sacre mare*. (188-89, italics mine)

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138 Cf. Chateaubriand part five “Suite du voyage de Jérusalem” 1124-25, AW 203-05.

The corresponding passage in Chateaubriand from part one, “Voyage de la Grèce,” reads:

[L]es nuages qui s’assemblaient au couchant nous annoncèrent un orage. Nous entendîmes les premiers coups de foudres sur les côtes de la Croatie. A trois heures on plia les voiles, et l’on suspendit une petite lumière dans la chambre du capitain, devant une image de la Sainte Vierge [...] A sept heures du soir, l’orage était dans toute sa force. Notre capitain autrichien commença une prière au milieu des torrents de pluie et des coups de tonnerre. Nous priâmes pour [...] nous et pour les mariniens *sepolti in questo sacre mare*. (772)

Even in the case of this forgery, there is a textual precursor, and the incidence of *Scheinintertextualität* is in fact only make-believe in part and otherwise represents Sebald’s “regular” mode of creatively embellishing an intertext for his purposes. Knowledge of the pretext reveals the aside about the captain praying in Italian rather than in German as Sebald’s humorous annotation of Chateaubriand’s text. More so than Sebald’s handwriting, which turns out to be a distraction that further obscures the real source text, the tag that exposes this passage as adapted from a precursor (beyond Ambros) is the line “vor dem Bildnis der lb. Frau,” especially the abbreviation “lb.” for “liebe.” The usage of such a shorthand, otherwise absent in the diary, would indicate frequent references to Biblical figures or religious practices in Ambros’s journal – or indeed his biography – for which there is no basis. On the contrary, Ambros and Cosmo are characterized throughout as *cosmopolitan* agnostics who prefer Constantinople to Jerusalem (and moreover Cosmo is Jewish). In Chateaubriand, everybody, the first-person narrator included, prays, whereas in Sebald’s story only the captain and sailors do (notwithstanding Chateaubriand’s comment in this passage that “l’homme dans ce moment devient religieux [...]

le flambeau de la philosophie le rassure moins au milieu de la tempête, que la lampe allumée devant la Madone,” *ibid*).

In SG, “Beyle oder das merckwürdige Faktum der Liebe” culminates in Stendhal’s allegory of crystallization, which Sebald also refers to briefly in “Max Aurach.” In the original text, “The Salzburg Bough,” appended to *On Love*, Stendhal reads crystallization as an allegory for admiration. Traveling near Salzburg, the woman he loves, Ghita (Madame Gherardi), receives a branch covered in salt crystals in one of the salt mines. For Stendhal, the iridescent branch becomes a representation of Ghita, an image of how her many admirers perceive her. The object of admiration, he ponders, shifts according to the imagination of the admirer and changes according to each projected desire. The glittering crystals are like the illusion of a lover, who sees a special light emanating from the beloved that is invisible to all others. In Stendhal’s text, desire remains unrequited. Sebald transfigures this passage into a slightly less bitter one (“Der langwierige Prozeß der Kristallisation, der den toten Zweig in ein wahres Wunderwerk verwandelt hatte, schien Beyle [...] eine Allegorie für das Wachstum der Liebe in den Salzbergwerken unserer Seelen”) (SG 31). In “Max Aurach,” the narrator ponders the process of crystallization in a salt works, “die langwierigen und, wie ich glaube, unergründlichen Vorgänge, die beim Höhergradieren der Salzlösungen die seltsamsten Versteinerungs- und Kristallationsformen hervorbringen, Nachahmungen gewissermaßen und Aufhebungen der Natur” (AW 344). A photograph of a twig implicitly refers to Madame Gherardi’s “Salzburg Bough” in both SG and the pretext by Stendhal. Crystallization is also a metaphor for an intertextual mode of composition: intertextual quotes crystallize like salt around a textual skeleton, obscuring and refining it, and eventually dazzle readers. Like the reference to diamonds at the end of *Austerlitz* that flag the presence of falsified materials, the references to Stendhal’s

allegory of crystallization at the end of AW announce altered materials and point to characters in disguise.

