Verschachtelte Räume: Writing and Reading Environments in W. G. Sebald

Citation

Permanent link

Terms of Use

Share Your Story

Professor Judith Ryan   Emily Erin Jones

Verschachtelte Räume:
Writing and Reading Environments in W. G. Sebald

This dissertation focuses on the construction of the narrated environment in W. G. Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten*, *Die Ringe des Saturn*, and *Austerlitz*. Drawing on a constellation of ecocritical theories, I examine the ways in which memory and history are embedded in images of the built environment and how, in turn, this spatialization of the past contributes to a criticism of traditional linear narration. Sebald's texts create postmodern textual environments, urban, domestic, faux-pastoral, and heterotopian, that unite disparate times and spaces, demonstrating the need for innovative narrative in untangling and portraying complex, sometimes contradictory layers of history.

An examination of the labyrinth and garden in *Die Ringe des Saturn* and of urban spaces in *Austerlitz* demonstrates the potential of the environment to seize agency and exert force on the human subject in the environment. The domestic environment also contains this potential, but in *Austerlitz*, the protagonist reclaims agency and uses the domestic environment as a medium for recovering memory. Finally, drawing on theories from Michel Foucault and Marc Augé, I examine the effect heterotopian spaces have on the characters experiencing them in all three of Sebald's major prose works. More importantly, I demonstrate the way in which Sebald exploits the heterotopian potential of the text itself, creating a textual "environment" that pushes back against the reader, reinforcing the meaning of its content, but also drawing attention to the textual structures it deploys to create meaning.

CONTENTS

memories of the last seven years. Having had Jamie as a colleague and friend throughout has made me wonder how others manage without a sibling in academe. I am also indebted to my brother-in-law Eric, who has made Jamie so happy, but who has also generously shared his time, his perspective on issues both academic and not, and gone above and beyond the call of duty by helping with some research in Spanish.

Finally I would like to thank my husband, the love of my life, Daniel Le Ray. The love I daily receive from him is the foundation upon which my efforts have been built. Without his encouragement, intellect, fierce loyalty, and friendship, I would be at a loss. He is my touchstone, refuge, and companion in both laughter and tears. It isn't a love song, but this dissertation is evidence of the strength and joy I find in our love.

For my family,
whose accomplishments inspire we,
whose love sustains me,
and without whom this would not have been possible

INTRODUCTION

        W. G. Sebald has become one of the most studied and most admired writers of German

literature in recent history. His texts are notable not only for their moving thematic content, but also

for Sebald's innovative approach to genre and the dense richness of his tone. His complex network

of historical and literary allusion, coupled with the fact that he was also a scholar of literature,

continues to draw attention to the way in which his texts, both literary and critical, engage in a

dialogue with literary theory, cultural criticism, and the topic of engagement with German history.

Much of Sebald scholarship focuses on the texts' portrayal of and engagement with German history.

This emphasis on history relies heavily on analyses of the construction of temporality and memory

in the text. While my dissertation also addresses, to a degree, Sebald's engagement with history, I

approach it from a new perspective.

        A unique characteristic of Sebald's engagement with history and memory is his recognition

of the importance of space in processing history. After all, when people think about history, engage

in active memory, and memorialize the past, these things are very frequently encoded in places.

Memorials to the tragedies of the past become sites of memory and, in turn, attain their own

significance for people who visit them. Beyond this explicit platial engagement with history and

memory, history is frequently constructed along spatial divides: wars crop up along borders, territory

is a cause of conflict. This is especially true of twentieth-century German history and the literary

forms through which it has been processed. My dissertation distinguishes itself from the body of

Sebald scholarship that focuses on the temporality of history in that I focus on these environmental

expressions of history and memory, undertaking an "ecocritical" study of environment – broadly

defined – in Sebald's literary texts.[1] In this sense, I position Sebald within the "spatial turn" that continues to play a significant role in literary theory and practice since the 1980s. Sebald's attention to environment, I contend, represents an original approach to this topic. My analysis concentrates on three central works from Sebald's literary oeuvre – *Die Ausgewanderten,*[2] *Die Ringe des Saturn,*[3] and *Austerlitz*[4] – with the aim of examining the construction and role of concrete spaces in the texts. I will argue that the preponderance of spatial metaphors and the complexity with which the texts construct environment function as a critique of the primacy of temporality in many narratives that deal with (German) history. In his essay on the criticism of time implicit in Sebald's works, Amir Eshel focuses on the "poetics of suspension," which goes beyond the thematization of time and becomes, instead "a poetics that suspends notions of chronology, succession, comprehension, and closure – a poetics that rather than depicting and commenting on the historical event in time, constitutes an event, becomes the writing of a different, a literary time."[5] I will argue that beyond this focus on temporality, Sebald recognizes the ways in which the Nazi regime's power and ideology were encoded in spatial terms (borders, conquest, architecture) and proposes a spatial paradigm for dealing with the ghosts of Germany's past. My study is not primarily concerned, however, with questions of territorial power. Rather, it examines space in a broader sense that includes the relationship between human beings and their environments. For this reason, it will be

---

[1] Ecocriticism, it should be noted is not a unified school of literary criticism. It encompasses criticism that focuses on ecological crisis, new forms of gender studies (for example, ecofeminism), environmental justice, urban studies, and so on. Buell refers to ecocriticism as "the omnibus term by which the new polyform literature and environment studies movement has come to be labeled," (Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 3.) but tends to prefer, as do I, the broader term "environmental criticism," which does not immediately imply environmentalism as much as the prefix eco- does.

[2] W. G. Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten: Vier Lange Erzählungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994).

[3] W. G. Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn: Eine Englische Wallfahrt*, 8. Aufl. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl., 2004).

[4] W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (München: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003).

[5] Amir Eshel, "Against the Power of Time: The Poetics of Suspension in W. G. Sebald's 'Austerlitz'," *New German Critique*, no. 88 (January 1, 2003): 74.

necessary to think about how this larger issue relates to the more focused project of ecocriticism and to define some of the central terminology that will appear in the following pages.

In recent years, Lawrence Buell has played a key role in the development of ecocriticism. His recent book on *The Future of Environmental Criticism* attempts to trace the movement's history and make some suggestions for how it can best be carried into the future. Buell locates the origins of the ecocritical movement in literary studies in the 1970s and 1980s noting its origin in Anglo-American literary studies.[6] Buell describes ecocriticism as "an umbrella term used to refer to the environmentally oriented study of literature and (less often) the arts more generally, and to the theories that underlie such critical practice" and notes that a multitude of critical methods are encompassed in the term "ecocriticism." He also makes a distinction between "first-wave" and "second-wave" ecocriticism, the former primarily concerned with "genres such as nature writing, nature poetry, and wilderness fiction" and the latter with a wider variety of landscapes and, at least in part, a greater interest in environmental justice. Second-wave ecocriticism also reflects on first-wave ecocriticism, both drawing inspiration from it and criticizing its tendency to romanticization of the environment.[7] In an earlier work that was primarily concerned with environmentalism and literary study, Buell suggested that ecocriticism provides the opportunity to bring "green" and "brown" environments into dialogue with one another and with the urban environment in order to study the artistic representation of the ailing environment and the interdependence of these different environments.[8]

---

[6] However, he claims that two works in particular anticipated the movement: Leo Marx's *The Machine and the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in American Culture* (1964) and Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973). See Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, 13–14.

[7] Ibid., 138.

[8] Buell understands the "brown" environment to be the industrial and "exurban" environment. Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2001), 7.

Buell and his colleagues are primarily concerned with representations of the environment in

English and American literature, which raises the question of whether this study of environment

must be confined to national borders. Buell notes that the early practitioners of ecocriticism

> […] bear no special responsibility for the practice of reading environmental imagination as a barometer of *national* imagination. In this they followed the bias of literary professionalism toward nation-based specialties that marked the work of their own mentors and that still runs strong. Nor is nation-based specialization altogether unjustified in this case. Nations *do* generate distinctive forms of pastoral or outback nationalism (e.g., the myth of the Bush for Australia; the mystique of the far North for Canada; the iconicity of the Black Forest for German culture; the myth of the jungle for Creole cultures of Brazil, Venezuela, and other Latin American nations).[9]

It seems to be a natural trend that this form of literary study should focus on national conceptions

of environment. After all, national identity and ideology is frequently, if not always, inextricably

bound to the specific geography of the nation. However, despite Germany's reputation as

"Ökoland,"[10] many scholars note that ecocriticism has been relatively slow to take hold in German

literary study. Gersdorf and Mayer note the relative lack of engagement with environmental topics in

literary study in Germany, noting that "in den USA, aber auch in Großbritannien die Literatur- und

Kulturwissenschaften seit Beginn der 1990er Jahre aus dem […] ökologischen Dornröschenschlaf

erwacht" and that in Germany until very recently "ökologisch orientierte, geistes- bzw.

humanwissenschaftliche Disziplinen auf einem institutionell und legitimatorisch noch kaum

vermessenen Terrain [bewegten]."[11] Malkmus criticizes the self-reflexivity of literary and cultural

studies after World War II, citing its self-perception as "Speerspitze der kritischen Theorie

---

[9] Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, 16.

[10] Axel Goodbody, *Literatur Und Ökologie* (Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1998), 12.

[11] Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer, eds., *Natur, Kultur, Text: Beiträge Zu Ökologie Und Literaturwissenschaft* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2005), 7–8.

Frankfurter Prägung"[12] as one reason that ecology has remained a "blinder Fleck" for literary and cultural study until relatively recently.[13]

A further possible explanation for Germany's late entrance to ecocriticism is the charged history of its ecological movement. Riordan notes that in the interwar period ecology was unfortunately bound up with racial ideology, referring to the anti-Semitism embedded in ecological manifestos of the time. This compounded ideology was taken up by the NSDAP and became a cornerstone for National Socialist policy, finding expression in such ideas as "Ostkolonisation," "Blut und Boden," and "Lebensraum." This legacy of problematic ideology has left its mark on contemporary "green thought" in Germany as well. Riordan notes also that, of the German Green Party platform's four pillars, only one is "green" while the others seem to distance the party from any resemblance to those earlier National-Socialist ideologies.[14] One could argue that the process of integrating ecology into the humanities also involves a process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.[15]

Despite the troubled legacy of ecology in Germany, ecocriticism has now taken hold in German literary study. Gersdorf and Mayer trace the beginnings of the ecological humanities in

---

[12] Bernhard Malkmus, "Ökologie Als Blinder Fleck Der Kultur- Und Literaturtheorie," in *Natur, Kultur, Text: Beiträge Zu Ökologie Und Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer (Heidelberg: Winter, 2005), 54.

[13] Malkmus reads Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* as a satire of consumer culture and sees it as "ökologisch *ex negativo*." See Malkmus, "Ökologie Als Blinder Fleck Der Kultur- Und Literaturtheorie."

[14] "The Greens aimed to be ecological, grass-roots democratic, socially responsible and non-violent. Clearly, the last three terms specifically make impossible any affinity with fascistic politics. They are a patent reversal of Nazi values: genuine democracy, not authoritarianism; care of the weak, not survival of the fittest; peace, not war."Colin Riordan, ed., *Green Thought in German Culture: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 33.

[15] An example of a way to deal with this entwinement of ecology and Nazi ideology is found in Carl Amery's essay "The Great Blind Spot," where he depicts Hitler as an environmental manager gone wrong and arguing for a renewal of humanism in dealing with the environment. This seems to constitute, in Amery's view, a radical anti-fascist statement in its own rite: "What we need to develop is a new solidarity with the biosphere, the world of living things, purged by knowledge and humility. The Darwinism of the neo-cannibals, regardless of whatever ilk, has no more place in it than the naïve doctrine of the invisible hand of providence or the arrogant hope in eschatological redemption by a force above and beyond us still discernible in many a secular mind. If there is any point in seeking a global formula today, then it must be the following: *Humankind can remain the crown of creation – as long as we understand we are not that by right*." Carl Amery, "The Great Blind Spot," in *The Culture of German Environmentalism: Anxieties, Visions, Realities*, ed. Axel Goodbody (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 128.

Germany primarily to the work of two scholars: Gregory Bateson, whose *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*[16] was first translated into German in 1981 and Gernot Böhme, whose *Für eine ökologische Naturästhetik*[17] and *Atmosphäre*[18] proposed an ecological approach to aesthetics and literature. Since then, a number of volumes of essays have been published and conferences about "Green Germanistik" and the environment in literature emerge with increasing frequency.

One of the earliest collections of essays dealing solely with ecology and literature was edited by Axel Goodbody, who understands ecology as a system that "faßt die Welt als Ensemble integrierter Systeme und Ganzheit auf, in der alles voneinander abhängig ist" and sees technology as a means by which humans can change (and thus endanger) their environment.[19] In this sense, he suggests a holistic model of the environment – ecological holism has become the target of criticism in the "second wave" of ecocriticism exemplified by the toxic discourse.[20] Ecological literature, he argues, does not aim to objectively educate its reader, but instead intends "die Leser durch

---

[16] Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (San Francisco: Chandler Pub. Co., 1972).

[17] Gernot Böhme, *Für Eine Ökologische Naturästhetik*, 1. Aufl. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989).

[18] Gernot Böhme, *Atmosphäre: Essays Zur Neuen Ästhetik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995).

[19] Goodbody, *Literatur Und Ökologie*, 17.

[20] Buell writes "toxic discourse holds that belief in the availability of such a holism by such means is chimerical and divisive. Yet it recognizes both the rhetorical appeal and the benefit to human and planetary welfare of the ideal of a purified physical environment as an end in itself, thereby recognizing physical environment's nonreducibility to ideological artifact or socioeconomic counter. Its impetus is both to reinforce the deromanticization and to urge the expansion of "nature" as an operative category." Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 45. It bears mentioning that, while this is the frame Goodbody constructs for the volume, the individual articles largely focus on elements of toxic discourse. For example, Hunt explores the process of natural chaos in Grass's volume of drawings and text *Totes Holz* and Volker Braun's *Bodenloser Satz*. In Grass the focus is on images of death and decay, while in Braun the imagery is related primarily to destruction and tearing-down ("Abraumarbeiten"). Hunt sees images of chaos in these works – as indications of the coming end-times. She points out immediately that by "Endzeit" she means "Endphase im Sinn von gewalttätiger Umwelt-Zerstörung" and not any Biblical implication. See Irmgard Elsner Hunt, "Chaos in Der Endphase. Ökoliteratur Von Volker Braun Und Günter Grass," in *Literatur Und Ökologie*, ed. Axel Goodbody (Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1998), 243–256. Tate reads Franz Fühmann not as the "naively sympathetic commentator on the industrial world of the GDR" that he at first appears to be. Instead he reads Fühmann's depiction of nature in *Kabelkran* and other works as an expression of unease about the impact of industry on nature, if not an implicit criticism of industry. According to Tate, Fühmann's use of apocalyptic environmental imagery ultimately connects his fears about the ecological prognosis to his experiences of World War II. See Dennis Tate, "The Spectre of the Apocalypse in the Work of Franz Fühmann," in *Literatur Und Ökologie*, ed. Axel Goodbody (Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1998), 257–270.

Einbildungskraft und sprachliche Intensität zum Handeln zu ermächtigen und ihre Energien zu mobilisieren,"[21] a goal which is borne out in the selection of essays included in the volume. He suggests that the most productive kind of ecological literature to study is that which "unsere Beziehung zur Natur kritisch beleuchtet, auch wenn sie nicht explizit nach den Ursachen der ökologischen Lage fragt oder technologischen und gesellschaftlichen 'Fortschritt' hinterfragt."[22] His collection attempts to study this sort of literature and to explore the ways in which literature can help to develop our understanding the ideas of nature, technology, and progress, all while keeping the ecological crisis in mind.[23] Gersdorf and Mayer's volume, *Natur – Kultur – Text*[24] (2005) thematizes ecology as an object of cultural and literary inquiry as well as a critical perspective from which to study literature and culture. Johannes Dingler's essay in this collection attempts to create a definition of "nature" that is based in poststructural discourse theory, the general approach taken in this volume. This collection also focuses broadly on the natural environment and deals largely with ecological crisis. Thus, like Goodbody's works, this collection broadly fits with Buell's "first wave" of ecocriticism.

Spatial Turns (2010) goes beyond this discussion of the "natural" environment and the more explicitly environmentalist criticism seen in Goodbody's first collection and Gersdorf and Mayer's volume.[25] Fisher and Mennel's volume features criticism that deals largely, though not exclusively,

---

[21] Goodbody, *Literatur Und Ökologie*, 21.

[22] Ibid., 25.

[23] See ibid.

[24] Gersdorf and Mayer, *Natur, Kultur, Text*.

[25] Goodbody has become a very prominent figure in German ecocriticism. In addition to *Literatur und Ökologie* he has edited five collections that can be broadly defined as ecocritical. In addition, he is currently preparing a collection of "German Nature Writing." In the 2002 volume, Goodbody edits a selection of texts that explore Environmentalism as a cultural movement as well as its impact on the political culture of Germany. See: Axel Goodbody, ed., *The Culture of German Environmentalism: Anxieties, Visions, Realities* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002). His joint effort with Everett brings spatial theory into dialogue with European Cinema, featuring essays on, among others, urban space, the exotic or wilderness landscapes, and the encoding of identity in space. Wendy E. Everett and Axel Goodbody, eds., *Revisiting Space:*

with the built environment and that focuses on the potential of environmental criticism to broaden

our engagement with German literature and culture. The editors suggest, as have many others, that:

> German Studies seems particularly well suited to analyses of space, given the long-term
> centrality of space and spatial imaginary to German Culture (the struggle for a German
> nation state, territorial wars of aggression, and constantly changing borders); but recent
> developments also suggest the severe limits of a traditionally spatial or territorial model for
> the German nation-state itself.[26]

The collection, then, assumes the productive potential of the "spatial turn" in literary study, while

attempting to acknowledge the limitations of the critical methods involved, particularly those that

come from other fields, such as the social sciences. Significantly, the collection criticizes the

traditional opposition of time and space and questions the notion of "space as a transhistorical and

transnational category."[27] The essays in the collection draw heavily on critical models from the social

sciences, particularly geography (especially cartography), politicized and gendered space, and

visualizations of space. It also bears mentioning that this collection goes beyond the time period

reflected in Goodbody's collection – Mennel and Fisher's volume addresses the post-1945 period as

well, but also includes articles on literature from the early twentieth century, very recent literature,

and two essays on Goethe. In that sense, this volume better shows the broad potential of

environmental criticism, not only for analyzing texts that thematize ecological crisis, but also for

---

Space and Place in European Cinema, New Studies in European Cinema, 1661-0261 2 (Oxford: P. Lang, 2005). Goodbody's joint edition with Wanning focuses on water as a point of concern in the continuing ecological crisis. This collection brings together scientific information about water infrastructure and access concerns with literary representations of water. Within this second section, there is a strong focus on the intersection between water and gender in literature. Axel Goodbody and Berbeli Wanning, eds., *Wasser, Kultur, Ökologie: Beiträge Zum Wandel Im Umgang Mit Dem Wasser Und Zu Seiner Literarischen Imagination* (Göttingen: V & R unipress, 2008). An historical counterpart to this work by Goodbody and Wanning is David Blackbourn's study of aquaculture in the development of Germany up to World War II. David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany*, 1st American. (New York, N.Y.: Norton, 2006). Finally, Goodbody and Rigby edited a collection of recent European contributions to ecocritical theory, including essays on Böhme, Benjamin, Williams, Merleau-Ponty, and others. Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby, eds., *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

[26] Jaimey Fisher and Barbara Caroline Mennel, eds., *Spatial Turns: Space, Place, and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture* (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2010), 9.

[27] Ibid., 10.

texts of varied periods and media (the collection also deals with film) and in dealing with a broad range of issues.[28]

Notably missing from all of these volumes (with the exception of a few passing comments in individual essays) is W. G. Sebald, who in this same period – roughly since 2000 – became a "Lieblingsgegenstand der internationalen Germanistik."[29] In this dissertation, I will demonstrate the way in which some approaches characteristic of environmental criticism can be helpful in understanding Sebald's literary works. I would like to begin by clarifying the meaning of some important concepts.