Claudia Öhlschläger reads the theory of crystallization as the mimetic transformation of nature into art. The salt crystals conceal but also elevate the lowly twig, supplanting the original. Thus, the new twig becomes a supplement to nature. Similarly, historical reality is continuously appended and embellished by the imagination. “Fiktion erweist sich als konstitutiver Bestandteil der Erinnerung,” as Sebald writes in “Beyle,” where the protagonist is disturbed by realizing that reality does not live up to his imagination (SG 62-63). According to Öhlschläger, Sebald “[entwickelt] aus Stendhals Figur der Kristallisation ein Modell poetischer Selbstreflexion [...], das gerade die Abweichung von der Natur zum realistischen Prinzip entwickelt” (67). The topic recurs in “Max Aurach,” when the narrator calls the formation of crystals “Nachahmungen gewissermaßen und Aufhebungen der Natur” (AW 344). In conjunction with Aurach’s technique of violently altering realistic portraits until they are unrecognizable, and the narrator’s obsessive edits that turn his own drafts into an illegible palimpsest, Öhlschläger concludes that, for Sebald, “der Akt der Konstruktion von Wirklichkeit geht mit deren Zerstörung einher” (69). Sebald’s intention with the allegory of crystallization she calls “Veranschaulichung von Differenz [...] die gebraucht wird, um das Fremde im Eigenen zur Darstellung zu bringen” (73). However, considering the amount of “Fremdes” Sebald used “im Eigenen,” and how much the “Fremdes” was altered by him, I argue that crystallization can be read as a more playful way of signposting falsifications.

What Öhlschläger’s analysis does not mention, for instance, is that “Max Aurach” also contains a falsified Holocaust memoir, which remains unattributed like Friedländer’s and Bechhöfer’s texts in *Austerlitz*. Luisa Lanzmann is supposedly Aurach’s mother, but her

“Aufzeichnungen” are really based on the memoir of a female relative of Sebald’s Manchester landlord, Peter Jordan (who, along with the painter Frank Auerbach, served as inspiration for the character Max Aurach). According to Klaus Gasseleder, Sebald kept parts of this source text verbatim, but also embellished and diverged from it considerably, most significantly in changing the author’s identity. Unlike Luisa Lanzmann, the real author (Thea Frank) did not die during the Holocaust and did not commit her story to paper until after the war. Sebald’s fictionalized version instead tells, in first person, the tale of her sister (Paula, transfigured into “Luisa”), who was killed in the concentration camp Kaunas in Lithuania, familiar from the last pages of *Austerlitz*. “Is it the survivor who is erased, because her memoir is attributed to the victim?” Ruth Franklin asks, “[o]r is it the victim, since the text conflates her autobiography with that of the survivor?” (193). Gasseleder comments that by hiding the identity of an already obscure and unknown author, Sebald bars readers from accessing the pretext, whose literary quality hence remains unvalued.<sup>139</sup> Sebald’s references in AW to destroying an original work of art by (over)editing it are hence a self-conscious comment on his altering of materials like the “Luisa Lanzmann” diary. The narrator is frustrated that he cannot “accurately” represent the life of Aurach’s mother. The diary the narrator inherited is, like Ambros’s, a deliberately forged item, yet both Luisa’s and Ambros’s journals have intertextual precursors, which reveals how complicated instances of “forgery” are within Sebald’s intertextual methodology. More than just a supplement to nature, salt crystals become a simulacrum and similarly intertexts supplant the original. The twig-shaped sheath of salt crystals represents embellished intertexts that stand in for the original, fooling readers.

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139 For an extensive analysis of the pretext compared to Sebald’s fictionalization cf. Gasseleder 157-75. Gasseleder’s convoluted path to identifying and obtaining Thea Frank’s memoirs attests to the difficulty of accessing the pretext.