Four terms will be of central importance for my study: environment, landscape, place, and space. "Environment," as is already clear, is a word with multiple meanings. It is essential to note the distinction between environment and environmentalism. In my study of Sebald, environmentalism (i.e. a concern with ecological crisis and the attendant political activism) is not a primary focus.[30]

---

[28] Haque studies the way in which instability of space – its vacillations between West and East, city and desert in Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* – creates a complex image of the East, "one which is neither purely the Persia of Hafiz nor the Arabian Peninsula of Muhammad and the Bedouin." He studies the way in which nomadic figures in the poems are able to cross these boundaries and access the contrasting spaces on both sides using Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. See Kamaal Haque, "From the Desert to the City and Back: Nomads and the Spaces of Goethe's West-östlicher Divan [West-Eastern Divan, 1819/1827]," in *Spatial Turns Space, Place, and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture*, ed. Jaimey Fisher and Barbara Caroline Mennel (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2010), 275–300. Jarosinski studies the construction of urban space in Kracauer's novel *Ginster*. The study of a literary work by one of the preeminent theorists of space in Germany exemplifies the project of "second-wave" ecocriticism, examining the dialogues that emerge between theory and literature and the way these issues are embedded in the environment. Jarosinski focuses on the way that Kracauer narrates the multiple mediality of urban space, specifically linguistic mediation. See Eric Jarosinski, "Urban Mediations: The Theoretical Space of Siegfried Kracauer's Ginster," in *Spatial Turns Space, Place, and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture*, ed. Jaimey Fisher and Barbara Caroline Mennel (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2010), 171–188. Drawing on human geography, urban studies, and gender studies, Schade explores the construction of home in semi-autobiographical narratives of migration by Özdamar, a Turkish-German author. Schade sees Özdamar's complex construction of home as a rewriting of "cosmopolitanism as a highly personal and individual patchwork." See Silke Schade, "Rewriting Home and Migration: Spatiality in the Narratives of Emine Sevgi Özdamar," in *Spatial Turns Space, Place, and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture*, ed. Jaimey Fisher and Barbara Caroline Mennel (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2010), 275–300.

[29] Gfrereis and Strittmacher quoted in Michael Niehaus and Claudia Öhlschläger, eds., *W.G. Sebald: Politische Archäologie Und Melancholische Bastelei* (Berlin: E. Schmidt, 2006), 9.

[30] For reference, Riordan provides excellent short definitions of environmentalism, ecologism, and conservationism. "Environmentalism proper can reasonably be said to exist where there is evidence of active protest or campaign against damage to the natural environment which rests on a knowledge of the ecological effects of human action. Where concern for the preservation of a particular natural feature is actuated primarily by aesthetic considerations, however, it

Instead, I take environment in its broader sense to indicate the physical surroundings of a location

or person. When discussing environments that are meant primarily or chiefly as objects of

observation or aesthetic appreciation, I use the word "landscape." The use of "landscape" in English

comes primarily from the tradition of Dutch landscape painting. Buell complicates the traditional

understanding of landscape, which will be useful in my study of the built environment in Sebald.

> Landscape typically refers to rural rather than urban contexts and typically implies certain
> amplitude of vista and degree of arrangement, whether the referent is an artifact or an actual
> locale. But what is called landscape *may* be messy or chaotic rather than orderly,
> foreshortened as well as panoramic, urban as well as exurban. In all cases, landscape implies
> the totality of what a gaze can comprehend from its vantage point.[31]

Here Buell emphasizes not only the variability of environments encompassed by the term landscape,

but also the importance of the *gaze* in defining a landscape. Denoting an environment as a landscape

emphasizes its composition and the presence of a viewing subject. The environment, when

subjected to the gaze of a viewer observing it from a specifically selected vantage point, becomes an

object. I understand environment to be something that one experiences, while landscape is

something that one looks at.

Finally, the terms space and place are of central importance. For my purposes, space serves

primarily as the counterpart to place, as explained by Yi-Fu Tuan:

> In experience, the meaning of space often merges with that of place. "Space" is more
> abstract than "place." What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to
> know it better and endow it with value. Architects talk about the spatial qualities of place;
> they can equally well speak of the locational (place) qualities of space. The ideas "space" and
> "place" require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are
> aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think

---

makes more sense to speak of conservationism, the history of which has been extensively documented in Germany. […]
The ecologist world-view is holistic, that is, all things both organic and inorganic are interrelated and interdependent;
interfering with one will have unpredictable effects on others. Ecologism must be based on scientific understanding of
the global effects of human interference in nature, but is characterized by a critical stance toward the effects of science
(in its technological guise) on global ecology. Human beings are a part of nature, but have no superior status or special
right to exist within it." Riordan, *Green Thought in German Culture*, 4–5.

[31] Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, 142–143.

of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.[32]

Space, according to Tuan, is a physical location that is not associated with or imbued with personal meaning. This meaning, Tuan suggests, is created by the accumulation of human emotion or experience in a particular location. While it is easy to think of place as positively connoted and space as neutral (or impoverished, compared to place's rich connotations of experience), it is important to note that "place can become regressive and repressive when it is thought of in essentialized terms as an unchanging unitary entity, as in ethnocentric appeals to *Heimat* or local patriotism."[33] Moreover, although this understanding of the word "place" seems to require a relatively neutral counterpart, "space" can and does exist independently. When taken on its own, space becomes the center of an extremely complex abstract philosophical and scientific discourse. As my dissertation deals almost exclusively with concrete space and the built environment, space will be primarily understood as the counterpart to place.[34]

My approach to understanding the built environment in Sebald's texts will be guided by a selection of major environmental theories and be based on close textual analysis and historical contextualization. I begin by studying concrete spaces that are closely related to or inspired by real-world locations that highlight the ways in which Sebald reproduces and manipulates history to his own ends. The primary example of this will be seen in Somerleyton Hall, a central location in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, and which I study against the background of the history of the English Landscape Garden. In this chapter, I draw on the writings of Humphry Repton, the preeminent theorist of landscape gardening in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. I show that Sebald uses

---

[32] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6.

[33] Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, 145–146.

[34] For a thorough introduction to space as a concept in philosophy, science, and literature see Oliver Simons, *Raumgeschichten: Topographien Der Moderne in Philosophie, Wissenschaft Und Literatur* (München: Fink, 2007).

Somerleyton Hall as a way of articulating a miniature history of gardening practices, while ultimately concluding that the seeming chaos of nature may be preferable to its conscious shaping by gardeners of whatever stripe. My second chapter focuses on the urban environments in *Austerlitz*, which function as spaces that enable the eponymous protagonist to access or recreate memories of his own origins. The central environments in this chapter are real locations: Liverpool Street Station in London and the streets of Terezín, the site of a notorious World War II concentration camp. Descriptions of Prague are also studied in this chapter. Yet despite the real existence of these environments, Sebald's treatment of them moves away from the more historically accurate descriptions of Somerleyton in *Die Ringe des Saturn*. To study these environments, I draw on Jay Appleton's prospect-refuge theory to demonstrate the ways in which the construction of space can either produce or alleviate anxiety.

In the second half of the dissertation, I progress toward a study of the more explicitly fictional and constructed spaces in Sebald's texts. I begin by analyzing the domestic spaces described in *Austerlitz* and *Die Ausgewanderten*, using theories from Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* to conduct a topo-analysis which considers the psycho-social significance of the home in literary intimate places. These domestic environments hew very closely to the notion of place as defined by Tuan. In my final chapter, I turn to Michel Foucault's theory of heterotopias to study the way in which Sebald manipulates the narrative to create a disorienting and destabilizing reading experience. I introduce further nuances by coupling Foucault's "real" heterotopias of crisis and deviance with Marc Augé's theory of non-places to study these spaces described in *Die Ausgewanderten*.

IRRWEGE:

THE LABYRINTH AND THE ENGLISH LANDSCAPE GARDEN IN *DIE RINGE DES SATURN*

Although the title *Die Ringe des Saturn* suggests some kind of disconnection from Earth, Sebald's memoir-cum-travelogue is, in fact, deeply rooted in the terrestrial landscape. In order to find a foothold in an otherwise slippery text, it will be vital to analyze the portrayal and function of the environment in all degrees of human cultivation from the "natural" landscape to the exurban landscape seen from the train as the narrator approaches Somerleyton Park. The evolution – or devolution – of the environment as a result of human intervention or natural is thematized throughout the book and the result contributes to Sebald's poetics of natural destruction. An understanding of these topoi against the background of the journey itself – the narrator undertakes what he calls in the subtitle a pilgrimage as an attempt at recovery from severe ailments both physical and emotional – will provide perspective on the organization and motivation of the text itself. In addressing the question of how the text is or is not organized, we can begin to see the ways in which Sebald may be criticizing attempts at organization in general while perhaps making an argument for the supremacy of natural chaos.

Die Ringe des Saturn straddles different genres, creating a liminal genre for itself, encompassing memoir, novel, and travelogue. This last genre is of singular interest for my reading of the text, as the journey itself – the places visited and described as well as the act of visiting and describing – provides the underlying structure upon which the book is built. *Die Ringe des Saturn* is characterized by a series of seemingly random allusions, drawing alternately on historical sources (which have, in some cases, been altered), personal memory, and other types of texts including

memoir, scientific study, and literary allusion. This complex model of pastiche[35] makes it difficult for the reader to find analytical purchase. As such, the places that are concretely described in the text provide the most stable foothold for analysis and give the reader a structure upon which to base understanding.

Much of the scholarship on *Die Ringe des Saturn* attempts to untangle the web of allusion and quotation and find a way of organizing the text, despite its resistance, into an orderly system. Bianca Theisen argues that Sebald struggles against the Enlightenment's tendency to reduce the world to items organized in a grid. Gabriele Eckart, taking a similar starting point, writes that Sebald's work "must be read in the tradition of a literature that attempted to break down the enlightenment discourse of instrumental rationality."[36] This situates his work, she argues, as a Romantic project in the sense that he strives for a measure of freedom from the intellectual pressure of modernity.[37] Sebald's resistance to that kind of universal organization is complicated by his own reliance on similar organizational models (the "spherical system of associations and encyclopedic links that openly flirt with the overwrought networks of Browne's secret code"[38] that Sebald develops, especially in the Michael Hamburger episode). However, rather than being a wholly rational system, Sebald's system of connections belies a belief (however skeptical) in mystical models (such as astrology – the influence of which is suggested in the title of the work). Sebald also consistently

---

[35] What is unique about Sebald's pastiche is that, while he certainly does inhabit the voices of other authors (notably Stifter, but dipping also into the styles of poets, scientific literature, and journalism), he practices something like Jameson's view of architectural pastiche – "the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past" Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 18. – in his writing of physical spaces. To complicate the function of these assembled environments, he relies on heavily charged symbolic and historical-thematic tropes like the labyrinth, relying on their cultural context to evoke an atmosphere, but then torpedoing our assumptions by distorting these cultural allusions.

[36] Gabriele Eckart, "Against 'Cartesian Rigidity': W.G. Sebald's Reception of Borges", December 2009, 519.

[37] See ibid.

[38] Bianca Theisen, "A Natural History of Destruction: W.G. Sebald's 'The Rings of Saturn'," *MLN* 121, no. 3 (April 1, 2006): 569.

features figures who also break out of society's predetermined mold. "Upstarts"[39] – self-made men who rose from obscurity to social and financial prominence – like Samuel Morton Peto, who purchased, renovated, and expanded Somerleyton Hall, buck traditional hierarchies of wealth and power to rise to prominence. Theisen reads Sebald's reliance on "upstarts" like Peto as part of Sebald's pursuit of the question of how behavior effects the survival of the human species. The selfishness and cutthroat character embodied by these upstart figures, Theisen argues, is what causes the world, in Sebald's view, to be "bent toward self-destruction."[40] Theisen bases her argument on the significance of intertexts, particularly an enlightening reading of Simplicissimus's meeting with the shape-shifter Baldanders.

In his article "Writing at the Roche Limit: Order and Entropy in W.G. Sebald's *Die Ringe des Saturn*,"[41] Richard Gray argues that the rings of Saturn themselves provide the organizing impulse for Sebald's process of writing and organizing. The precarious balance between gravitational pull and entropic dispersal, he argues, is mimicked by the text as it continually offers examples of similar liminalities – the whole journey in the book is conceived as a teetering walk along the cliffs between land and sea – and demonstrates the way in which the concentric circles of history can be peeled away, seen in cross section, and enumerated, like so many rings of a tree.

While Gray's argument is compelling, he also seems to orbit one of the main issues at play without ever landing on it; he refers to dozens of examples that aptly illustrate his argument, but fails to note specifically that all of them are spatial examples. The model of history and progress (whether ascending or declining) that the narrator espouses in this book are all conceived of in concrete spatial or environmental terms. Moreover, while it does seem that this understanding of history

---

[39] Ibid., 576.

[40] Ibid., 579–580.

[41] Richard T. Gray, "Writing at the Roche Limit: Order and Entropy in W. G. Sebald's Die Ringe Des Saturn," *German Quarterly* 83, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 38–57.

originates in the otherworldly context of Saturn's rings, it is brought literally down to Earth and

reaches its conceptual and evocative highpoint in the topos of the labyrinth. In fact, the only actual

labyrinth described in the text and pictured as an ostensibly unrelated illustration is based on a

modified circle, leading those walking its path around and around before reaching the innermost,

circular opening, a mound from which one can, for the first time, look back at the path traversed.

Moreover, a person tracing her way through a labyrinth enters something like what Gray calls "a

kind of suspended animation."[42] While within the walls of a labyrinth, one knows roughly that the

destination of the journey is somewhere in the middle, but one does not know precisely what she

will see upon arriving. Furthermore, the passages of a labyrinth look alike – a resemblance designed

to confuse, but also to free the mind to consider other matters. It is this property of the labyrinth –

its encouragement of deep, undirected thought – that has made it a mainstay of contemplative

tradition. The labyrinth provides a place for intellectual suspension and for a departure from the

ordinary world.

As Judith Ryan points out in her article "Lines of Flight: History and Territory in *The Rings of

Saturn*"[43] the narrator's journey is conceived as a pilgrimage – a journey traditionally defined by its

destination. This notion is complicated by what Ryan calls the "random trajectory" of the narrator's

trip. However, the topos of the maze, related as it is to the contemplative labyrinths seen in

cathedrals and other religious sites,[44] is defined by the journey itself and not its destination.

Contemplative labyrinths consist most frequently of a single circuitous path with no dead ends.[45] A

walking journey, as John Wiley points out in his report on an English coastal walk, is marked by a

---

[42] Ibid., 42.

[43] See Judith Ryan, "'Lines of Flight': History and Territory in The Rings of Saturn", December 2009.

[44] Ibid., 51.

[45] Ibid., 50.

kind of spectrality. Drawing on Derrida, he writes: "A walker is poised between the country ahead and the country behind, between one step and the next, epiphany and penumbra, he or she is, in other words, spectral; between there and not-there, perpetually caught in an apparitional process of arriving/departing."[46] This draws our attention to an inherent contradiction in the form of pilgrimage itself, and might explain some of the tension present in Sebald's text: one sets out on a pilgrimage with a destination in mind, yet one is not located while walking, but rather is on the cusp between distance covered and locations yet to be reached. To put it in temporal terms, on the one hand, one is rooted to the present, but on the other hand, one is removed entirely from linear time, pausing between the time past and the future. This complex temporality is a theme that will shape my reading of Sebald throughout. In all of the texts I study, Sebald creates a non-linear, multi-faceted, and hybrid time and the narrated environment frequently reflects these characteristics. An example of this conflation of time and space can be seen in the labyrinth. The labyrinth may indeed be a further expression of the meaninglessness or nonexistence of time that appears through Sebald's works, as Gabriele Eckart observes in her essay on Sebald's reception of Borges in *Die Ringe des Saturn*.[47] She builds a convincing argument for Sebald's rejection of a traditional notion of time, calling on passages quoted in *Die Ringe des Saturn* from Borges claiming that the past, present, and future are one in the same, but also drawing on *Austerlitz* for further evidence. She argues that, among other things, Austerlitz's refusal to wear a watch and his diatribe against the human conception of time is evidence of his wholesale rejection of that understanding of the world.[48]

The labyrinth is an ideal image to illustrate the themes of timelessness and placelessness: although its center is the obvious destination, the process of moving through the labyrinth removes

---

[46] John Wylie, "A Single Day's Walking: Narrating Self and Landscape on the South West Coast Path," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30, no. 2, New Series (June 1, 2005): 237.

[47] Eckart, "Against 'Cartesian Rigidity'," 514.

[48] See ibid., 515–516.

the walker from any outside context or sense of time. The labyrinth acts as a kind of stasis or

vacuum in which contemplation may take place and may, in fact, be the spatial practice upon which

the book's journey is based.

The book's subtitle *eine englische Wallfahrt* [49] calls attention to the book's identification as a

particular brand of travel writing, but immediately raises a number of questions in the reader's mind:

What destination does this pilgrimage have? What religious or mystical tradition provides the

context for this pilgrimage? What is the motivation for this pilgrimage? These questions touch on

the organizational principle upon which the book rests and can provide structure to our reading of

it. The subtitle provides the reader with a key to understanding the text, although the walking trip

may have been dubbed a pilgrimage only in hindsight and despite the obscurity of the pilgrimage's

destination.

The first section of the book provides some insight into possible answers to these questions.

Like the other sections of the book, this one is based on a network of allusions to historical figures,

personal anecdotes, and scientific facts. At first glance the topics listed in the table of contents seem

entirely unrelated: "Im Spital – Nachruf – Irrfahrt des Schädels Thomas Brownes – Anatomische

Vorlesung – Levitation – Quincunx – Fabelwesen – Feuerbestattung." In fact, each individual topic

flows into the next so that, at times, it is difficult to see even on closer inspection where the topics

are actually addressed. And, in fact, that seems to be the reason for their presentation in the Table of

Contents. Rather than a list of clearly delineated sections, the author chooses to present the reader

with a cloud of connected, though disparate words describing (sometimes in what seems to be code)

---

[49] The idea of an English pilgrimage immediately reminds the reader of another famous literary English pilgrimage: *The Canterbury Tales*. There are certainly parallels to be drawn between T*he Canterbury Tales* and Sebald's serial storytelling in *Die Ringe des Saturn*. The episodic nature of the narrative is reminiscent of *The Canterbury Tales* and each character the narrator encounters on his own pilgrimage has a story of his or her own to tell. For an excellent discussion of the parallels between *Die Ringe des Saturn* and *The Canterbury Tales* see: Ryan, "Lines of Flight."

the ideas that will appear in the text.[50] This enumeration of references gives a preview of the meandering, occasionally repetitive nature of the text, a characteristic that is reminiscent of passing through a labyrinth: the Table of Contents purports to provide context but, instead, is designed to confuse.[51]

In the first section, we learn that the narrator embarks on his walking journey in order to recuperate from a bout of hard work and a back injury – possibly a psychosomatic manifestation of stress. After disclosing that, the narrator describes the condition of the hospital in which he recovers, recounts a pair of personal anecdotes about colleagues who were engrossed in their work to a degree that mirrors the narrator's own obsession with his, and introduces the reader to the tone that will characterize the rest of the narrative. In the narrator's description of Thomas Browne's writing style, it is possible to recognize a comment on the narrator's (or Sebald's) own style:

> Wie die anderen Schrifsteller des englischen 17. Jahrhunderts führt auch Browne ständig seine ganze Gelehrsamkeit mit sich, einen ungeheueren Zitatenschatz und die Namen aller ihm voraufgegangenen Autoritäten, arbeitet mit weit ausufernden Metaphern und Analogien und baut labyrinthische, bisweilen über ein, zwei Seiten sich hinziehende Satzgebilde, die Prozessionen oder Trauerzügen gleichen in ihrer schieren Aufwendigkeit.[52]

Anyone who has read Sebald can recognize here a description of the pages-long sentences and complex of metaphors, quotations, and allusions that shape his own text. One wonders if, in fact, the narrator is not describing himself instead of Browne. Furthermore, while it is possible to read

---

[50] For example, in Teil I, the word "Levitation" refers to the feeling of intoxication the narrator experiences while heavily drugged in the hospital: "Unter dem wundervollen Einfluß der Schmerzmittel, die in mir kreisten, fühlte ich mich in meinem eisernen Gitterbett wie ein Ballonreisender, der schwerelos dahingleitet durch das rings um ihn her sich auftürmende Wolkengebirge." (28) The narrator goes on to describe his imaginary vision of mountains and birds and flight while maintaining contact with reality through the voices of the nurses caring for him. Rather than a lengthy description of the mystical or supernatural phenomenon of levitation – which one might, in fact, expect – the reader encounters here a very brief impression of a medically-induced drug haze. The reader might wonder why this merits mention in the table of contents when it is such a brief interlude between historical descriptions of Thomas Browne.