In her description of the carnivalesque, Kristeva depicts the fairground as a metaphor for a subversive “substratum of official Western culture,” in which repressed aspects of human life can play out freely and find a polyphonous expression (78). The fairground is not a stage and yet inherently theatrical, a system onto itself. The carnival participant is both spectator and actor, “subject of the spectacle and an object of the game” (ibid), like Ambrose in Barth’s “Lost in the Funhouse,” who both comments on and becomes entangled in the labyrinth of the funhouse. Kristeva links this to literature in the sense that a text is a conceit ambivalently poised between self-awareness of its constructedness and dependence on the suspension of disbelief. Similarly, readers of (Sebald’s) intertextual prose perform a complicit dual role of spectator and actor by recognizing intertexts as derivative and weaving them into a new narrative. The carnivalesque is a tragicomic, fragmentary literary discourse made up of contrasts and ambivalence (“virtuous courtesans” like Lily in *Shanghai Express*, “generous bandits” like Cosmo Solomon) that takes place at the fringes of society (Kristeva 83). Both Sebald’s and Barth’s texts play with the dialogical aspect of the carnivalesque in utilizing an intertextual writing style through which several voices speak at once. Barth structures his short story in the ambivalent space between content and commentary, switching back and forth between multiple styles and points of view. Sebald’s polyphonous stories efface the distinction between commentary and content altogether in their dense layering and constant allusion to other texts. According to Kristeva, language that is ambivalent transcends realism and is more akin to abstract painting (89). Her poetic theorization of the dialogic impulse of intertextuality is especially poignant in its challenges to authority and its envisioning of a form of laughter that is “not simply parodic [...] no more comic than tragic; it is both at once, one might say that it is *serious*” (80). The serious undercurrent is

often overlooked in overtly ludic postmodern literary experiments and, conversely, the playful and parodic side of Sebald's melancholy texts tends to be undervalued.

#### IV. CONCLUSION: THE MAGIC MIRROR MAZE IN THE CRAZY HOUSE

“Es ist wie ein Sturz durch einen Spiegel, ein Sturz wie durch alle Spiegel, und nachher, kurz darauf, setzt die Welt sich wieder zusammen, als wäre nichts geschehen. Es ist auch nichts geschehen.” (Max Frisch)

Funhouses are designed as labyrinths that lure visitors down illusive paths into a simulated world of nonexistent angles and false expansiveness. In a mirror maze the angles at which mirrors are placed cause disorientation. The “room” of Sebald's text likewise expands virtually (in the readers' imagination) through the inserted intertexts. In Austerlitz and “Ambros Adelwarth,” funhouses and mirror cabinets are also metaphors for the disorienting environment of (post)modernity, the refraction of an individual's identity therein, and the repetition of texts and experiences. In addition, they exemplify the structure of Sebald's narratives and signify how the intertexts operate. Funhouse mirrors split reflected objects into fragments and multiply them, making it difficult to identify an original, as is illustrated in the “magic mirror maze” scene in *The Lady from Shanghai*, which is a mirror cabinet within a “crazy house.” Likewise, *Austerlitz* and *Die Ausgewanderten* in and of themselves act as funhouses that, along the model of a hall of mirrors, split the texts of forerunners into literary fragments that are then used to assemble characters like Austerlitz and Aurach. Composed of the fragments of others – Susi Bechhöfer, Saul Friedländer, Frank Auerbach, Sebald's landlord, Nabokov's protagonists, and others – these Sebaldian characters are torn, unhappy, and depressed. In other words, literary fragments mirror the fragmentation of lives in (post)modernity and vice versa in a *regressus in infinitum*.