[51] The list of chapter headings, while unusual for the twentieth century, mimics those of many early English novels. It also seems to resemble the chaotic lists which create a heterotopian textual experience in Sebald's texts. This will be a central concern in chapter five.

[52] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 30.

this description of Browne's long-winded syntax as critical, the following sentence positions this description as more positive than negative. Browne's syntax is endowed with the power of defying gravity and giving its readers the feeling of levitation (the only place in which that word from the table of contents appears). Browne's writing has the same effect of inspiring visions and an elated feeling of dizziness, according to the narrator, as the pain medications do on the patient in the hospital. Furthermore, Browne's convoluted narrative style seems to inspire contemplation in the same way that a labyrinth might, obliterating a linear notion of time, narration, or orientation.

Die Ringe des Saturn by no means explicitly dwells on its own organization. However, the first section of the book returns repeatedly, doubling back on itself, to the question of order and the creation of order from or in spite of chaos. Again and again, the narrator describes scenes of apparent chaos – Janine Dakyns's office with its mountains of paper,[53] the "Irrfahrt" of Thomas Browne's Skull, which follows a wholly chaotic path, but ends in an orderly burial, the misrepresentation of anatomy in The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp, the more grotesque and surprising results of evolution (the anteater and pelican, among others), and the chaotic appearance of city streets when seen from above. Through these examples, the narrator enacts his own kind of chaos, leaping from idea to disconnected idea and leaving the reader to wonder about the connective tissue. But there are ideas that crop up time and again, repeated words that give shape to the apparent chaos of Sebald's prose; labyrinths, both physical and imagined, with their prescribed, but obscure and seemingly random paths, provide an organizing principle for the text and act as a reaction against other artificially orderly models.

In approaching the question of the labyrinth's role as an organizing principle for the otherwise meandering text, it will be useful to examine the landscape from which the labyrinth

---

[53] "da antwortete sie mir, daß die scheinbare Unordnung in ihren Dingen in Wahrheit so etwas wie eine vollengdete oder doch der vollendung zustrebende Ordnung darstelle." ibid., 19.

emerges. While the labyrinth perhaps represents the height of human manipulation of nature, the bulk of the text takes place as the narrator describes from a first person perspective the emotional impact of the more or less natural spaces through which he finds himself wandering. Here again it is important to bear the subtitle *eine englische Wallfahrt* in mind. England has frequently been romanticized as "a green and pleasant land,"[54] and is the source of Wordsworth's pastoral idylls, among others. The English rural and agrarian landscape in *Die Ringe des Saturn* does not, however, depict a quaint pastoral portrait of a green and thriving countryside. The rural landscapes are largely unpopulated and are punctuated by images of decay and destruction. Rather than a blooming countryside, the narrator depicts the England of his pilgrimage as deserted and decrepit. This is complicated, as I will show, by a curious glorification of decay in the narrator's descriptions of particular places, most notably the garden and house at Somerleyton Park, which will provide the foundation for our understanding of the narrator's relationship to and understanding of nature in this context. In approaching Somerleyton Hall, the narrator describes the transition from field to forest and from town to country. This journey shows a reverse progression from landscapes heavily manipulated by human intervention to those that at least have the appearance of nature. The basic types of landscapes present in the text can be roughly defined as the forest, the field, and the garden.

---

[54] William Blake's "And did those feet in ancient time," has attained the status of an English national hymn. The text of the poem stresses repeatedly the green, agrarian landscape while ascribing a holy status to the country itself:

And did those feet in ancient time.
Walk upon England's mountains green:
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On England's pleasant pastures seen!
[…]
I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green & pleasant Land.

David Fuller and William Blake, *William Blake: Selected Poetry and Prose*, Longman Annotated Texts (Harlow, England: Longman, 2000).

These three categories roughly illustrate the degrees of cultivation perceived by the narrator of the text and all three appear within the borders of Somerleyton Park.

The forest, as the narrator describes it, appears to be the least cultivated landscape. Though he emphasizes repeatedly how the forest ought to have been cared for,[55] the forests described are either wholly untamed or in an advanced state of deterioration from a formerly well-groomed state. The field – a broadly defined category that encompasses both agricultural fields (whether for growing or grazing) and wild, tangled heaths – provides the viewer with prospects[56] and the potential for openness, which the forest denies the viewer. All the same, while allowing visual freedom, these open spaces are curiously oppressive, an inversion of the feeling of liberation the reader might expect. Finally, the garden is, or is expected to be the pinnacle of cultivation. However, the narrator describes the gardens he encounters as wholly neglected, rapidly decaying signposts of fading affluence.

The gradations of cultivation and human interference juxtaposed with the natural process of decay are evidence of the deep-seated ambivalence the narrator feels toward human interference or cultivation of the landscape. He vacillates between bemoaning the deterioration of formerly well-groomed forests and citing examples of human interference gone wrong – for example, the overfishing of herring or the burning of rain forests. If one were to focus solely on the latter of these two responses to human interference in the landscape, it would be easy to see the narrator as a radical environmentalist, but the reality is somewhat more complicated. Focusing on the setting of the garden, the most cultivated landscape described in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, will provide insight into

---

[55] Here it is important to keep the German ideal of "hegen und pflegen" in mind.

[56] In his seminal book, Jay Appleton suggests the Prospect-Refuge theory as a potential way to explain human aesthetic appreciation of landscape. This theory suggests that humans find a landscape aesthetically pleasing when it fulfills the requirements for a livable habitat as perceived by a vestigial sense for habitat. Namely, a habitat must provide prospect (the ability to see one's predators and prey) and refuge (the ability to hide oneself while maintaining prospect). While this argument verges on the atavistic, it may explain some of the oppressiveness of the open spaces is this novel. See Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, Rev. (Chichester: Wiley, 1996).

what status the "natural" landscape occupies in comparison with the status of other, more controlled – or *landscaped* – landscapes. In this chapter I will show the way in which Sebald creates a kind of postmodern pastiche of gardening styles that resembles the synchronic style used by the narrator in describing the garden. In *Die Ringe des Saturn* Sebald uses both narrative and narrated environment to criticize linearity and to emphasize the necessity of new forms to reflect complex postmodern sensibilities.

The garden with which I will primarily be concerned is at Somerleyton Hall, a manor house originally dating to the Elizabethan period which was renovated and expanded in the mid nineteenth century by Sir Samuel Morton Peto,[57] a self-made man whose fortunes rested on a prolific career of speculating and railway contracting. Like many other English country houses of its type, whose designs had their origins in the Victorian period, Somerleyton's landscape design was heavily influenced by the tradition of English Landscape Gardeners[58] founded in the previous century by Capability Brown and his contemporaries and propagated by his follower Humphry Repton. The various designs represented in the garden and the environment surrounding Somerleyton present a kind of miniature history of garden design. The formal parterres, elaborate flower beds, and labyrinth at Somerleyton reflect pre-Reptonian English and Italian formal gardens and the later Picturesque tradition. The grove and fields surrounding the house represent the naturalistic style of English Landscape Gardening. Other environments – the heated Winter Garden, and *Schrebergartenkolonien* – that appear in the text allude to later environmental developments. In contrast to other texts that deal extensively with gardens, *Die Ringe des Saturn* does not weigh the merits of

---

[57] Peto purchased Somerleyton Hall and its attending lands and privilege in 1844, while he was working to restore and expand the harbor at Lowestoft. Peto did not have the funds to make the purchase (totaling close to £100) on his own, but he received help from family and friends. He went on to build a new school, a new row of 'widows cottages,' and a chapel, in addition to vastly improving the state of the Jacobean Hall and gardens. See Adrian Vaughan, *Samuel Morton Peto: A Victorian Entrepreneur* (Hersham: Ian Allan, 2009), 60–73.

[58] I capitalize "Landscape Garden" in order to refer to the specific style of garden design described by Humphry Repton.

one type of garden against another.[59] Instead, it juxtaposes cultivation itself with the "natural"

processes of deterioration and decay, ultimately concluding that human attempts at ordering may be

futile.

Among the many garden styles present at Somerleyton, the earliest are represented by the

formal aspects (geometrically designed parterres) and the labyrinth. Labyrinths or garden mazes were

by no means emblematic of the English Landscape Garden design that is most prominent in the

English countryside. Instead, they were popular in earlier phases of garden design, particularly in the

Italian and French styles, reaching their pinnacle in the late seventeenth and very early eighteenth

centuries. One of the most famous surviving hedge mazes in the world is found at Hampton Court

Palace in England. The maze may originate from the Elizabethan period, but the current pattern was

planted in 1690.[60] It is interesting to note that it was typical for mazes before the eighteenth century

to be decorated with statues, fountains, and seats "to relieve the monotony of the walks."[61] In his

seminal book on mazes, Matthews observes that the goal of many maze designers was "not so much

that of puzzling the visitor as of providing an entertaining and diversified promenade," while others

aimed "to provide as much bewilderment as the space available permitted."[62] The dawn of English

Landscape Gardening involved the destruction of many pre-existing hedge mazes throughout

Europe, which was typical of the general rebellion against the straight line in landscape design.[63] The

Victorian period did see a resurgence of garden mazes, particularly in public pleasure gardens. It was

---

[59] The "garden text" that comes to mind is Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, where the English and French styles of garden design are at odds and represent some of the competing desires felt by the inhabitants of the estate.

[60] See Nigel Pennick, *Mazes and Labyrinths* (London: R. Hale, 1990), 145.

[61] W. H. Matthews, *Mazes and Labyrinths: A General Account of Their History and Developments* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1922), 117.

[62] Ibid., 132.

[63] Pennick, *Mazes and Labyrinths*, 149.

in this period that William Andrews Nesfield, who consulted on the reconstruction of Somerleyton Hall, designed the somewhat anachronistic yew maze for that estate.[64] Somerleyton, designed at the end of Landscape Gardening's heyday, is characterized by a sort of pastiche of garden traditions, including the naturalistic forest, geometric parterres, and a hedge maze. It very much grows out of the Landscape Garden tradition, while, to use Jameson's word, "cannibalizing" a number of other styles.

Although the reader first encounters the description of an actual labyrinth in the second section, images that resemble a labyrinth appear in the first section, as if anticipating the importance of that location for the text as a whole. The word labyrinth appears above in the narrator's description of Thomas Browne's complex syntax. The "ineinanderverschobenen Gemäuer"[65] the narrator sees when peering from his hospital window resembles a labyrinth.[66] The progress of Thomas Browne's skull from grave to hospital museum to obscurity and back to grave follows a labyrinthine path. And finally, the path of the narrator's own pilgrimage seems to mimic progress through a labyrinth – the destination is as yet unknown, but the path itself provides an opportunity for reflection.

The reader finally encounters the labyrinth in the garden at Somerleyton when the narrator seems to abruptly discover it at the end of what appears to be a grove of trees. For all his emphasis on the trees' natural evolution and gradual conquering of the rest of the garden, the narrator turns to the most artificial aspect of the garden for the topos that informs the structure of the book as a

---

[64] Nesfield also made plans for Kew Gardens, and a maze at the Horticultural Society's gardens at South Kensington. A further maze by Nesfield – a copy of the Somerleyton maze, planted in beech instead of yew – also still stands at Worden Park in Lancashire. See Ibid., 155.

[65] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 13.

[66] Michael Hulse translates this as "a maze of buildings." W. G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, trans. Michael Hulse (New York: New Directions, 1999), 5.

whole. The narrator gives only a brief description of the yew maze found in the middle of the

gardens, couching it in terms that emphasize its mysteriousness and ability to confound:

> Bei weitem am dichtesten und grünsten aber schien mir das in der Mitte des geheimnisvollen Geländes gelegene Eibenlabyrinth von Somerleyton, in welchem ich mich so gründlich verlief, daß ich erst wieder herausfand, nachdem ich mit dem Stiefelabsatz vor jedem der Heckengänge, die sich als Irrwege erwiesen, einen Strich gemacht hatte durch den weißen Sand.[67]

The yew labyrinth is characterized not only by its confusing layout, but also by its denseness and

greenness. The narrator lumps the labyrinth in with the rest of the trees, as if it represents a different

species of tree. The maze itself, designed in 1846 and still standing today, is very large, measuring

245 by 160 feet, with a pathway that is 440 yards in length.[68] In the estate's heyday, the labyrinth's

upkeep also represented the most dreaded job for some of the estate's gardeners. One recalls:

> I used to clip that maze with hand clippers – it took weeks and weeks and weeks. I think every foot of it is printed on my mind still. […] We hated when we knew the maze was coming up to be clipped. I don't know how many miles of hedge that is.[69]

The narrator gives a clear impression of his frustration inside the maze, but the description of the

maze itself is so sparse that the reader has very little idea of its size or appearance. This stands in

contrast to the narrator's overly thorough descriptions of the trees in the garden. After discussing

the history of the other styles present in the garden at Somerleyton, I will return to the figure of the

labyrinth to discuss its role as an organizing principle for the book as a whole.

Much of the garden and the land surrounding Somerleyton Park adhere to the style of

English Landscape Gardening. In his delightful *History of Garden Design*, Derek Clifford describes the

rise of the eighteenth-century English Landscape Garden as a reaction to the monotony of

frequently replicated earlier garden designs. He claims that much of Europe became bored with the

---

[67] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 52.

[68] Pennick, *Mazes and Labyrinths*, 155.

[69] Ann Gander, *Top Hats and Servants' Tales: A Century of Life on Somerleyton Estate* (Wenhaston: Holm Oak, 1998), 133–134.

French and Dutch models of garden – marked by their enclosures and geometric designs[70] – which had ruled until that point. Clifford credits the "Great Revolution of Taste" in England to the cost of upkeep associated with the earlier, more formal designs, the challenges posed by the English climate, and to the "Englishman's fondness for taking a country walk."[71] Furthermore, the prominence of the English Landscape Garden arose, he argues, from the idea of the 'noble savage' and the ideal state of nature that permeated eighteenth-century thought: "According to this view the original state of nature *was* perfection and far from being deflected from its goal by evil accidents from which man could redeem it, man himself was the evil accident and must seek to perfect *himself* according to the model of unspoilt nature."[72] Dorothy Stroud also points out the importance of a series of Acts of Improvement passed in the early eighteenth century, including provisions for "the enclosure of large areas of hitherto common land, new methods of reclamation and husbandry, the making of better roads, and the importation of new species of trees and shrubs."[73] This cultivation of the ground in England on a grand scale made way for the new method of gardening to take hold. As it developed, two major precepts became the guiding principles behind Landscape Gardening, namely, Alexander Pope's insistence that one "Consult the Genius of the Place in all…"[74] and that straight lines in garden designs were inferior to "wavy" or more organic lines.

Eventually, a master of the Landscape Garden emerged in the form of Lancelot Brown, also known as "Capability" Brown, a nickname he "acquired from his habit of saying that a place had

---

[70] See Derek Plint Clifford, *A History of Garden Design*, Rev. (New York: Praeger, 1966), 123.

[71] Ibid., 124.

[72] Ibid., 128.

[73] Dorothy Stroud, *Capability Brown* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 41.

[74] Alexander Pope, *Ethic Epistles, Satires, &c. With the Author's Notes. Written by Mr. Pope.* (London: printed for the Company, 1735), 87.

'capabilities of improvement.'"[75] Brown's work received mixed praise during his lifetime, but he has since attained the status of a landscape deity, being widely credited with the creation of England as we see it today: "that ideal type of English parkland where hills, lakes and trees fold together in repose, where mysteries of no very mysterious nature are suggested but never stated, did not happen 'naturally'; it was very largely the creation of one man."[76] In fact, he is credited with the design of over two hundred estates.[77] Brown is frequently referred to as an 'upstart' of the Peto-ian ilk, coming from "yeoman farming stock,"[78] but nonetheless well educated.[79] He rose to prominence as a celebrity landscape designer and a competent architect in his own right.[80] While his work speaks for itself, he does not appear to have published any of his methods or ideas about the process of creating a landscape garden.[81] For first-hand knowledge about those matters, I turn to the second great master of the style, Humphry Repton. Anyone who, like Sebald, was accustomed to traveling through the English countryside and visiting distinguished estates quickly becomes familiar with Repton and his principles.

---

[75] Clifford, *A History of Garden Design*, 157.

[76] Ibid., 160.

[77] A confirmed list of sites bearing his designs can be found in Stroud, *Capability Brown*, 214–247.

[78] Ibid., 37.

[79] Clifford, *A History of Garden Design*, 155. Clifford uses this as an opportunity to further express his derision of J. William Kent, writing "he [Brown] left school at the age of sixteen, which shows him to have been better educated than his enemies gave him credit for; he was, for example, a man of far higher education than Kent, who was barely literate."

[80] For more on Brown's architectural efforts, see: Edward Hyams, *Capability Brown and Humphry Repton* (London: Dent, 1971), 110.

[81] Some letters between Capability Brown and various clients and contemporaries do exist. Turner quotes from one where Brown describes the necessary tools for creating an excellent landscape: "To produce these effects there wants a good plan, good execution, a perfect knowledge of the country and the objects in it, whether natural or artificial and infinite delicacy in the planting, etc., so much Beauty depending on the size of the trees and the colour of their leaves to produce the effect of light and shade so very essential to the perfecting of a good plan: as also the hideing of what is disagreeable and shewing what is beautifull, getting shade from the large trees and sweets from the smaller sorts of shrubs etc." He calls this effort alternately Gardening and "Place-Making." Roger Turner, *Capability Brown and the Eighteenth Century English Landscape* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), 78–79.

Humphry Repton (1752-1818) was the great practitioner of the style in the early nineteenth century.[82] Like Lancelot Brown, he rose to prominence from humble beginnings – his father was a clergyman. Desiring of a finer way of living, Repton used his inheritance and the proceeds of his work to set himself up as a country gentleman living in Old Hall, a seventeenth-century manor.[83] In order to finance his new way of life, he became a civil servant and eventually turned to landscape gardening as a source of income, drawing on his experience renovating Old Hall for himself. Repton distinguished himself as an expert Landscape Gardener, but also as a shrewd businessman. He marketed his skills through advertisements and developed a very appealing trademark: the Red Books. Each of his clients received a small, red-leather-bound book with a series of descriptions and paintings of the site and the proposed improvements.[84] This together with his habit of publishing treatises on his methods, mostly beautifully illustrated by himself, set him apart from the other practitioners of the age. His skill in marketing himself and the beautiful landscapes he executed were rewarded by commissions to redesign about two hundred sites, ranging from Yorkshire in the North

---

[82] There had been practitioners of the landscape garden style before Repton. An early attempt was Lord Burlington's garden at Chiswick (Clifford, *A History of Garden Design*, 129.) incorporated serpentine paths in an otherwise geometrically formal garden plan. An early proponent of Landscape Gardening was Stephen Switzer, who published *The Nobleman, Gentleman and Gardener's Recreation* (1715), which made an argument for "Extensive Gardening," which built on the French style of vista gardens with a reduction in the presence of parterres. (Clifford, *A History of Garden Design*, 133.) Alexander Pope (Clifford, *A History of Garden Design*, 129, 134.) and Joseph Addison (Clifford, *A History of Garden Design*, 129.) also lent their support to the project of Landscape Gardening in the form of essays and, in Pope's case an attempt at his own "natural" garden, which featured his beloved grotto (Clifford, *A History of Garden Design*, 134.). William Kent was the first celebrated practitioner of the style and drew his inspiration largely from landscape paintings by the likes of Claude Lorrain. His work was foundational for the landscape gardens to come, introducing the use of untrimmed trees, "the development of the garden as a series of pictures," and the "obliteration of […] the relation of one part to another and of the whole to the house." Clifford, *A History of Garden Design*, 136.

[83] See Hyams, *Capability Brown and Humphry Repton*, 115.

[84] Many of these Red Books are still in existence and are housed in rare book collections world-wide. Hyams gives an excellent account of their appearance: "they would have found a neatly drawn map of their park, finished in water-colours, and probably keyed. This would have been to illustrate what would have come next, an analysis of the park, again written in that copperplate as clear as the finest type-face […] Next the [clients] would have found one or several charming water-colours illustrating the suggested major improvements in an ingenious manner which was wholly Repton's own. The, as it were, top picture would have shown the scene as it was then; by raising one or more cut-out and pasted in flaps, perfectly made to fit, they would then have seen how the scene would look after the proposed improvements. This use of flaps might even show alternative suggested changes. Ibid., 128–130.

to Cornwall in the South and nearly every county in between. A single-sheet advertisement for

Repton's services, published in 1789 describes his method as follows:

> By this compound term [Landscape-Gardening] he does not mean to confine himself within the limits of a garden, or to the mere decoration of a few acres round a house; but extends his ideas to the beautifying and improving, in a bold stile [sic], the whole FACE OF A COUNTRY, availing himself of all inequalities of ground, and adapting each soil to such uses as by nature seem most apposite and congenial; in many cases affording a native forest appearance, while the consideration of due profit is not neglected by advising and laying out extensive sheep-walks and distant rides, which may yield health, pleasure and advantage.[85]

Repton's method of reshaping the face of a country was achieved by "forming lakes, shaping and

introducing views of rivers, moving ground by contract or otherwise, giving designs for hot-houses,

stoves, ice-houses, and all other buildings which belong to Landscape-Gardening."[86] In short, the

project of landscape gardening was not simply the planting of a few trees or the mowing of a lawn,

but rather a complete reconfiguration of land and its botanical and, in some cases, geological

features to create a more pleasant appearance and purpose while preserving at all costs the illusion

of nature. As Repton understood it, landscape gardening on such a grand scale required

> the united powers of the landscape painter and the practical gardener. The former must conceive a plan, which the latter may be able to execute; for though a painter may represent a beautiful landscape on his canvas, and even surpass nature by the combination of her choicest materials, yet the luxuriant imagination of the painter must be subjected to the gardener's practical knowledge in planting, digging, and moving earth.[87]

This marriage of technical skill and artistic nuance was governed by four cardinal principles:

> First, it must display the natural beauties, and hide the natural defects of every situation. Secondly, it should give the appearance of extent and freedom, by carefully disguising or

---

[85] Humphry Repton, "H. Repton Having for Many Years (merely as an Amusement) Studied the Picturesque Effect Resulting from the Art of Laying Out Ground, Has Lately Been Advised by Many Respectable Friends … to Enlarge His Plan, and Pursue Professionally His Skill in Landscape-gardening. …" (London?, 1789), Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Humphry Repton, "Sketches and Hints on Landscape Gardening. Collected from Designs and Observations Now in the Possession of the Different Noblemen and Gentlemen, for Whose Use They Were Originally Made. The Whole Tending to Establish Fixed Principles in the Art of Laying Out Ground. By H. Repton, Esq." (London, 1794), xiii, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

hiding the boundary. Thirdly, it must studiously conceal every interference of art, however expensive, by which the scenery is improved; making the whole appear the production of nature only; and, fourthly, all objects of mere convenience or comfort, if incapable of being made ornamental, or of becoming proper parts of the general scenery, must be removed or concealed.[88]

The purposeful preservation of the illusion of untouched nature concurrent with the application of technique to bend nature to the gardener's will is the identifying feature of this tradition. This goal sets it apart from earlier models of gardening that favored symmetry and enclosure as well as a basically practical approach to laying out the scheme of a large property. In those earlier models, essentials like functional outhouses, pantries, and kitchen gardens were placed matter-of-factly close to the house itself, for maximum convenience. Repton, on the other hand, suggested removing such impediments as far as possible from the view of the house, making those structures ornamental in some way, or shielding them from view. This is related to his insistence on hiding the boundaries of the estate – one should, by no means demolish the boundary wall, but one ought to hide it in order to create the illusion of never-ending space: "Modern taste […] has thrown down the ancient palisade and lofty walls, because it is aware that liberty is the true portal of happiness […]."[89]

Repton's plans all kept the notion of liberty in mind, in contrast to the constraints of French and Italian gardening. His designs endeavor to preserve the illusion of unspoiled nature, but he does make some concessions to the necessity of artifice and interference in nature: First, on the subject of park-land, he reminds us that

while we admire and even imitate, the romantic wildness of nature, we ought never to forget that a park is the habitation of men, and not solely devoted to beasts of the forest. I am convinced that some enthusiastic admirers of uncultivated nature are too apt to overlook this distinction. Park scenery compared with forest scenery, is like an historical picture compared with a landscape; nature must alike prevail in both, but that which relates to man should have a higher place in the scale of arts.[90]

[88] Ibid., 42.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid., 36.

Not only are the resident beasts of the forest to be kept under control,[91] the illusion of forest must be preserved without the wildness of an actual forest. Second, though in most cases he disparages symmetry and the visible intrusion of art into a natural landscape, Repton allows for

> the most perfect symmetry in those small flower gardens which are generally placed in the front of a green-house, or orangery, in some inner part of the grounds; where, being secluded from the general scenery, they become a kind of episode to the great and more conspicuous parts of the place. In such small inclosures, [sic] irregularity would appear like affectation. Symmetry is also allowable, and indeed necessary, at or near the front of a regular building; because, where that displays correspondent parts, if the lines in contact do not also correspond, the house itself will appear twisted and awry.[92]

These concessions to artifice serve not to lessen the appearance of untouched nature, but rather to remind the viewer of the perfection of Repton's improved nature, and were forerunners of the more eclectic garden designs of the later nineteenth century, like Somerleyton.

In its attempt to reconcile the appearance of unspoiled nature with the height of cultivation, the school of English Landscape Gardening finds itself in a position of precarious balance not unlike the Roche Limit about which Richard Gray writes. What is most curious is the narrator's perspective on this topos in *Die Ringe des Saturn*. In keeping with his focus on melancholy and emphasis on destruction and deterioration, one might anticipate the narrator bemoaning the state of the garden – the deterioration of which marks it as another victim of the march of time. The narrator's take on this garden, however, belies an admiration of the power of deterioration to improve on human attempts to improve nature.

The park at Somerleyton provides a fruitful example of English Landscape Gardening for Sebald. In its attempt to create what Repton called 'improved nature,' it also performs two other

---

[91] One method used to keep wildlife at bay while preserving the illusion of boundless estates was the ha-ha, "[a] method of concealing the line of division by a ditch with a fence hidden at the bottom." This became the main method of "freeing the garden from its boundaries." See Clifford, *A History of Garden Design*, 132.

[92] Repton, "Sketches and Hints on Landscape Gardening. Collected from Designs and Observations Now in the Possession of the Different Noblemen and Gentlemen, for Whose Use They Were Originally Made. The Whole Tending to Establish Fixed Principles in the Art of Laying Out Ground. By H. Repton, Esq.," 45.

important functions: it emphasizes the hybrid style of a later period while also showing what happens when garden upkeep is neglected. The result of human neglect is not an unbridled return to the wilderness from whence the garden was coaxed, but rather a highly aestheticized, artificial wilderness populated by exotic, imported specimens from an earlier time. Nature slowly goes about overgrowing the borders set by earlier gardeners, not utterly destroying their notion of improved nature, but improving on it in a natural way. Here we seem to see the counterpart of another of Sebald's projects; what he shows us is not a natural history of destruction, but a history of natural destruction.

As the first major destination of the narrator's pilgrimage, Somerleyton lays out the major themes and topoi that structure the rest of the text. A number of images that occur first in Somerleyton reappear at later points in the novel and become orientation points to which the reader can refer. The narrator describes his approach to Somerleyton by train, following a typical route eastwards out of Norwich, traveling through the suburban wilderness, typified by "Hinterhöfen und Schrebergartenkolonien und Schutthalden und Lagerplätzen"[93] and crossing into the surrounding marshland. These elements of the landscape serve as signposts for the development of the environment since the nineteenth century. The railway, together with the appearance of trash heaps and warehouses, is an allusion to the rise of industrialization, while the *Schrebergartenkolonien* represent the necessity for green space felt as a result of the too-rapid urbanization that followed.[94] This brief description of the transition from the city (Norwich) to a more rural landscape[95] exemplifies some of

---

[93] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 41.

[94] The prominence of the railway in this passage is also significant in conjunction with Samuel Morton Peto, who made his fortune through railway speculation.

[9595] This description of the narrator's progress out of the city and into the countryside is the reverse of the narrator's journey into London, described in *Austerlitz*. There the narrator passes from the countryside into the outer suburbs, experiencing a growing feeling of tension and oppression, the further he gets into the city. I discuss this particular journey further in chapter three.

the motifs of landscape description that recur throughout the book: the *Hinterhöfe* and

Schrebergartenkolonien reflect the geometric parceling of land (whether for occupation or cultivation)

typical of the human-influenced landscape (and reminiscent of the earlier models of landscaping)[96]

while the *Schutthalden* (rubbish dumps) and *Lagerplätze* that commonly dot the edges of an urban

center reflect the motifs of waste, decay, and neglect that the narrator emphasizes throughout the

text. Curiously, the narrator mentions the train making a stop in a town called Herringfleet (itself the

location of a ruined Saxon manor house and Norman church, as well a windmill that had been

disused and then restored to working order in the 1950s) where there is no train station and that lies

about a mile to the northeast of the existing train route. It seems that Sebald may have invented a

stop there as a way to anticipate the lengthy discussion of the overfishing of herring that follows in

the third section of the book.

Upon arrival at the station affiliated with Somerleyton Park (where there is, in fact, no train

station), the narrator meditates on the isolation of the station – he speculates on the variety of

objects necessary for the "Aufrechterhaltung" of an aristocratic country house, enumerating

everything from a new piano to several varieties of wine, lawn mowers to crinolines. This chaotic

---

[96] Derek Clifford describes the end of geometric land parceling thus: "From the monks' cloister and the castle courtyard
the gardens of Europe had grown steadily outward, covering hundreds of acres, but still keeping the form of the
buildings in which during the Middle Ages they had been nurtured. The walls had gone, the moats had gone, the straight
lines remained. So deeply had this regularity entered into men's minds that they mistook geometry for order. […] In fact
the geometrical garden had reached the end of its tether. […] Before the cliff-like classical façades appeared the
inevitable *compartiments de broderie*; interminable avenues, shining canals, fountains, waterworks, and *points de vue*, were laid
out across vast areas of countryside with ruler and compasses. The little medieval castle garden had reached the final
point of its development; there was nothing left to do but to extend these avenues farther and farther and to add still
more water works until the whole of Europe was chopped up into stars, vistas and geometrical *pièces d'eau*. At least there
appeared to be nothing else to do. And if, on the palatial scale, there was nothing to be done but make the brass band of
your so-called garden play louder and longer than your neighbour's, a not dissimilar difficulty was facing the small
squires of the country and modest burghers of the towns, who did not pretend to emulate the magnificence of kings and
emperors, but leaned towards the Dutch rather than the French variant. Your garden was laid out in a parterre; you
inscribed a number of symmetrical designs upon the ground and you planted them with box; haven exhausted the
possibilities of horizontal picturing you turned the box as it grew into sculptured shapes so that the huntsmen of Pliny's
Tuscan Villa cantered in Kensington to the envy of your enemies; and your invention became more and more bizarre
and astonishing, and your garden became more and more full. There would be no development in art if man did not
become bored." Clifford, *A History of Garden Design*, 123.

enumeration of objects is typical of Sebald's cataloging impulse. After listing the many types of

things that would have been necessary for the upkeep of the house, the narrator muses,

> Und jetzt nichts mehr und niemand, kein Bahnhofsvorstand mit glänzender Uniformmütze,
> keine Bediensteten, keine Kutscher, keine geladenen Gäste, keine Jagdgesellschaften, weder
> Herren in unverwüstlichem Tweed noch Damen in eleganten Reisekostümen. Eine
> Schrecksekunde, denke ich oft, und ein ganzes Zeitalter ist vorbei.[97]

This listing of personnel seems to be another chaotic enumeration of disparate elements, but the list

reflects a hierarchy, from the public servant at the bottom to the elegant ladies at the top. And

finally, the summation, a kind of textual *memento mori* reminds the reader that the world of

Somerleyton's high period is over. This death or dearth of servants and aristocrats and the absence

of any people or things anticipates the description of Somerleyton as a deserted, deteriorated that we

will be reading in the following pages.

Lest the reader become caught up in mourning the loss of the aristocratic past, Sebald makes

a clown of his narrator, writing "Wer dennoch an der Bahnstation eintrifft wie ich, der muß, wenn er

nicht zunächst die halbe Domäne umrunden will, gleich einem Strauchdieb über die Mauer klettern

und sich durch das Dickicht kämpfen, ehe er den Park erreicht."[98] The narrator uses this comical

image of the solitary walker hopping the fence to distinguish himself from the 'typical' visitor to

Somerleyton (the estate is most frequently visited, he tells us, by people in their own cars), but this

gesture also has the effect of preserving the illusion of his having stepped back in time. By climbing

the fence and fighting his way through the brush surrounding the park, he avoids encountering cars,

other tourists, ticket booths, and parking lots. He can thus preserve the illusory solitude of his first

encounter with the park.[99]

---

[97] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 44.

[98] Ibid. The wall and hedge are not typical elements of Repton's Landscape Garden design unless disguised or otherwise concealed to preserve the illusion of open space.

[99] The narrator also suggests that the park and house are only recently open to the paying public "Heute wird Somerleyton wie die meisten bedeutenden Häuser des Landadels während der Sommermonate dem zahlenden Publikum

Curiously, the narrator's first observation inside the park is of the small-gauge railway that runs through the grounds, conducted by the current Lord Somerleyton (Crossley).[100] The railway reminds the reader of the prevalence of train travel in the nineteenth century and the concomitant reorganization of land to make way for tracks. The image of "The Queen's Master of the Horse," the title given to the current Lord Somerleyton, as a train conductor and ticket collector ("mit umgehängter Billettasche als Schaffner, Lokomotivführer und Chef der dressierten Tiere in einem"[101]) places the present Lord Somerleyton in a critical light, poking fun at the landed gentry by conflating the office of "The Queen's Master of the Horse" with that of a miniature train conductor. A further insult is embedded in this description of the miniature train conductor, as we learn shortly thereafter that Sir Samuel Morton Peto, who completely renovated and radically expanded Somerleyton, was one of the "bedeutendsten Unternehmern und Spekulanten seiner Zeit,"[102] earning his fortune as a railway contractor, contributing, according to the narrator to the "Ausweitung des Eisenbahnwesens in Kanada, Australien, Afrika, Argentinien, Rußland und Norwegen."[103] According to one historical source Peto was "[an] extensive 'contractor,' who had become the purchaser of the Norwich and Lowestoft ship canal, and to whose enterprise Lowestoft owes its railway, its pier, its harbor &c."[104] Peto, then, created Lowestoft in its present form and his humble beginnings (stressed by the narrator, but glossed over by historical sources) are emphasized

---

zugänglich gemacht." However, this was already the practice early in the 20th century. Cf. Gander, *Top Hats and Servants' Tales.*

[100] This railway could be understood as a comical transformation of the industrialization implied by the full-sized railway and other industrial relics the narrator saw from the train. This comedic effect implies the disjunction between the workers in factories and on railways and those who owned or financed them.

[101] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 44.

[102] Ibid., 45.

[103] Ibid.

[104] S. C. Hall and Llewellynn Frederick William Jewitt, *The Stately Homes of England* (New York,: A.W. Lovering), 210.

in what seems to be an almost populist glorification of the self-made man. The narrator uses the

adjectives "bedeutend," "prestigeträchtig," "wahrhaft riesig"[105] to describe Peto and his projects,

while Lord Somerleyton is presented in the context of tourists that remind one of "verkleidete

Hunde oder Seehunde im Zirkus."[106] In contrast to the characterization of Peto, the narrator's

description of the present Lord Somerleyton is ridiculous. This populist undertone is further

developed by the narrator's ennobling description of the workers, particularly the garden workers on

the estate. This can be read as a reaction to a traditional element of the pastoral. According to

Raymond Williams,

> [W]e can then remember that the whole result of the fall from paradise was that instead of
> picking easily from an all-providing nature, man had to earn his bread in the sweat of his
> brow; that he incurred, as a common fate, the curse of labor. What is really happening, in
> Jonson's and Carew's celebrations of a rural order, is an extraction of just this curse, by the
> power of art: a magical recreation of what can be seen as a natural bounty and then a willing
> charity: both serving to ratify and bless the country landowner, or, by a characteristic
> reification, his house. Yet this magical extraction of the curse of labour is in fact achieved by
> a simple extraction of the existence of labourers. The actual men and women who rear the
> animals and drive them to the house and kill them and prepare them for meat; who trap the
> pheasants and partridges and catch the fish; who plant and manure and prune and harvest
> the fruit trees: these are not present; their work is all done for them by a natural order.[107]

There is no such extraction of the existence of laborers in Sebald's view of the English country

house. Not only has he put the lord of the manor to work conducting a miniature train, but he

repeatedly refers to the work involved in the upkeep of the estate and eventually enters conversation

with William Hazel, the head gardener of the estate. Hazel is presented as a font of knowledge about

the situation of Somerleyton during World War II, but also about Sebald's own field of interest: the

---

[105] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 45.

[106] Ibid., 44.

[107] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), 32.

air war and the apparent lack of narratives about it.[108] Rather than restrict the conversation to the

gardener's area of expertise, the narrator takes the opportunity to learn from him about war history.

The narrator describes Somerleyton Hall much in the manner of a travel guide or newspaper

report (indeed he alludes to newspapers like the *Illustrated London News*[109] covering the renovations of

Somerleyton), giving a lengthy description of the ways in which the interior and exterior of the

house seem to bleed into one another – the walls of the house themselves seem permeable.

> [Der] besondere[…] Ruhm [bestand] anscheinend darin […], daß sich die Übergänge
> zwischen Interieur und Außenwelt so gut wie unmerklich vollzogen. Die Besucher
> vermochten kaum zu sagen, wo das Naturgegebene aufhörte und das Kunsthandwerk
> anfing.[110]

The wording of this particular description does not limit the confusion of borders to what lies inside

and what lies outside. Instead, the permeable border lies between that which is naturally occurring

and that which is "Kunsthandwerk" – something that lies between craft and art[111] (much like

Humphry Repton's description of Landscape Gardening as the intersection between painting and

practical gardening).

The crown jewel of Somerleyton, according to the narrator, was the Winter Garden, an

enormous greenhouse comprising over 100 square feet.[112] It had been designed by Joseph Paxton,

the architect who designed the Crystal Palace in London, which housed the Great Exhibition in

---

[108] See Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 52–54.

[109] The *Illustrated London News* wrote of the estate: "The exterior has something fairy-like and the interior, when lighted by its well-managed gas jets, is quite a scene of enchantment." quoted in Vaughan, *Samuel Morton Peto*, 64.

[110] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 46.

[111] This understanding of *Kusthandwerk* as something between craft and art is reminiscent of Humphry Repton's description of Landscape Gardening as the intersection between painting and practical gardening. In fact, William Andrews Nesfield, who was the consulting landscape architect during Peto's renovation of the house and gardens at Somerleyton, believed his experience as a professional watercolor artist was of paramount importance to his skills as a landscape architect. He described landscape architecture as "the Art of painting with Nature's materials." quoted in: Christopher Ridgway, *William Andrews Nesfield: Victorian Landscape Architect* (York: Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies, 1996), 7.

[112] Gander, *Top Hats and Servants' Tales*, 136.

1851. Paxton's glass edifice featured enormous gilt bird cages, marble statues and fountains, all

manner of tropical plants, a palm house, and all the potted plants that "brought year-round colour to

the hall."[113] The structure relied on two boilers for heat and required constant care by the gardeners.