However, using Austerlitz – the character who has begun to find closure and who has an unwritten future ahead of him – as a paradigm, Sebald’s last text suggests healing precisely through fragmentation and distortion. Every text, Kristeva writes in “Word, Dialogue, Novel,” represents a “mosaic of quotations” (66). Sebald’s intertextual method refracts but also reconstructs modern identity as a mosaic of fragments. Sebald’s texts exemplify the possibility of a recovery of individuality and restoration of interiority. Contrary to the apocalyptic undercurrents in SG and RS, the death of the emigrants in AW, and Austerlitz’s sad life, all of Sebald’s texts create a satisfying reading experience. All four texts have closure and a redemptive ending because, akin to therapy, something has been learned and worked through. If such endings are rather conventional, they restore the reader and narrator to reality after adventure – a hallmark of romances, as Bruzelius has suggested (185) – like funhouses do.

The mirroring pattern also influences Sebald’s narrative stance of bearing witness. The narrators of “Ambros Adelwarth” and “Max Aurach” read the diaries of the protagonists (or their family members), and rework them into a new narrative that mirrors the unnamed precursor texts. The narrator of “Max Aurach” questions his ability to tell Luisa Lanzmann’s story at the same time as Sebald distorts it. The blurring of the boundary between witness and testifier, historical source texts, and fictional material is a strategy to confuse readers. “When the characters in a work of fiction become readers or authors of the fictions they’re in, we’re reminded of the fictitious aspect of our own existence,” Barth comments (*Friday Book* 73). In *Austerlitz*, however, there is no conceit of inherited written material and instead Jacques Austerlitz’s story is a fictitious oral history that illustrates the beginning of a historiographical process. The result is no less distorted because any witness report refracts and distorts the testifier’s experience. But what if the original experience is already not original, already a

reflection of the experiences of others? Ironically, *Austerlitz*, the text in which Sebald's intertextual method – a text-based art form dependent on reassembling the texts of others – is most refined, is the text in which writing is no longer part of the narrative construct. Liberated from written material (even Austerlitz abandons his writing projects), the narrative twists and turns as if through a funhouse and delves increasingly deeper into the protagonists' past through storytelling. The nesting of voices is a series of repetitions, distorted more with every level of mediation. Lemoine, Austerlitz tells the narrator, bears witness to the existence of Camp Austerlitz but represents the voice of a puppeteer that was filtered through a journalist, while alluding to a diamond forger, who had already previously been turned into a character by Proust, who split him into different shades to reflect the styles of other writers. Funhouse mirrors distort regular images. However, if the image is already distorted, a funhouse mirror can “undistort” or correct it, causing it to be more visible.

Whereas the narrator of SG mirrored Kafka, the narrator of *Austerlitz* is more akin to a funhouse operator, orchestrating the levels of reflection and distortion of others. Sebald strategically places reflections within the text, such as when the (old) library in Paris acts as a hall of mirrors. The scene where the library windows mirror each other causes a strange sadness in Austerlitz, related perhaps to the uncomfortable and uncanny effect of doubling described in SG via Freud (A 372). Benjamin comments on the metaphysical flirting with eternity caused by mirror multiplications in a note from *Das Passagen-Werk*:

Ein Aspekt der Zweideutigkeit der Passagen: ihr Reichtum an Spiegeln, der die Räume märchenhaft ausweitet und die Orientierung erschwert. Denn mag diese Spiegelwelt auch mehrdeutig, ja, unendlich vieldeutig sein – zweideutig bleibt sie doch. Sie blinzelt – ist immer diese Eine und nie Nichts, aus dem ein anderes

sogleich heraussteigt. [...] Es ist so ein zweideutiges Zwinkern vom Nirwana herüber. (672)

Benjamin addresses the blurring between reality and illusion, also the cause for disorientation in a funhouse. The ensuing confusion about what is real and what simulated is resolved by humor, “ein zweideutiges Zwinkern.” Benjamin continues to describe the peculiarity of the virtual environment created by reflections by highlighting the magical aspect of such a mirror world:

Blickwispern füllt die Passagen. Da ist kein Ding, das nicht ein kurzes Auge wo man es am wenigsten vermutet, aufschlägt, blinzeln schließt, siehst du aber näher hin, ist es verschwunden. Dem Wispern dieser Blicke leiht der Raum sein Echo. ‘Was mag in mir, so blinzelt er, sich wohl ereignet haben?’ Wir stutzen. ‘Ja, was mag in dir sich wohl ereignet haben?’ So fragen wir ihn leise zurück.  
(ibid)

Benjamin’s illustration of mirror reflections creating a new room in which experience happens through looking describes the experience of reading. Sebald’s text is also a (mirrored) room in which experience is recorded through looking at a subject from different angles, and through different intertexts and their different circumstances and eras of production, which are looking at each other in a “Blickgewisper.”

Using an intertextual method, Sebald follows his own advice from the foreword of BU: “‘Sieh ins Buch! Wenn man hineinguckt, weint man nicht’” (13). In BU Sebald continues:

Mit dieser Parabel von der Buchstabenbrücke aus dem Unglück in den Trost sind wir bei dem [sic] in der literarischen Tradition Österreichs [...] so wichtigen Kategorie der Lehre und des Lernens, auf die, soviel ich weiß, noch niemand verwiesen hat, wahrscheinlich, weil sie in eklatantem Widerspruch zu der um

vieles auffälligeren, und allem Anschein nach defätistischen Schwermut steht.

(ibid)

This comment describes the surface structure of his own writing and how it has been received. In BU, and later in his prose narratives, Sebald looks beyond the “allem Anschein nach defätistischen Schwermut” in the literature of his forerunners and reveals its hopeful aspects. In my dissertation I hope to have done the same with his texts. Playfulness in Sebald’s texts seems to contradict the presentation of traumatic experiences, but following Sebald’s intertextual beckoning to his “teachers” transcends the unhappiness the narratives overtly construct. The foreword ends with a reminder that bearing witness is always worthwhile because it increases knowledge and potentially understanding:

Stifters pädagogische Provinz, [...] Kafkas didaktische Wissenschaft, [...]

Canetti, der ein großer Lehrer geworden und ein kleiner Schüler geblieben ist, die Hoffnungen, die Wittgenstein in die Dorfschullehrerexistenz gesetzt hat, [...] und die immer wieder um ein Stück verlängerte Lehrzeit Handkes, das alles sind Facetten einer Haltung, die dafür eintreten kann, *daß es einen Sinn hat, etwas weiterzugeben*. Unter diesem Aspekt stellt die Erklärung unseres persönlichen und kollektiven Unglücks ein Erlebnis mit bei, über das das Gegenteil von Unglück, und sei es mit knapper Not, noch zu erreichen ist. (ibid, italics mine)

Happiness is attainable and using the literary past as a guide, through writing and reading, the human condition is worth recording and transmitting. As Sebald’s first work that represents a transition from the conventions of scholarship to fiction, *Schwindel. Gefühle*, literalizes the advice about following teachers from BU most “faithfully.” The narrator imitates Kafka, follows his itinerary, and restages Freud’s essay. The falsified and embellished diaries in *Die*

*Ausgewanderten* suggest an uncoupling from forerunners and a more creative use of anterior material. *Die Ringe des Saturn* raises doubts about text-based disciplines altogether, calling attention to the chronic melancholia of writers, and suggests ekphrasis as a way of writing and seeing, and painting as way of filling in the blank spots of history. *Austerlitz* sets fragmented intertexts free by transposing them into an “oral” format (within the text, to be sure) and dispensing with the narrator’s tortured self-doubt about the (in)adequacy of representation. I have suggested in the introduction that intertextuality, especially when it expands towards intermediality, is akin to thought. The stream of consciousness-like Chinese box style of *Austerlitz* that dispenses with paragraphs mirrors this. *Austerlitz*, in a way, deconstructs itself, as the funhouse operator makes visible its gears. With a wink, Sebald suggests that the magic mirror maze in the crazy house is better suited to witnessing, reflecting on, and mirroring the experience of the 20<sup>th</sup> century than literature or historiography.

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