One recalled that all the glasshouses on the property (including the Winter Garden and the other,

remaining structures) had to be scrubbed during bad weather, the glass cleaned and the woodwork

scoured to prevent mildew.[114] This structure was said to be unrivalled by any other glass house in

Europe and it seems unsurprising that Sebald's narrator reflects on this particular aspect of the

garden's history. The narrator quotes an unidentified contemporary description of the estate during

its heyday, saying that

> Am wunderbarsten […] sei Somerleyton in einer Sommernacht, wenn die unvergleichlichen,
> von gußeisernen Säulen und Verstrebungen getragenen, in ihrer filigranen Erscheinungsform
> schwerelos wirkenden glashäuser von innen heraus strahlten und funkelten. Ungezählte
> Argand-Brenner, in deren weißer Flamme leise rauschend das giftige Gas sich verzehrte,
> verbreiteten mittels ihrer versilberten Reflektoren ein gleichsam mit dem Lebensstrom
> unserer Erde pulsierendes, ungeheuer helles Licht.[115]

This description is threaded through with the notion of the unreal or the superreal, as if the glass

houses of Somerleyton were a dream or a fantasy, something not entirely solid: the words *filigran*,

strahlen, *funkeln*, *rauschend*, and the repeated reference to light, flame, and the otherworldly quality of

the shining building all conspire to make the appearance of the glass house unreal. They appear to

be weightless, and they do not seem to have a fixed form. Instead it is as if their particular

Erscheinungsform is unfixed, fragile, perhaps imagined. However, despite its apparent transience and

mutability, the structure of the glass houses relies on cast iron struts and supports, which contrast

---

[113] Ibid., 139.

[114] Ibid., 136.

[115] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 46–47.

with the filigree-like appearance of the houses when illuminated at night.[116] The spectral or imaginary quality of the glass houses is emphasized by the description of the flames and gas used to illuminate the houses. The white flame of the gas consuming itself makes a *rauschen* – a rushing noise, which does describe the sound of a burning flame, but also calls to mind the verb *berauschen* – to confuse, intoxicate, or befuddle. This idea of intoxicated confusion is reiterated directly after by the narrator's suggestion that "Nicht einmal Coleridge hätte im Opiumschlummer eine zauberhaftere Szene sich ausmalen können."[117] So the reader is left wondering whether the Winter Garden were just, in fact, an hallucination.

And indeed, the narrator does indulge in a flight of fantasy in describing the Winter Garden. A few sentences later, he tells us that the whole Winter Garden was destroyed in a gas explosion in 1913 (the gas acting as another reminder of the opium haze that seems to have inspired this vision and of the industrial processes involved in building, maintaining, and lighting the building). In actual fact, however, the Winter Garden did not fall victim to its own self-consuming gases, but rather to economic stress. The cost of personnel aside, the structure itself consumed a good deal: both boilers ran on an endless supply of coal and the "ungezählte Argand-Brenner" that Sebald describes required an endless stream of fuel. In 1914 Savile Crossley (then Lord Somerleyton) decided to dismantle the expensive amusement after local authorities declined his offer of the building for public use.[118] Savile's daughter recalled that Savile had 'always intended to dismantle the Winter Garden, but was spurred to action because of the approach of the First World War.[119] Perhaps

---

[116] The materials used to build this structure are closely related to those that were used to build the railway – both the rails themselves and the structure of train stations. In fact, many early train stations featured a glass ceiling much like the one seen in the Somerleyton Winter Garden.

[117] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 47.

[118] Gander, *Top Hats and Servants' Tales*, 136.

[119] Ibid., 139.

Sebald manipulates this history in order to emphasize the volatility of the economic world that enabled Peto to build the fantastic structure in the first place. The Winter Garden represents, then, not only the rise of industrialization – and the wealth that came with it – but also its (inevitable) demise.

This revision of history may be the result of the narrator's preference for natural destruction or decay over what was in fact a very practical decision made by the man in charge of the estate. Although the gas explosion is not a spontaneous natural process, the destruction of the Winter Garden in a cataclysmic moment of combustion strips the human of control and seems to criticize the whole project of creating such an artificial environment. This preference is borne out in the narrator's description of the trees in the garden, but is complicated directly thereafter by the presence of the perfectly groomed, highly aesthetic and artificial yew maze.

After commenting at some length about the deterioration of the house itself and the spectacular destruction of the Winter Garden, the narrator claims that the gardens were now "auf dem Höhepunkt ihrer Evolution."[120] The possessive "ihrer" is crucial in this sentence. The garden's evolution seems to have proceeded without human intervention. The changes we see in the garden (and the house) are a record not of human contact, but rather of the natural process of evolution. Evolution implies an upward movement – evolution carries a species from the bottom of the food chain to the top. If the garden were now at the pinnacle of its evolution, as the narrator claims, the reader would expect it to have achieved perfection, but the state it has reached is not perfection in that sense. The description of all the varied species of trees gives the reader the feeling that the narrator is in a forest, rather than a highly controlled and designed park. He comments on the progress of the trees over the last hundred years, saying

---

[120] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 51.

> Zwar mochten die Rabatten und Beete einst farbenprächtiger und besser gepflegt gewesen sein, aber dafür füllten die von Morton Peto gepflanzten Bäume nun auch den Luftraum über dem Garten aus, und die von den damaligen Besuchern bereits bewunderten Zedern, von denen einige ihr Astwerk über nahezu einen Viertelmorgen ausbreiteten, waren inzwischen ganze Welten für sich.[121]

This brief description sums up a number of themes in the narrator's perception of natural spaces: first, Sebald's extensive knowledge of trees comes to the fore as he describes the way in which they eclipse the rest of the garden entirely. It's as if the narrator walked through the extensive gardens of Somerleyton only looking up. Second, we are reminded of the narrator's preference for natural evolution and growth over the interventions of human cultivation. The borders (*Rabatten*) and beds (*Beete*) that were typical of earlier garden designs have faded in color and are perhaps less well tended than they used to be. Therefore, they seem to be unworthy of the narrator's notice. The trees, however, which need relatively little tending and seem to have grown far beyond their intended boundaries (another result of neglect, but this one positively inflected), hold the narrator's attention and direct his gaze. In this passage the narrator describes in great detail the experience of being among the trees – where in other passages he relies on historical sources or other eye-witness accounts, he describes both factually (the sequoias grow more than sixty meters high) and emotionally: verbs like *bewundern*, *sich vorstellen*, and adjectives like *wolkengleich*, *tief*, *undurchdringlich*, *riesig*, and *dicht* all involve the reader in the mimetic process of imagining what seems to be a dense grove of trees.

Sebald employs something like the kinetic occlusion described by Elaine Scarry[122] to create a vivid sensory mimesis. The trees are lined up one after the other and their various trailing branches and overarching canopies and moving shadows (like ripples on the surface of a lake) create in the

---

[121] Ibid.

[122] According to Scarry, kinetic occlusion refers to the process of mimetic reading of narrated space by the creation of perceived depth through the description of objects moving in front of and behind one another. See: Elaine Scarry, "On Vivacity: The Difference Between Daydreaming and Imagining-Under-Authorial-Instruction," *Representations*, no. 52 (October 1, 1995): 1–26.

reader's mind a three-dimensional space. The description, in fact, directs the reader's mind's eye in

the same way that the narrator's eye moved to take in the towering trees. As the result of a cluster of

prepositions and directional verbs, the reader thinks "up" and "down" in much the same way the

viewer of such a scene would glance up and down. "Up" is conjured by the words: *über*, *hinaufragen*,

aufstreben, and *schweben*. "Down" is brought to mind only by the words *niedersenken*, and *absterben*, so

that the tone of the passage is principally "up," like the growth of the trees or the process of

evolution. The reader's gaze and the narrator's glances, however, also mirror the "vollkommene[r]

Kreis"[123] described by the rare cedar's habit of dipping boughs taking root and sending up new

trunks. Another curious moment in his description of the trees is his use of the word

"Terrassenförmig" – this word seems to raise the actual ground of the garden, which does have

some terraces and parterres[124], to the tops of the trees. The formal aspects of the garden which have

languished at ground level are reincarnated (also through the process of neglect) in the tops of the

trees. The reader can only conclude that untended nature, in contrast to any kind of garden formal

or informal, is the ideal for which he is searching.

In contrast to the disordered appearance of the estate in decay, the continued existence of

the labyrinth represents an organizing principle that lends structure to the entire book. Intriguingly,

the narrator's visit to Somerleyton traces the different landscape styles in reverse chronological

order. Perhaps the most significant characteristic of *Die Ringe des Saturn* is its constant self-

referentiality and revisiting of seemingly-unimportant themes and motifs. One such motif and

another possible organizing principle is Thomas Browne's *Quincunx*, which appears in the very first

---

[123] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 51.

[124] Though his skills ranged from engineering (fountains and water features, particularly) to horticultural design, parterres were a specialty of William Andrews Nesfield. He was known to travel "the country with an album containing designs of parterres copied from 17th-century French gardens, illustrating the work of such 'Old Masters' as Le Notre, Mollet, Boyceau and Le Brun." Ridgway, *William Andrews Nesfield*, 6–7.

chapter. The quincunx is a pattern of five points, much like the five-spot on a die, which can be expanded to resemble a chain-link fence.

This pattern, Browne tells us, according to the narrator, is seen in all facets of nature, in the structure of crystals and bones, the appearance of flowers and plants, etc. Browne's project in the Garden of Cyrus appears to be a search for order and evidence of a divine plan in creation. Sebald's narrator is also in search of something, but I would argue that order is not his ultimate goal. His constant allusions to the triumph of natural progression and the failure or perversions of human attempts at order suggest that the quincunx, such a rigid, totalizing organizational principle is not what the narrator desires. I suggest that the labyrinth, with its circuitous route that forces the walker to circle around her destination before finally arriving there, is a more apt metaphor for the narrative's structure and organization. In the context of the narrator's journey, an attempt to recover from debilitating depression, it is perhaps a curious organizing principle, but not an inapt one. Though different from the Somerleyton maze in that way, the contemplative tone of a journey for its own sake pervades the narrator's experience in the labyrinth and that of his walking trip as a whole. Additionally, the contemplative nature of the narrator's journey is mirrored in the contemplative experience of walking in a maze in that it puts the walker into a state like the suspended animation of Saturn's rings. Suspended animation is also the privileged status that writing provides as an escape from obsolescence and historical oblivion: writing as preservative act, as the creation of traces that invoke and reinvigorate past events and life forms, becomes the paradigmatic example of a suspended animation that promises partial salvation from the downward spiral of temporal decline and material decomposition.[125] Writing, then, is a way of freezing oneself in a particular moment and preserving that version of oneself for perpetuity. This type of "suspended animation" is also mimicked by the labyrinth's perseverance despite the decay of its surroundings.

---

[125] Gray, "Writing at the Roche Limit," 46.

The park at Somerleyton is so far deteriorated that it resembles a wild version of itself – surely the

labyrinth, which required such intensive upkeep should have run thoroughly wild by this point.

Instead, however, it stands very much as it did in the past, perfectly preserved as if under glass or

written down. The labyrinth alone, of all the parts of the garden, has attained the privileged state of

suspended animation required for "salvation from the downward spiral of […] material

decomposition" Gray talks about.

The narrator returns to the topos of the maze later in the book, but this time in a dream.

After becoming seemingly hopelessly lost while walking across a "baumlose Heide"[126] with only a

curious tower looming far away as a reference point, the narrator experiences a recurring dream in

which he finds himself again stumbling through the labyrinthine heath. The characteristic that

distinguishes this dreamed labyrinth from the experienced labyrinth at Somerleyton is that the

narrator cannot see the labyrinth itself until he reaches his, to that point unknown, destination at the

center.

> Todmüde und schon bereit, mich irgendwo niederzulegen, gelangte ich bei Einbruch der
> Dämmerung an einen etwas erhöhten Platz, auf dem genau wie in der Mitte des
> Eibenlabyrinths von Somerleyton ein kleiner chinesischer Pavillon errichtet war. Und als ich
> von diesem Aussichtsposten hinabblickte, sah ich auch das Labyrinth selber, den hellen
> Sandboden, die scharf abgezirkelten Linien der mehr als mannshohen, fast schon
> nachtschwarzen Hecken, ein im Vergleich mit den Irrwegen, die ich zurückgelegt hatte,
> einfaches Muster, von dem ich im Traum mit absoluter Sicherheit wußte, daß es einen
> Querschnitt darstellte durch mein Gehirn.[127]

This moment of clarity in his dream allows the narrator to see his predicament clearly for the first

time. Rather than simply a maze built into a pleasure garden, this dreamed labyrinth actually

represents the narrator's first clear view of his own confused mind.

---

[126] This treeless landscape seems to be a reference to the "Heidelandschaften" painted by Titorelli in Kafka's *Prozess*. A further crucial intertext for this landscape is the heath upon which Shakespeare's King Lear goes mad. Both scenes imbue the heath with connotations of madness, futility, and loss of agency, all of which are mirrored in Sebald's heath scene.

[127] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 206.

FIGURE 1. Photograph of the Somerleyton Park yew maze.[128]

Significantly, in this passage Sebald provides the only image of the maze at Somerleyton but it is reproduced from a poor photocopy and the garden surrounding the maze has been crudely masked so that the maze appears, roughly head-shaped against a black background. The actual design of the labyrinth does look something like the cross-section of a skull, although the image has also been cut into this shape, with the serpentine pathways of the maze resembling the ridges of gray matter within.

This image, as well as the description of the maze as invisible or unclear until solved, represents a real departure from the narrator's original description of the maze as an almost natural progression of the garden, despite its essential artificiality.[129] Originally, the maze flows out of and blends into the garden seamlessly and here it is lifted entirely out of that context.

---

[128] Ibid.

[129] In her essay on *Die Ringe des Saturn* and *Heart of Darkness* as representatives of the adventure romance genre, Margaret Bruzelius points to this chapter as an example of the adventure genre's generative space, a space that typically "contains within itself a person or thing that is the source of the adventure; it thus figures as the occluded originating space of the story." Of the generative space in Sebald, Bruzelius writes: "In adventure, the hero's entry into this highly charged space is linked to an essential bit of information about his past that he must know to free himself of the trammels of his plot. In *Die Ringe des Saturn*, as one would expect from its pervasive melancholy, the moment is one of déjà vu and misery, and
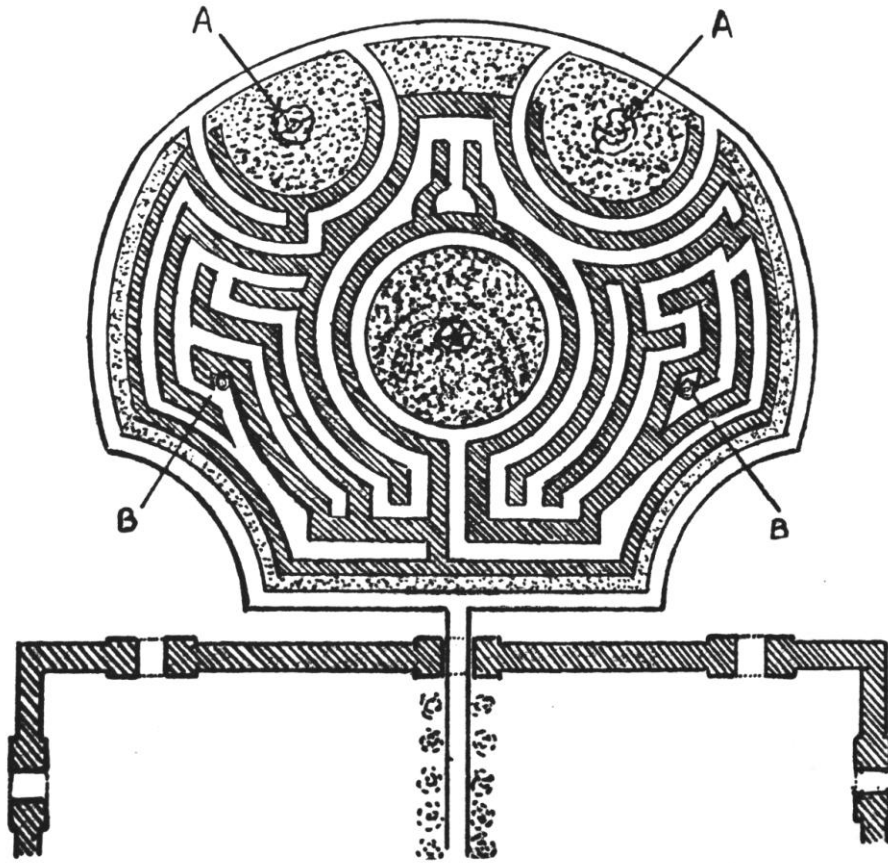
FIG. 123.—Maze at Somerleyton Hall, Suffolk. (W. H. M., from sketch by G. F. G.)

FIGURE 2. Design of Somerleyton Park yew maze.[130]

What results, finally, from the adoption of the labyrinth as an organizational principle, is

symptomatic of postmodernism. According to Jameson, the postmodern self encounters great

frustration with the attempt to apply to the world any sort of total system or logic:

> What happens is that the more powerful the vision of some increasingly total system or
> logic—the Foucault of the prisons book is the obvious example—the more powerless the

forcefully illustrates the circular and meaningless structure of the romance. [...] In this reverie the narrator experiences the generative space as a place of disorientation (he's wandering in circles) and solipsism (he sees a slice of his own brain) [...]" Margaret Bruzelius, "Adventure, Imprisonment, and Melancholy: Heart of Darkness and Die Ringe Des Saturn," in *The Undiscover'd Country: W.G. Sebald and the Poetics of Travel*, ed. Markus Zisselsberger (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2010), 265.

[130] Matthews, *Mazes and Labyrinths: A General Account of Their History and Developments*, 141.

reader comes to feel. Insofar as the theorist wins, therefore, by constructing and increasingly closed and terrifying machine, to that very degree he loses, since the critical capacity of his work is thereby paralyzed, and the impulses of negation and revolt, not to speak of those of social transformation, are increasingly perceived as vain and trivial in the face of the model itself.[131]

This dynamic is also present in Sebald. In *Die Ringe des Saturn* it seems that the quincunx – the omnipresent network – will end up being the system in which the world is organized. However, the journey described in the book (notably, an itinerary and not a map) seems to resist this model. The narrator's departure from the hospital and his constant movement away (both literally, through space, and figuratively, away from illness and toward health) constitutes a series of departures from this totalizing system and toward a new way of understanding and encountering the world.

The labyrinth takes the place of the quincunx in the end. This challenges our notion of an organizing principle, of course, because the labyrinth is intended as an exercise in diachronicity – one can proceed through it without gaining any perspective on it – but of course it becomes legible when seen from above. The labyrinth seems to unite both the map and the itinerary, a diachronic way of experiencing space and the synchronic view that enables mapping it. This multiple perspective is typical of Sebald's narrative style and will be a key feature in the chapters that follow. Significantly, Sebald deploys this postmodern narrative style in conjunction with the conflated garden designs. As I have shown, Somerleyton unites many garden styles within its borders and the narrative surrounding the garden touches on other environmental developments from the twentieth (and twenty-first) century. This hybrid environment can be read in two ways. On the one hand, the garden and its surrounding environment represent a postmodern synthesis of environmental references spanning at least five centuries – a narrative strategy that is also deployed in Sebald's narration of urban spaces. On the other hand, the journey from the city to Somerleyton represents

---

[131] Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 5–6.

another devolution, this one literally tracing environmental forms backward through time. The narrator leaves the city via a train that travels through a landscape dotted with signifiers of the present day, rapid urbanization in the early twentieth century, and the rise of industry in the nineteenth century, arriving at a manor house that unites styles from the nineteenth (the Winter Garden), eighteenth (the English Landscape Garden style), seventeenth and sixteenth centuries (the labyrinth and formal gardens come from this era and the house itself was originally built in the Elizabethan period). This backwards progress through time creates a miniature history of garden styles and environmental developments, but also mirrors the process of devolution and deterioration seen throughout the text. The narrated environment itself provides further evidence that the "Höhepunkt [der] Evolution" is not, in fact, the high point of cultivation. Instead, Sebald seems to argue, nature compels the environment toward a return to earlier states, a process that humans would do well to accommodate.

EIN[...] IMMER VERWINKELTER WERDENDE[S] GEWIRR
FAULIGER GASSEN UND HÄUSER[132]:

THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT AND LAYERS OF HISTORY

In Sebald's texts, particularly in the last novel published in his lifetime, *Austerlitz*, environment is established as the medium through which communication between the living and the dead, or to put it more prosaically between the present and the past is possible. When the atmospheric conditions are right memory becomes accessible. These "ineinander verschachtelte Räume" and "bestimmte[…] Lichtverhältnisse und atmosphärische[…] Bedingungen" are the conditions necessary for the retrieval of lost memories in *Austerlitz*. One could say that, unlike Proust, Austerlitz is not in search of lost time as much as he is in search of lost environments, or at least of those that enable remembering because they are connected with past time.

Significantly, although some of Sebald's environmental descriptions resemble the overwhelming or disorienting urban environment that is familiar from modernist narratives like Döblin's *Berlin, Alexanderplatz*, the urban environment in *Austerlitz* loses its disorienting, intimidating character in moments where the protagonist gains insight into his personal history and becomes, instead, a site of illumination. By contrasting anxiety-ridden urban environments with those where the urban environment purportedly enables access to Austerlitz's lost memories, I will demonstrate how Sebald's narratives exploit the palimpsestic temporality of the urban environment to develop a style of postmodern synchronous narration. In addition, I will examine the novel's environment alongside a collection of urban studies theories to determine in what ways the narrated city is rooted in the real urban environment and how the narrative builds on or contradicts those theories.

---

[132] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 192–194.

In *Austerlitz*, the urban environments that provide access to lost memories have a specific character, shrouded in a mysterious atmosphere and possessing singular qualities of light and air. Most importantly, however, the spaces in which Austerlitz retrieves – or (re)creates – his memories are urban spaces that are already imbued with a sense of history and the sometimes visible layers of past time. Through a combination of the right atmospheric conditions and, perhaps even more importantly, the desire to see into the past, Austerlitz uses urban spaces to retrieve his past. A side effect of his constant searching for his own past and his persistent exploration of the urban environment in search of his lost memories is that Austerlitz experiences urban space as an outsider. Furthermore, rather than recording his personal experience of urban space, he narrates it from a perspective that is wholly separate from the masses of people that surround him. Yet in contrast to a figure like Franz Biberkopf (in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*), Austerlitz does not feel intimidated by urban space. Instead, he seems to sense its potential for illumination.

The interaction between Austerlitz and his urban environment is informed by human interaction with real urban environments. The field of urban studies seeks to systematize and understand the development of the city and its meaning for its human inhabitants. Three theories relevant to urban studies will inform my reading of the urban spaces in Sebald: the urban planner and theorist Kevin Lynch's *Image of the City* elucidates the form of the city and the goals of its design; Chinese-American geographer Yi-Fu Tuan sheds light on the importance of the *experience* of space in understanding the city; and Jay Appleton's prospect-refuge theory, although primarily conceived in order to analyze rural environments and landscapes seen in art, gives shape to the origins of anxiety in certain types of urban spaces.

The modern (and post-modern) city resists traditional description in linear – or diachronic – narration. It requires a form that does justice to the multitude of simultaneous stimuli it produces; it requires a synchronous form. The inherent temporality of the city is apparent in Kevin Lynch's

description of the city: "Like a piece of architecture, the city is a construction in space, but one of vast scale, a thing perceived only in the course of long spans of time. City design is therefore a temporal art, but it can rarely use the controlled and limited sequences of other temporal arts like music."[133] The temporal experience of the urban environment that Lynch describes is something that Sebald exploits in his description of urban environments. However, rather than focusing on the linear passage of time and accumulation of historical moments in the city, Sebald sees the city as the synchronous embodiment of history. Challenging the "controlled and limited sequences" of traditional narrative, he narrates instead an environment that contains and unites moments from the many phases of history in a single, unified and yet multifaceted environment.

This multiple temporality and synchronous description is epitomized by Austerlitz's description of a vast cemetery being excavated underneath a train station in central London. As becomes clear in this passage, Austerlitz's relationship to London is not defined by the fact that he lives there,[134] but instead by the seemingly encyclopedic knowledge he has of its streets, history, and architecture, and the critical distance between a scholar and his subject, all of which originates in his nightly wandering. For Austerlitz, no urban space is innocent of hiding, burying, or otherwise obscuring some history. Every square inch of a city, particularly one whose history is as complex as London's, is stratified in historical layers. The city is, for Austerlitz, a palimpsest.[135] Each successive

---

[133] Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge [Mass.]: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1960), 1.

[134] As we will see in chapter four, Austerlitz's house in Alderney Street never quite feels like home. His alienation from his abode is symptomatic of his constant search for his origins.

[135] In developing this notion of cities, and particularly London, as palimpsest, I am indebted to Andreas Huyssen, who describes the phenomenon in the context of Berlin's recovery and revitalization after the Fall of the Wall:

"What is now emerging is the more intriguing notion of Berlin as palimpsest, a disparate city-text that is being rewritten while previous text is preserved, traces are restored, erasures documented, all of it resulting in a complex web of historical markers that point to the continuing heterogeneous life of a vital city that is as ambivalent of its built past as it is of its urban future." Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 81. It is precisely this sort of historical consciousness that is exemplified by Austerlitz's musings on the city.

generation attempts to write their own history on its surface while attempting to disregard, at best, or obfuscate, at worst, the background against which their experience must be read. The central image of the city as palimpsest is revealed in text and photo, as Austerlitz describes the process of excavating a huge graveyard in central London:

> Geradeso wie die Lebendigen ziehen die Toten, wenn es ihnen zu eng wird, nach draußen in eine weniger dicht besiedelte Gegend, wo sie in gehörigem Abstand voneinander ihre Ruhe finden können. Aber es kommen ja immer neue nach, in unendlicher Folge, zu deren Unterbringung zuletzt, wenn alles belegt ist, Gräber durch Gräber gegraben werden, bis auf dem ganzen Acker die Gebeine kreuz und quer durcheinander liegen. Dort, wo einmal die Bestattungs- und Bleichfelder waren, auf dem Areal der 1865 erbauten Broadstreet station, kamen 1984 bei den im Zuge der Abbrucharbeiten vorgenommenen Ausgrabungen unter einem Taxistand über vierhundert Skelette zutage. Ich bin damals des öfteren dort gewesen, sagte Austerlitz, teilweise auch aus anderen, mir unverständlichen Gründen, und habe photographische Aufnahmen gemacht von den Überresten der Toten, und ich entsinne mich, wie einer der Archäologen, mit dem ich ins Gespräch gekommen bin, mir gesagt hat, daß in jedem Kubikmeter Abraum, den man aus dieser Grube entfernte, die Gerippe von durchschnittlich acht Menschen gefunden worden sind.[136]

This passage offers some central touchstones for understanding the relationship between Sebald's protagonist and his surroundings and between the present and the past in the text. First, Austerlitz specifically refers to two dated points in history – the building of the train station (1865) and his encounter with the archaeologist (1984). This kind of bracketing or conflation of centuries in a single anecdote is common in Austerlitz's narrative style. In the sentence following this passage, he describes the origin of the skeletons in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, adding further layers to the synchronicity of his description. In addition, Sebald gives Austerlitz a talent for ventriloquism, the use of which allows him to inhabit others' perspectives without losing his own voice. An example of this is the empathetic tone he employs in describing the plight of the crowded dead.[137] Some of his own fears creep into this description, with the dead seeking space and solitude

---

[136] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 192.

[137] He refers in this passage to "das Leid und die Schmerzen, die sich dort über die Jahrhunderte angesammelt haben" and wonders whether that suffering does not, in fact, persist to the present day. This identification with past pain is not, however, an expression of Austerlitz's real feelings, but rather an intellectual exercise which preserves his critical distance

and, perhaps most disturbing to Austerlitz, losing their identity as they are piled "kreuz und quer" into intersecting, layered graves. This loss of individual identity animates the entire novel, and Sebald takes every opportunity to hammer this point home through images like these. However, although Austerlitz's narrative pays tribute to the concerns of the dead, he never forgets his place as a scholar of architecture and reduces their plight to a logistical question of *Unterbringung*.[138] Whatever is one to do with the ever-accumulating dead? This logistical mindset reinforces Austerlitz's status as an outside observer of the city and history. Austerlitz describes the problem of excavating and relocating a vast burial ground in order to rebuild a deteriorating train station, instead of musing, metaphysically, on the realms of the dead. Another theme that is exemplified here and recurs throughout the novel is the idea that, in order to build (in this case the new train station), one must first demolish (in this case, the irrelevant taxi stand, obsolete parts of the old station, and the old burial ground). Finally, Austerlitz's mention of photography and the inclusion of a grisly photo

---

from the evidence of suffering in the environment around him. Austerlitz practices his ventriloquism in a number of contexts in the course of his narrative, perhaps the most memorable of which are his ruminations on the lives, motivations, and anxieties of specific caged and or taxidermied animals. While these tend to anthropomorphism and, I would argue, projection of Austerlitz's own emotions, moments like these feature Austerlitz emoting on behalf of historical figures who have lost the ability to speak for themselves.

[138] In fact, Sebald's masses of dead bodies migrating to the suburbs have a parallel in reality. Foucault, with whose works Sebald was familiar, gives an excellent thumbnail sketch of the trend of cemeteries originally located in the center moving toward the periphery as society became less comfortable with death.
"Up until the end of the eighteenth century, the cemetery was located in the very heart of the city, near the church. Within it, there existed a hierarchy of every possible type of tomb. There was an ossuary where the corpses lost their last traces of individuality, there were some individual tombs, and there were the graves inside the church […]. It is curious to note that in an age which has been very roughly defined as 'atheist', Western culture has inaugurated the so-called cult of the dead. […]
In parallel to this individualization of death and the bourgeois appropriation of the cemetery, an obsession with death as 'sickness' has emerged. […]This great concern with the spread of sickness by contagion from cemeteries began to appear with insistence toward the end of the eighteenth century, but the cemeteries only moved out to the suburbs during the course of the nineteenth. From then on they no longer constituted the sacred and immortal wind of the city, but the 'other city', where each family possessed its gloomy dwelling." Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neal Leach (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 354. This passage is a possible origin of Austerlitz's crowded masses of bones. It is also important to note that the excavation of the cemetery under Broad Street Station is well documented. See Christopher Thomas, *London's Archaeological Secrets: A World City Revealed* (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the Museum of London Archaeology Service, 2003), 134. Thomas actually dates the original burials under the site of the Broad Street Station to the late sixteenth century. See also: Catharine Arnold, *Necropolis: London and Its Dead* (London; New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006). At the same time, the mass graves found at concentration camp sites after the end of World War II (and indeed in the course of investigating any genocide) and the obliteration of individuality and identity resulting from their use are implied in this passage.

(featuring one skeletonized torso and four skulls partially embedded in an abundance of mud) thematize in a way that is routine, but not insignificant, Austerlitz's use of photos to both distance himself from what he observes and, later, to process its meaning for him.[139] The image of the bodies moldering below the train station is an emblem par excellence of the synchronic or historically layered city. Austerlitz's unfettered access to the archaeological dig, his encyclopedic knowledge of the findings of the dig and the history of the site, and his recounting of this history cement his status as an outside observer.

Although Austerlitz attempts to maintain a critical distance from the city, he falls prey to what Lynch describes as a kind of interdependence between the city and the person experiencing it. Much like the way in which the meaning of a text can be seen as the product of the cooperation between reader and author, Lynch suggests that a person's experience of the city in turn becomes part of the city and of its creation.

> Environmental images are the result of a two-way process between the observer and his environment. The environment suggests distinctions and relations, and the observer--with great adaptability and in the light of his own purposes--selects, organizes, and endows with meaning what he sees. The image so developed now limits and emphasizes what is seen, while the image itself is being tested against the filtered perceptual input in a constant interacting process.[140]

The "two-way process" of meaning-production described by Lynch is precisely the sort of relationship Sebald's characters have to the environments around them. In the example of *Austerlitz* we see many instances of this interdependence. Austerlitz frequently comments on the effect that his surroundings have on his emotional state and occasionally manipulates his surroundings – particularly in domestic spaces – in order to either amplify or mitigate this effect.[141] Although the

---

[139] At various points in the text, Austerlitz claims to take photos "um mich ein wenig zu sammeln" (Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 218.) or to document. More about the ways he uses these photos will be revealed in chapter four.

[140] Lynch, *The Image of the City*, 6.

[141] This phenomenon is central to my analysis of domestic spaces in chapter four of this dissertation.

experience of the urban environment seems less personal than that of the domestic environment, this two-way process is still in full effect in Austerlitz's experience specific environments that enable him to access previously lost memories. As Lynch suggests, "the named environment […] furnishes material for common memories and symbols which bind the group together and allow them to communicate with one another. The landscape serves as a vast mnemonic system for the retention of group history and ideals."[142] Austerlitz attempts to connect to the "mnemonic system" of the city in order to resurrect his personal history. However, this attempt becomes problematic when one considers that the environment to which Austerlitz turns for inspiration is littered with the mnemonic traces of hundreds of years and countless other people's memories. The narrative that he eventually pieces together is evidence of the friction between "common" and personal, relying almost entirely on other people's memories (for example, those of the suggestively-named Věra) and "official" records of the past (seen in the Prague archive and the Terezín museum). In what follows, I will demonstrate the way in which Austerlitz attempts to use environment to gain access to his lost memories. However, I will show that it is only when Austerlitz least expects it and when he most surrenders to the effects of the environment that he gains insight into his own missing past, an effect that is similar to that of an epiphany. In order to do this, I will focus on the urban environments of London, Prague, and the smaller city of Terezín, the site of the Theresienstadt concentration camp.

LONDON

The descriptions of the urban environment in *Austerlitz* take two distinct forms. In some cases, the environment is described diachronically, and shows, through the description of a changing landscape, the metamorphosing state of mind of the narrator proceeding through the landscapes. In

---

142 Lynch, *The Image of the City*, 126.

other moments, the urban environment is described in a much more synchronic style, making unpredictable reference to varied moments in history and uniting all of them into a multifaceted whole.

Where the diachronic style is used, the effect of the changing landscape on the narrator or protagonist is palpable – the urban environment becomes active. This resembles what Mary Ann Caws calls the city's metamorphosis "from *topos* to anthropoid."[143] Caws suggests that the city becomes active as a kind of "character" in the text when the city in the text is a fictional representation of a real city, when the human characters are in transit or moments of "physical and cultural flux," and when the city gives the impression of a "force or pressure bearing upon [a character]."[144] The cities described in *Austerlitz* largely fulfill these criteria: Austerlitz is characterized as rootless and permanently wandering,[145] his identity is in flux, he does see certain city spaces as a force in his process of remembering, and the cities in question (London, Prague, Terezín) exist in reality. Curiously, however, the narrator – but not Austerlitz, the purported protagonist of the novel – is susceptible to the impact of the urban environment. The ability of the city to seize agency from the character in the urban environment is also reminiscent of Siegfried Giedion's notion of *Durchdringung*[146] – or the ability of the urban environment to penetrate both architecture and, in a way, human subject – in modern architecture. In his study of "modernist miniatures" – texts that narrate the visual impression of discrete urban scenes, Andreas Huyssen notes that the authors he

---

[143] Mary Ann Caws and Jane Augustine, eds., "From Topos to Anthropoid: The City as Character in Twentieth-Century Texts," in *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1991), 73.

[144] Ibid., 74.

[145] We will discuss more about Austerlitz as homeless or rootless in Chapter Four.

[146] cf. Andreas Huyssen, "Modernist Miniatures: Literary Snapshots of Urban Spaces," *PMLA* 122 (January 2007): 31.

studies (Rilke, Kracauer, and others) focus on the negative aspects of it.[147] Huyssen follows the

notion of *Durchdringung* one step further in pointing out a vital moment in Benjamin's *Das Ornament*

where space not only penetrates the subject, but is also made active while the human subject is made

object to the space's actions:

> The first sentence of the text contains a punctum. "Nicht gesucht hat den Platz, wen er
> findet" (*Das Ornament* 12). The translation "Whoever the place finds did not seek it" does
> not quite capture the reversal of subject and object as succinctly as the German does (*Mass
> Ornament* 38). The meaning, however, is clear: "He whom the place finds did not seek it."
> The uncanny reversal of human subject and urban space in the German sentence
> immediately disorients the reader. The human subject becomes grammatical object; the
> empirical object becomes grammatical subject.[148]

This moment from Benjamin epitomizes the notion of the city acting as an agent, but this

observation is not unique to this text. Although many of the narrated environments in Sebald share

characteristics with the miniatures Huyssen describes, the fact that the urban environment becomes

active in the text and impacts the narrators in specific ways is most significant. In fact, the urban

environment in *Austerlitz* does something very like what Huyssen points out in Benjamin – the very

places that Austerlitz seeks are not the ones that "find" him. The environments he expects to recall

memories fail to do so, but he is – and his memories are – "found" by other, unexpected

environments.

The city begins to act like a "character" in the text in moments when the narrator deploys

the diachronic mode of narration and not when Austerlitz uses his signature synchronic style. One

example in *Austerlitz* is the narrator's train journey into London to see an ophthalmologist – here the

narrator is also in a moment of crisis, as his vision is threatened. In this passage the city acts as a

---

[147] cf. ibid., 33. Take for example, Rilke's description of Malte's room at night: "Elektrische Bahnen rasen läutend durch
meine Stube. Automobile gehen über mich hin. Eine Tür fällt zu. Irgendwo klirrt eine Scheibe herunter, ich höre ihre
grossen Scherben lachen, die kleinen Splitter kichern. Dann plötzlich dumpfer, eingeschlossener Lärm von der anderen
Seite, innen im Hause. Jemand steigt die Treppe. Kommt. Kommt unaufhörlich. Ist da, ist lange da, geht vorbei. Und
wieder die Strasse." Rainer Maria Rilke, *Die Aufzeichnungen Des Malte Laurids Brigge: Kommentierte Ausgabe*, Universal-
Bibliothek. (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1997), 7–8.

[148] Huyssen, "Modernist Miniatures," 34.

force, heavily impacting the narrator as the environment through which the train passes becomes

progressively more urban:

> wie jedesmal, wenn ich allein hinunterfahre nach London, rührte sich auch an diesem
> Dezembertag in mir eine Art dumpfer Verzweiflung. Ich schaute in die flache, fast baumlose
> Landschaft hinaus, über die riesigen braunen Äcker, auf die Bahnstationen, an denen ich
> niemals aussteigen würde, die Möwenschar, die sich wie immer versammelt hatte auf dem
> Fußballfeld am Stadtrand von Ipswich, auf die Schrebergartenkolonien, das kahle, von
> abgestorbenen Waldreben überzogene Krüppelholz, das an den Böschungen wächst, auf die
> quecksilbrigen Watten und Priele bei Manningtree, die zur Seite gesunkenen Boote, auf den
> Wasserturm von Colchester, die Marconifabrik in Chelmsford, die leere Windhundrennbahn
> von Romford, die häßlichen Rückseiten der Reihenhäuser, an denen die Bahntrasse in den
> Außenbezirken der Metropole vorbeiführt, auf das Gräberfeld von Manor Park und die
> Wohntürme von Hackney, auf all diese immergleichen, immer, wenn ich nach London fahre,
> an mir sich vorbeidrehenden und mir dennoch nicht vertrauten, sondern - trotz der vielen
> seit meiner Ankunft in England vergangenen Jahre - fremd und unheimlich gebliebenen
> Ansichten. Besonders bang wird es mir jedesmal auf dem letzten Stück der Strecke, wo der
> Zug sich, kurz vor der Einfahrt in die Liverpool Street Station, über mehrere Weichen
> hinweg durch einen Engpaß winden muß und wo die zu beiden Seiten der Geleise
> aufragenden, von Ruß und Dieselöl geschwärzten Ziegelmauern mit ihren Rundbögen,
> Säulen und Nischen mich auch an diesem Morgen erinnerten an ein unterirdisches
> Kolumbarium.[149]

This passage emphasizes the growing anxiety and oppression the narrator feels upon entering

London from the countryside. The passage is marked by words that signify distortion,

disorientation, or disturbance: the boats sinking to one side, the backs of houses, dead flora, and a

flock of seagulls congregating on a football field. Furthermore, the narrator's visual field grows

progressively narrower as he nears the city: he first notes a flat, treeless landscape, then a football

field – still a field, but a man-made one that is enclosed.[150] Then the view is narrowed by focusing on

the steep embankments on either side of the train tracks and the weedy undergrowth that

encroaches on the tracks. The undergrowth gives way to the backs of row houses, and finally the

tracks are closed in by grimy brick walls. The pervasive tone of this passage is oppressive,

---

[149] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 56–58.

[150] One may also think of this in terms of Appleton – as his visual field narrows, the narrator experiences more anxiety
and certainly derives less aesthetic pleasure from the view. This signifies a diminution of prospect and, as the city walls
rise around him, a lack of potential refuge.

claustrophobic, and punctuated by images of death. The graveyard in Manor Park, a comparison of

the walls rising on both sides of the train tracks to an underground columbarium, and those same

seagulls – scavengers, however innocuous they appear – belie the narrator's growing feeling of doom

as the train nears the city. The appearance here of the columbarium – a type of gravesite or crypt

designed particularly for cinerary remains – presages the later images of the graveyard underneath

the train station. In addition, in the post-Holocaust context, any mention of ash is tied to the image

of crematoria at Auschwitz and the other concentration camps. Finally, the word "columbarium"

can also refer to the small nesting holes in a dovecote.[151] This description of entering the city gives

one the distinct impression that the city is, in fact, rushing toward or encroaching on the narrator. It

rises up and engulfs the narrator, creating a strong, overwhelming sensation of oppression and

disorientation.

The sense of oppression caused by this narrowing of the visual field can be better

understood by reference to Jay Appleton's Prospect-Refuge theory. Appleton attempts to locate the

source of human aesthetic assessment – both positive and negative – of landscape in what remains

of habitat-seeking instincts inherited from our evolutionary forebears. Appleton suggests that "the

spontaneous appraisal of the landscape"[152] has remained within the spectrum of human unconscious

instincts, along with hunger, thirst, sexual desire, and seeking shelter or refuge from danger.[153] This

inherited ability to unconsciously assess the habitability of a perceived environment, Appleton

insists, is still handed down through the evolutionary chain, despite the fact that we have created a

world where those instincts are no longer necessary for survival. In that case, he argues, the vestigial

---

[151] The many connections between animals and humans in *Austerlitz* will be discussed at length in chapter five.

[152] Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, 64.

[153] Ibid., 63.

instinct takes on a symbolic character and transforms the desire for a sustainable habitat into the symbolic, aesthetic appreciation of landscape:

> All this leads to the proposition that aesthetic satisfaction, experienced in the contemplation of landscape, stems from the spontaneous perception of landscape features which, in their shapes, colours, spatial arrangements and other visible attributes, act as sign-stimuli indicative of environmental conditions favourable to survival, whether they really *are* favourable or not.[154]

Borrowing a phrase from anthropologist Konrad Lorenz, he suggests that one essential criterion for assessing a landscape's habitability is the ability "to see without being seen."[155] In order for a landscape to fulfill this criterion, it must include symbols of prospect ("an umimpeded opportunity to see"[156]) and refuge ("the opportunity to hide"[157]). Prospect-Refuge theory claims that "because the ability to see without being seen is an intermediate step in the satisfaction of many of those [biological] needs, the capacity of an environment to ensure the achievement of this becomes a more immediate source of aesthetic satisfaction."[158]

While Appleton conceived his theories primarily to assess aesthetic appreciation of rural landscapes, landscape gardens like those discussed in the previous chapter, and landscapes depicted in art, the same principles can be identified in the appraisal of and interaction with the man-made or urban setting.[159] Keeping in mind the importance of prospect to a positive appraisal of a landscape,

---

[154] Ibid., 62.

[155] Ibid., 63.

[156] Ibid., 66.

[157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Appleton's theories are not entirely uncontroversial. In response to the criticism that habitat theory is no longer applicable in today's civilized world, Appleton writes, "The idea that our aesthetic sensitivity to landscape is derived ultimately from inborn behavior mechanisms does not mean that there is a direct, utilitarian relationship between those landscapes which afford us satisfaction and those which afford us safety. The relationship is much more remote. It would be absurd to insist that a lover of landscape walking on the mountains is actually reducing the risk of death or injury at the hands of an enemy because he can get a better view. […] But just as your gourmet, roundly savouring his

61

it becomes clear that part of what creates an oppressive feeling in the narrator's approach to London via train is the progressively diminishing prospect. As the visual field narrows, the narrator's discomfort grows.

This kind of oppressive urban environment is not unique to *Austerlitz*, but is also present in Sebald's other works. A strikingly similar passage can be found in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, where the narrator is leaving the city of Norwich by train:

> Es war ein tief mit Wolken verhangener Tag, als ich, im August 1992, mit dem alten, bis an die Fensterscheiben hinauf mit Ruß und Öl verschmierten Dieseltriebwagen, der damals zwischen Norwich und Lowestoft verkehrte, an die Küste hinunterfuhr. […] Die meiste Zeit rollte der unsicher auf den Schienen schwankende Wagen im Leerlauf dahin, denn es geht dem Meer zu fast immer leicht bergab. Nur zwischendurch, wenn mit einem das ganze Gehäuse erschütternden Schlag das Triebwerk in Gang gesetzt wurde, war eine Weile das Mahlen der Zahnräder zu hören, ehe wir unter gleichmäßigem Pochen weiterrollten wie zuvor, an Hinterhöfen und Schrebergartenkolonien und Schutthalden und Lagerplätzen vorebei in das vor der östlichen Vorstadt sich ausdehnende Marschland hinaus.[160]

This description echoes the one from Austerlitz in a number of ways: both dwell on the filth generated by decades of train traffic (*Ruß und Öl*), describe the typical metamorphosis of open land to city or vice versa, mentioning *Schrebergartenkolonien*, a series of places where the narrator would never disembark,[161] and a sense of oppression. However, where the passage from *Austerlitz* depicts

---

caviare [sic] or his Burgundy, has come a long way from the ancestor who spiked saliva-drenched incisor into the raw, quivering flesh, so your connoisseur of landscape is living in a very different world from that of the primitive man whose very survival depended on that ability to see without being seen which was afforded him by a functional disposition of foliage and open space. In both cases, however, to by-pass the antecedents is to begin after the logical premise. The removal of urgent necessity does not put an end to the machinery which evolved to cope with it; rather it frees that machinery to achieve different objectives which themselves are constantly changing with the aspirations and caprices of society." Ibid., 149. In fact, when taken on this symbolic level, Appleton's theories have found use not only in art history, whence he takes many of his landscape examples and where he elaborates on the problems of balance and perspective, but also in literature. Barbara Britton Wenner's *Prospect and Refuge in the Landscape of Jane Austen* draws heavily on the theories advanced in Appleton's book, and conducts a multifaceted analysis of the historical and symbolic landscapes narrated in Austen's works. Barbara Britton Wenner, *Prospect and Refuge in the Landscape of Jane Austen* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006). In the Postscript to *The Experience of Landscape*, Appleton refers to a book by Timothy Brownlow that uses prospect-refuge theory in a reading of John Clare's poetry, but bemoans that relatively few literary scholars have followed what seems to him to be an obvious path of inquiry. cf. Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, 247.

[160] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 41.

[161] In *Die Ringe des Saturn* these deserted and desolate places include "eine Zuckerrübenraffinerie mit qualmendem Schornstein am Ende einer Stichstraße in einem grünen Feld" and an area where "hier nichts zu sehen [ist] als ab und zu

the narrator's growing anxiety and sense of oppression through images of a constricting visual field, in this passage the visual field broadens as the city's grime is left behind and the train enters the "sich ausdehnende Marshland." The expanding visual field here increases the narrator's prospect and, thus his sense of oppression wanes as the city disappears behind him. A further similar passage occurs in *Die Ausgewanderten*, as the narrator enters Manchester in a taxi:

> Der Tag begann soeben anzubrechen, und staunend sah ich hinaus auf die gleichförmigen Häuserzeilen, die einen um so verwahrlosteren Eindruck machten, je näher dem Zentrum wir kamen. In Moss Side und Hulme gab es ganze Straßenzüge mit vernagelten Fenstern und Türen und ganze Viertel, in denen alles niedergerissen war, so daß man über das derart entstandene Brachland hinweg vorausblicken konnte auf die ungefähr eine Meile noch eintfernte, hauptsächlich aus riesigen viktorianischen Büro- und Lagerhäusern zusammengesetzte, nach wie vor ungeheuer gewaltig wirkende, in Wahrheit aber, wie ich bald schon herausfinden sollte, beinahe restlos ausgehöhlte Wunderstadt aus dem letzten Jahrhundert.[162]

In Sebald's Manchester, the sense of oppression and anxiety experienced by his narrator finds a correlative in the visual aspect of the city, which seems to be crumbling, caught in a process of destruction or decay. While in the previous examples the city center seems crowded, if not teeming with signs of life, Manchester seems hollowed out – the facades conceal largely abandoned buildings and the visible neglect throughout the city is evidence of the decline of industry. Although parts of the city seem to have previously been impressive, they are also deserted and falling down. These descriptions of Manchester are clearly negatively connoted, but yet another of Sebald's narrators sees decay and destruction as the true mark of a city:

> Besonders vielversprechend aber schien mir die Tatsache, daß die Häuserzeilen hie und da von Ruinengrundstücken unterbrochen waren, denn nichts war für mich, seit ich einmal in München gewesen war, so eindeutig mit dem Wort *Stadt* verbunden wie Schutthalden, Brandmauern und Fensterlöcher, durch die man die leere Luft sehen konnte.[163]

---

ein einsames Flurwächterhaus, als [...] ein paar niedergesunkene Weidenbäume und zerfallende, wie Mahnmale einer zugrundegegangenen Zivilisation sich ausnehmende Ziegelkegel, die Überreste der ungezählten Windpumpen und Windmühlen." Ibid., 41–42.

[162] Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 221–222.

[163] Ibid., 46.

In this passage the narrator of "Paul Bereyter" recalls his impression of the piles of debris left over from wartime bombing, which seem to add excitement and importance to the city to which he moves with his parents. He judges the worthiness of the city by the degree to which it merited and sustained damage during the war.

Each of these passages is characterized by a specific mode of transportation. In the first, the narrator is on a train, following a predetermined trajectory into the city. In the second, the narrator is being driven into the city in a taxi. In the last, the narrator recalls his boyhood move to a neighboring town. In all three passages, the narrators are at the mercy of some force outside themselves. The disorientation and oppression experienced by the narrators of these various passages may, then, come from the transfer of their agency to the city. [164] Where the human subject feels a loss of control may be when the city is most able to become active and act as a character or exert force on the human characters in the text. In *Austerlitz*, this disorientation and loss of agency typifies the narrator's experience of the city – and his attempt at telling Austerlitz's story, which he has great difficulty controlling – but contrasts starkly with Austerlitz's experience.

The range of urban experiences had by the narrator and the protagonist of *Austerlitz* is symptomatic of the ambivalence of urban environments in literature – for some the city embodies opportunity while for others it signals oppression, if not simply destruction. The city in literature is

---

[164] This disorientation may be due to the nature of train travel. Similar moments of disorientation appear frequently in German literature. For example in Gottfried Benn's "Gehirne" Rönne describes his experience of train travel. "Jetzt saß er auf einem Eckplatz und sah in die Fahrt: es geht also durch Weinland, besprach er sich, ziemlich flaches, vorbei an Scharlachfeldern, die rauchen von Mohn. Es ist nicht allzu heiß; ein Blau flutet durch den Himmel, feucht und aufgeweht von Ufern; an Rosen ist jedes Haus gelehnt, und manches ganz versunken. Ich will mir ein Buch kaufen und einen Stift; ich will mir jetzt möglichst vieles aufschreiben, und alles ist versunken. Als ich anfing, blieb es bei mir? Ich weiß es nicht mehr." (Gottfried Benn, "Gehirne," in *Sämtliche Werke Bd. 3. Prosa. - 1* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987), 29.) This passage encapsulates the constantly-shifting landscape as seen from a train window. This appears to have a disquieting effect on the narrator and his desire to begin writing down as much as possible seems as much a desire to orient himself as it is the desire to write his own history. Likewise, the catalogue of images and impressions he lists while looking out the train window appears to be an attempt at orienting himself, something that must necessarily fail, as his surroundings constantly shift around him. While the experience of train travel had, by the time that Sebald was writing, become less disorienting, the narrator in *Austerlitz* seems to exhibit some traces of this kind of anxiety.

described variously as a labyrinth,[165] as "an experience to be lived, suffered, undergone,"[166] as "the stage where staging itself occurs [and] the place where everything is both available and vanishing, […] as the stage in which all prosceniums are unfolding and disappearing."[167] The city assumes a number of guises in literature, but the city as labyrinth and the oppressive or overwhelming city are most frequently encountered. *Austerlitz's* unnamed narrator experiences the city in this way.

The city's overwhelming nature is frequently based on its ability to disorient. However, Hartwig Isernhagen argues in his article on the city as labyrinth that the city has always had an overwhelming effect on the human subject, even before it became disorderly enough to be geographically disorienting. He suggests that the early narrated city had kaleidoscopic effect, with the human apparently stationary and the city's many distractions and entertainments simply revolving around her.[168] The subject's location and orientation are not confused by the kaleidoscopic effect of the city, but the onslaught of images and distractions causes an overwhelming sensation. The narrator's description of his approach into London via train mirrors this sort of kaleidoscopic experience and heightens his lack of agency in that passage. The narrator describes the scenes

---

[165] See: Wendy B. Faris, "The Labyrinth as Sign," in *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film*, ed. Mary Ann Caws (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1991), 33–41.; Huyssen, "Modernist Miniatures."; Hartwig Isernhagen, "Die Bewußtseinskrise Der Moderne und Die Erfahrung Der Stadt Als Labyrinth," in *Die Stadt in Der Literatur*, ed. Cord Meckseper and Elisabeth Schraut (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 81–104.; Anja Johannsen, *Kisten, Krypten, Labyrinthe: Raumfigurationen in Der Gegenwartsliteratur: W.G. Sebald, Anne Duden, Herta Müller* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008). See also Chapter Two of this dissertation for more on the labyrinth in Sebald.

[166] Peter Preston and Paul Simpson-Housley, "Introduction: Writing the City," in *Writing the City: Eden, Babylon, and the New Jerusalem* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 1.

[167] Mary Ann Caws, *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1991), 13.

[168] The kaleidoscopic experience of the city can best be understood as a diachronic experience. Rather than seeing or experiencing (synchronically) multiple facets or layers of the city at once, the human in the city sees or experiences (diachronically) a series of images or facets in a linear fashion.
"Für die Betrachter – auch dort, wo sie am weitestgehenden desorientiert werden – bleibt die geographisch-räumliche Ordnung der Stadt erhalten, und das chaotische Gewimmel ihrer vermaßten Einwohner hat eher kaleidokopische als labyrinthische Züge: Es zieht vorbei am Betrachter, dessen Blickpunkt für ihn selbst in ganz naiver Weise zentral und ordnungsstiftend ist; er weiß immer im Grundsätzlichen, wo er ist und daß alle Unordnung um ihn herum mindestens erfahrungsmäßig auf ihn bezogen ist. Er geht nie verloren."
Isernhagen, "Die Bewußtseinskrise Der Moderne Und Die Erfahrung Der Stadt Als Labyrinth," 82.

spinning past him (*vorbeidrehen*), which recalls Isernhagen's kaleidoscopic early city. Here the narrator *is* disoriented, commenting on the persistent unfamiliarity of the sights despite his long tenure in the country. Of course, here the disorientation is not the result of becoming geographically lost, but rather of the psychological burden he perceives in the transition from country to city.

The modern, disorienting city is the hallmark of the twentieth-century urban novel, as seen in both Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* and Döblin's *Berlin, Alexanderplatz.* These cities embody what Isernhagen calls the labyrinthine city. This type of city can only develop when it embodies a new order of laws ("eine neue Gesetzlichkeit")[169] or when the human's ability to orient herself is hindered by the disorder of the streets or by such forces as night or fog.[170] This new order goes against the principle of "'legibility' of the cityscape,"[171] by which he means, broadly put, the human's ability to recognize parts of the city, organize its parts into a coherent whole, and find her way through the city relying on the full range of senses as well as kinesthesia.[172] All of these senses work together to create "the environmental image," an assembly of spatial memories and immediate sensory input that humans use to create a mental map or at least a general image of the shape and function of the city, an ability that is deeply rooted in our evolutionary development[173] and which is even tied into a person's emotional wellbeing.[174] To the list of necessary senses for navigating environments, Yi-Fu Tuan adds experience as a prerequisite for human spatial processing: "It takes

---

[169] Ibid., 84.

[170] Isernhagen points out that this type of environment is epitomized by the portrayal of London in Dickens's *Bleak House.*

[171] Lynch, *The Image of the City*, 2.

[172] cf. Ibid.

[173] cf. Ibid., 4.

[174] Ibid.

time and practice for the infant or the person born blind but with sight recently restored[175] to

perceive the world as made up of stable three-dimensional objects arranged in space rather than as

shifting patterns and colors."[176] Like Tuan, Lynch insists that human navigation through

environments is not the product of "any mystic 'instinct'"[177] but rather that humans respond

rationally to sensory clues and stimuli. Lynch further claims that the human capacity for processing

spatial stimuli is so far developed that "[t]o become completely lost is perhaps a rather rare

experience for most people in the modern city,"[178] a claim which Tuan might expand by suggesting

that if one had no experience of an urban environment it might not be so difficult to become lost.

It is in these circumstances that the city becomes a labyrinth and the subject actually finds

herself lost in a city that was previously familiar, navigable, or in Lynch's language, legible.[179] In

Berlin, Alexanderplatz, the city is just such a labyrinthine city, a place "an dem Menschen

kaputtgemacht werden."[180] While Sebald's narrated city occasionally resembles the disorienting

environment we see in these city novels,[181] the city is indispensible to and actually encourages

---

[175] Here Tuan refers to the surgeries pioneered by William Cheselden. A particularly famous case involved Cheselden removing cataracts that had been present since birth from the eyes of a thirteen-year-old, giving him sight for the first time. For more, see William Cheselden, "An Account of Some Observations Made by a Young Gentleman, Who Was Born Blind, or Lost His Sight so Early, That He Had No Remembrance of Ever Having Seen, and Was Couch'd Between 13 and 14 Years of Age," *Philosophical Transactions: Giving Some Accompt of the Present Undertakings, Studies and Labours of the Ingenious in Many Considerable Parts of the World* 34.

[176] Tuan, *Space and Place*, 12.

[177] Lynch, *The Image of the City*, 3.

[178] Ibid.

[179] cf. Isernhagen, "Die Bewußtseinskrise Der Moderne Und Die Erfahrung Der Stadt Als Labyrinth," 83.

[180] Ibid., 87.

[181] The best example of this kind of overwhelming urban space is found in Ambros Adelwarth's description of Jerusalem from *Die Ausgewanderten*: "Im großen und ganzen furchtbarer Eindruck. Andenken- und Devotionalienhändler beinahe in jedem Haus. [...] Die neueren Bauten von einer schwer zu beschreibenden Häßlichkeit. In den Straßen große Mengen von Unrat. On marche sur des merdes!!! Knöcheltief mancherorts der pudrige Kalkstaub. Die wenigen Pflanzen nach der seit Mai andauernden Dürre von diesem Steinmehl überzogen wie von einer bösen Krankheit." (Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 204.) This passage is followed immediately by a chaotic list of charities and missions clustered in the

Austerlitz's efforts at reconnecting with his past. Where the city in Döblin and Dos Passos thwarts

its inhabitants at every turn, Sebald's urban landscape does not. Having extensively studied Döblin,

Sebald was well aware of the nature of the city in his works and may, perhaps, be reacting to those

narrative landscapes.[182]

The anxiety and impotence inherent in these passages starkly contrasts with the tone of

Austerlitz's compulsive nighttime wanderings through London. This passage is completely free of

the overwhelming sense of oppression present in the passages above:

> Mehr als ein Jahr lang, glaube ich sagte Austerlitz, bin ich bei Einbruch der Dunkelheit außer
> Haus gegangen, immer fort und fort, auf der Mile End und Bow Road über Stratford bis
> nach Chigwell und Romford hinaus, quer durch Bethnal Green und Canonbury, durch
> Holloway und Kentish Town bis auf die Heide von Hampstead, südwärts über den Fluß
> nach Peckham und Dulwich oder nach Westen zu bis Richmond Park. Man kann ja
> tatsächlich zu Fuß in einer einzigen Nacht fast von einem Ende dieser riesigen Stadt ans
> andere gelangen, sagte Austerlitz, und wenn man einmal gewöhnt ist an das einsame Gehen
> und auf diesen Wegen nur einzelnen Nachtgespenstern begegnet, dann wundert man sich
> bald darüber, daß überall in den zahllosen Häusern, in Greenwich geradeso wie in Bayswater
> oder Kensington, die Londoner jeden Alters, anscheinend einer vor langer Zeit getroffenen
> Vereinbarung, in ihren Betten liegen, zugedeckt und, wie sie glauben müssen, unter sicherem
> Dach, während sie doch in Wahrheit nur niedergestreckt sind, das Gesicht vor Furcht gegen
> die Erde gekehrt, wie einst bei der Rast auf dem Weg durch die Wüste. Bis in die
> entlegensten Bezirke haben mich meine Wanderungen geführt, in Vorhöfe der Metropole, in
> die ich sonst niemals gekommen wäre, und wenn es Tag wurde, bin ich wieder nach
> Whitechapel zurückgefahren mit der Untergrundbahn, zusammen mit all den anderen armen
> Seelen, die um diese Zeit von der Peripherie zurückfluten in die Mitte.[183]

The mode of description here differs markedly from the narrator's description of the train ride into

London. Where the narrator's perspective is clearly ground- or train-level and he sees a degree of

---

middle of the city, which I discuss at length in Chapter Five of this dissertation. Here, though, the city makes an alienating, unpleasant impression. Many moments of disorientation follow, heightening the sense of the city as labyrinth.

[182] For more on Sebald's reception of Döblin, see Anja K. Johannsen, "'The Contrarieties That Are in Our Yearnings': Allegorical, Nostalgic and Transcendent Spaces in the Work of W. G. Sebald," *Journal of European Studies* 41, no. 3/4 (December 2011): 377–393.; Richard Sheppard, "W. G. Sebald's Reception of Alfred Döblin," in *Alfred Döblin: Paradigms of Modernism*, ed. Steffan Davies and Ernest Schonfield, Publications (University of London. Institute of Germanic Studies) 95 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 350–376.; Ben Hutchinson, "The Shadow of Resistance: W. G. Sebald and the Frankfurt School", December 2011.

[183] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 186–187.

detail that is appropriate to that perspective, Austerlitz's mode of description more reflects the random order in which a person might take in place names while scanning a map than the trajectory of a person walking through the city. His use of compass directions (*nach Westen*, *südwärts*), the catalogue of street and place names is reminiscent of other enumerations and the random order in which they are listed is clinical, reinforcing Austerlitz's status as an outsider and his perspective as one somehow above ground level.

These contrasting modes of description can also be organized temporally: the birds-eye perspective can be understood as a synchronic perspective, uniting in a single whole the layers of history present, while the linear, ground-level perspective is diachronic and invested in a progression of present moments.[184] The lack of emotion in this description further distances Austerlitz from empathy with or a common experience of the city through the eyes of the other inhabitants. In the one moment where he acknowledges that wandering the city at night might be an unpleasant pastime, Austerlitz depersonalizes his description (*man kann, wenn man einmal gewöhnt ist, dann wundert man sich*) rather than persisting in using the personal *ich* form. The depersonalization of his rhetoric continues as he pities, rather than empathizes with the morning commuters (*mit all den armen Seelen*) on his way back home after a night's wanderings. Oddly, Austerlitz does not find the nighttime city at all threatening, as Isernhagen's analysis of night and dark might suggest. By contrast, Appleton's prospect-refuge theory emphasizes the protective nature of the absence of light: "what light is to the prospect darkness is to the refuge. Just as light is conducive to seeing, so deprivation of light is

---

[184] Preston and Simpson-Housley read Penelope Lively's description of two characters' impressions of London (in *City of the Mind*) similarly: "Here, Penelope Lively attempts to read - or listen to - the narrative that is inscribed in and spoken by the city. This narrative is both diachronic, in that it recounts a story of change through time, and synchronic in that it sees that story as existing and constantly surfacing in the contemporary city." Preston and Simpson-Housley, "Introduction: Writing the City," 7.

conducive to not being seen."[185] So, perhaps Austerlitz takes refuge in the cover of darkness as well as in his encyclopedic knowledge of the streets.

Moreover, Austerlitz's thoughts during these walks are of an impersonal, philosophical nature: he muses on the thousands of people sleeping in houses they assume to be safe, but implies that this assumed safety is invalid. His almost patronizing tone seems to imply that Austerlitz is above or beyond the sleeping masses. He lifts himself entirely out of the context of normal humans who work during the day and sleep during the night, and suddenly he has insight to match. Austerlitz's god-like perspective is enhanced by the invocation of a Biblical story (the flight through the desert) and by his seemingly universal insight into the lives of others. The presence of the narrator is reasserted by a singular "sagte Austerlitz" in this passage. The narrator's recourse to Austerlitz's voice to describe the nighttime city highlights the contrast between the narrator's limited perspective and Austerlitz's seeming omniscience. This constitutes a further reversal of the labyrinthine city in modernist texts. Isernhagen argues that the narrators in Dos Passos and Döblin's texts are able to organize the narrative – and by extension the space in which the narrative takes place – because of their status as omniscient narrators. Their perspective on the city affords them an overview of the organization not only of the characters' lives, but of the city itself, exempting them from the disorientation inherent in the modern metropolis. Clearly the narrator of *Austerlitz* is not omniscient and does not have this power to orient himself in the city. Upon entering the city, he is disoriented, overwhelmed, and uncomfortable. Austerlitz, on the other hand, the protagonist upon whom the city ought to be acting as an overwhelming force, rises above the city, eschewing diachronicity or linearity in his narrative, and uniting through synchronic narrative numerous different locations within the city, different moments in history, and multiple different perspectives.

---

[185] Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, 100.

Compared to the narrator's description of his train journey, which is full of emotion, personal observation, and detail, Austerlitz's description is distanced and factual. The narrator's linear or diachronic description of the journey into London is marked by images flying past him on the train in a succession, all contributing to a growing feeling of anxiety which is attributed to the changing topography around him. On the other end of the spectrum, Austerlitz's description bears no marks of specific time, describing the wanderings of an entire year as if they took place on a single night. This synchronic mode of description and the god-like perspective from which it is carried out explain Austerlitz's almost uncanny comfort with wandering the metropolis at night. And this is, perhaps, the pivotal point in understanding Austerlitz's relationship with the city. He is not hampered by darkness, nor is he disoriented in the city at night.

It becomes apparent in later passages that walking was a favorite pastime of the young Austerlitz. As a child, Austerlitz spent his days walking through the parks, gardens, and streets of Prague with his nanny, Věra.[186] The significance of these early walks is brought home when Austerlitz visits Prague in search of his origins. His first flashes of recognition take place during the familiar uphill walk toward his family's apartment and later, he reenacts their walks through Prague's *Seminargarten*:

> 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 in den Erdboden zu starren. Sein Anblick erinnerte mich daran, auf den Spaziergängen mit Věra oft solche alte 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. Bis gegen Mittag bin ich dann auf einer Bank in der Sonne gesessen und habe über die Häuser der Kleinseite und die Moldau hinweg auf das Panorama der Stadt geschaut, das mir, genau wie der Firnis auf einem gemalten Bild, durchzogen schien von den krummen Rissen und Sprüngen der vergangenen Zeit. Ein zweites dieser nach keinem erkennbaren Gesetz entstehenden Muster, sagte Austerlitz, fand ich wenig später in dem verschlungenen Wurzelwerk einer an einem stark abschüssigen Platz sich einhaltenden Kastanie, in dem ich, wie ich von Věra weiß, sagte Austerlitz, mit Vorliebe herumgeklettert bin als Kind. Auch die schwarzgrünen Eiben, die unter den hohen Bäumen wuchsen, waren

[186] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 226–227.

mir vertraut, so vertraut wie die kühle Luft, die mich auf dem Grund des Tobels umfing, und wie die jetzt, im April, bereits verblühten, in endloser Zahl den Waldboden bedeckenden Buschwindrosen, und ich begriff nun, warum mir vor Jahren auf einer meiner Landhausexpeditionen mit Hilary die Stimme versagte, as wir in einem dem Schönborngarten in seiner ganzen Anlage sehr ähnlichen Park in Gloucestershire unversehens vor einem nordseitigen Abhang standen, der überzogen war von den feingefiederten Blättern und der schneeweißen Märzblüte der Anemone nemorosa.[187]

This description of Austerlitz's walk through Prague's *Seminargarten* is an extreme example of his tendency to pull together events from different times as if they were simultaneous. This technique is evident in the temporal layering of this passage: Austerlitz's childhood in Prague, his later visit to a Gloucestershire manor house in England, and finally the present moment are all present in the image of the roots. This scene is unites these disparate times and locations is imbued with the emotions of remembering his childhood, his remembrance of very strong emotion when unconsciously reminded of his childhood, and his confusion in trying to process the emotion of having found the site of a forgotten childhood memory. This confusion is directly related to the question of networks of meaning: just as the novel uses leitmotivs to knit the narrative together, Austerlitz seems to be seeking recurrent images to connect moments from disparate phases of his life. In this case, he sees correspondence between the present and both pasts in the roots of the chestnut tree, the slope of the ground, and in the blanket of flowers covering the ground. Austerlitz uses various terms to designate what I am calling a network of meaning. Here he refers to a *Muster* or pattern, which he sees in the roots of the tree[188] and in an imaginary varnish over what he calls the panorama of the city. Although he experiences a range of emotions in this passage, Austerlitz attempts to maintain some distance between himself and his response to his home town, describing the view of the city as a painting and focusing on the cracks in the imaginary varnish. This idea of a varnish heightens the sense of the city as imaginary or artificial, draws the reader's attention to the

---

[187] Ibid., 237–239.

[188] Here it is difficult not to think of family trees and the idea of establishing roots in a home-making sense.

constructedness of it, and seems to imply its imperfection. The network of roots, however, is

tangible, naturally occurring, and tied to Austerlitz's recollection of climbing in the tree. However,

this concrete reminder of his past may have gone unnoticed had Věra not informed Austerlitz of his

preference for this particular tree. While Austerlitz seems moved by the view of the city and

attempts to maintain critical distance from it, the opposite seems to be true of his observation of the

tree. Having been told it was significant, he attempts to reestablish that feeling, but isn't entirely

successful.

Although Austerlitz is untouched by the disorientation that traditionally accompanies

nighttime in the city, mist and smoke (akin to Isernhagen's disorienting fog) take on an almost

mystical presence in a number of scenes from the novel. Austerlitz is not disoriented by smoke or

mist, but the moments where fog, smoke, and mist appear are generally laden with emotion. Where

earlier the narrowing of the visual field in the city was a diminishment of prospect, here fog can be

read, according to Appleton, as a potential symbol of refuge:

> A particular kind of refuge (nebulous) which seems to be capable of arousing a powerful aesthetic response is that created by mist. A wisp of it among the trees, or on a lake, especially when seen from a higher elevation, suggests a kind of veil, whose significance in the art of concealment is self-explanatory. A thin smoke haze at evening provides a gratuitous increment to the refuge symbolism of the town which lies beneath it, just as a skein of peat-smoke may spread a symbolic blanket above the cottage from whose chimney it rises. But smoke and mist are substances which must be employed in moderation. To be immersed in a fog is one of the bleakest sensations. It does not create a refuge; it rather frustrates a prospect."[189]

This hazardous type of fog is seen during Austerlitz's visit to a church in Norfolk with Marie de

Verneuil. In that scene he says that he could not express his feelings to her. His reticence is

reiterated as he says,

> stumm sahen wir zu, wie [der Nebel] langsam nun über die Schwelle des Portals kroch, ein niedrig sich fortwälzendes, kräuselndes Gewölk, das nach und nach über den ganzen Steinboden sich ausbreitete, immer dichter und dichter wurde und zusehens höher stieg, bis

---

[189] Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, 93.

wir nurmehr zur Hälfte aus ihm herausragten und fürchten mußten, es könnte uns bald den Atem nehmen.[190]

While the fog in this passage arouses feelings of anxiety in Austerlitz (and, he supposes, in Marie de Verneuil), feelings of disorientation are wholly absent. Instead of fearing that they would become lost in the fog, Austerlitz fears that the fog will suffocate them both. This fog seems to be acting as a metaphor for the rising tide of Austerlitz's emotions and the coming suffocation stands in for his inability to express his feelings. Another kind of fog entirely appears in the form of the miasma, the form that Agata gives to the creeping fear that accompanied the Germans' entry into Prague. Věra tells Austerlitz that "Agata behauptete, [die Angst] käme sogar bei den geschlossenen Fenstern und Türen herein und nehme einem den Atem."[191] It is significant that here, fear itself threatens to rob one of his or her breath, where in Austerlitz's description of the fog in the church, he is afraid of the fog taking his breath away. The same phrase "einem den Atem nehmen" is used in both descriptions.

However, mist does not always have such a sinister aura. Rather, in some cases it acts as a filter through which or even the medium that makes it possible for Austerlitz to regain his memory. Austerlitz uses mist as a metaphor for his struggle for meaning and his search for his lost history:

> Tatsächlich begann ich damals, meistens bei der Heimkehr von meinen nächtlichen Exkursionen, durch eine Art von treibendem Rauch oder Schleier hindurch Farben und Formen von einer sozusagen verminderten Körperlichkeit zu sehen, Bilder aus einer verblichenen Welt […][192]

Here Austerlitz uses the ambiguous verb *treiben* (meaning to float, to drive, or to push, among others) to describe a kind of smoke that either simply appears before him or that actually pursues

---

[190] It is important to note that here Austerlitz employs a synchronic narrative style, jumping seamlessly between disparate points in his own history. The narrator is not able to do this, relying on a traditional timeline to organize his narrative, proceeding from one encounter with Austerlitz to another. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 200.

[191] Ibid., 256.

[192] Ibid., 187–188.

him. In this case, the smoke both reveals and obscures Austerlitz's vision of his past – embodying

the ambivalent nature of mist described by Appleton. It both impels him to seek his past and blocks

his progress forward. It is both the medium in which his memories take form and a barrier between

Austerlitz and his personal history. It is significant that he "sees" these specters (however

stereotypical) on his way home ("bei der Heimkehr") from his nightly wanderings and that he always

travels to or through the train station is always on his way home. His literal (geographical) way home

is also a kind of figurative homecoming, with every trip to or through Liverpool Street Station

accumulating to culminate in his underground epiphany.

Other scenes pervaded by mist or smoke are similarly emotionally laden, but the vapor itself

does not have such a clear metaphorical meaning. Instead, smoke and mist take on a mystical

quality, its appearance creating the atmosphere necessary for epiphany or insight. A poignant

example of this phenomenon is the scene in the Liverpool Street Station,[193] where Austerlitz finally

finds the missing link to his forgotten past:

> dies alles war eingeschwärzt von einer schmierigen Schicht, die sich im Verlauf eines
> Jahrhunderts gebildet hatte aus Koksstaub und Ruß, Wasserdampf, Schwefel und Dieselöl.
> Selbst an sonnigen Tagen drang durch das gläserne Hallendach nur ein diffuses, vom Schein
> der Kugellampen kaum erhelltes Grau, und in dieser ewigen Düsternis, die erfüllt war von
> einem erstickten Stimmengewirr, einem leisen Gescharre und Getrappel, bewegten sich die
> aus den Zügen entlassenen oder auf sie zustrebenden ungezählten Menschen in Strömen, die
> zusammen- und auseinanderliefen und an den Barrieren und Engpässen sich stauten wie
> Wasser an einem Wehr.[194]

In this case, the smoke and mist are seen in their accumulation over time. Decades' worth of coal

dust, smoke, and steam have accumulated, leaving a layer of grime covering everything in the station.

---

[193] Liverpool Street Station, originally built in 1874, was located at that time in one of the poorest districts of London. Its design is described as ingenious – due to the odd location and the fact that most of its site is under street level – but not spectacular. (See Alan Arthur Jackson, *London's Termini* (Newton Abbot,: David & Charles, 1969), 108.) Its most distinguishing characteristic is its roof, "lofty and delicate-looking, […] impart[ing] grace to the interior." (Jackson, *London's Termini*, 111–112.)

[194] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 189.

This passage from Sebald is reminiscent of a description of St. Pancras (another railway station) in Jackson's 1969 study of rail termini in London:

> Entering [St. Pancras] on a foggy afternoon, the visitor received the full impact of the steam railway, assaulting all his senses at once. Smoke and steam rose slowly to a roof almost out of view, whilst at the far end the atmosphere concentrated to a muddy dark yellow, obscuring the gasometers. In the great cavern between, where the electric lighting always seemed to fight a losing battle with the murk, all locomotive sounds were amplified.[195]

While in Jackson's description of the early station the filth, smoke, and steam are all present under an impossibly high roof, we see one key difference: in Austerlitz's description the grime gives everything a muted effect. Mysteriously, what takes place in that part of the station is dampened – audibly (*erstickten Stimmengewirr, einem leisen Gescharre und Getrappel*) as well as visibly (*ein diffuses, kaum erhelltes Grau, Düsternis*).[196] The grime – the tangible residue of more than a century's smoke – changes the quality of light. It is interesting to note that the visible traces of history are created by pollution. This casts a negative light on the urban palimpsest and suggests that perhaps the traces would be best wiped away.

The description of this muted atmosphere is interrupted in the text by a photo depicting a train station with similar architecture and a bank of lights shining toward the viewer, apparently through a mist of some sort, throwing the columns and arches of the building into silhouette. Though the image is identifiably of a train station, the strong contrast and architectural features, and the proximity to a huge burial ground,[197] might almost lead one to believe it is an image of a church or other religious building.

---

[195] Jackson, *London's Termini*, 69.

[196] The quietness of the Liverpool Street station is reminiscent of Austerlitz and Marie de Verneuil's tense silence in the previous passage. The latter passage is marked by the adjective *stumm* while in the former we see the adjective *leise* and *erstickt*, which, in turn, recalls the anxiety about suffocation that appears in Austerlitz's description of the encroaching fog.

[197] In fact, Liverpool Street Station was built on the site of the old Bethlehem (or "Bedlam") hospital gardens, which included its cemetery. Jackson, *London's Termini*, 109.

Although railway stations were not often explicitly modeled after churches or cathedrals,

religious architecture featured prominently in discussions about terminus design in the nineteenth

century. In his authoritative study of railway station architecture, Meeks quotes a report from

Building News in 1875 that makes this connection clear: "Railway termini and hotels are to the

nineteenth century what monasteries and cathedrals were to the thirteenth century. They are truly

the only real representative building we possess. . . . Our metropolitan termini have been leaders of

the art spirit of our time."[198] Indeed both the investors' fervor and elements of station architecture

called the church to mind. Jackson writes, "Some […] highly charged attitude on the part of

investors is required to account for the lavishness of the new stations which so often reminded their

contemporaries of medieval cathedrals—stations which embodied the triumph of the picturesque

eclectic aesthetic in complex massing, bolder asymmetry, pointed vaults, and towers."[199] Despite

these parallels to church architecture, station design was primarily inspired by the materials that

made the development of the railway possible in the first place—iron. Léonce Reynaud, a well-

known French architect and engineer of the time is quoted, saying, "Iron forms the rails and should

have a part in the building they give rise to. It would be appropriate to glorify in some way the

precious material to which industry has just given birth and which has, perhaps, endowed

architecture with the most beneficial invention of the epoch."[200] Reynaud also criticized train

stations across the board, claiming they lacked both a good plan and good design.[201] The problem of

design and practicality was central to the debate surrounding train station design. Writes Meeks,

"The question of whether railroad stations were architecture or engineering continued to be

---

[198] *Building News* (1875), quoted in Carroll Louis Vanderslice Meeks, *The Railroad Station; an Architectural History.*, Yale Historical Publications. History of Art, 11 (New Haven,: Yale University Press, 1956), iii.

[199] Ibid., 90.

[200] Léonce Reynaud quoted in Ibid., 62.

[201] See Ibid.

discussed. […] Recent stations were compared to struggling monsters trying by every architectural

device to attract public attention. […] St. Pancras and Liverpool Street Stations were allowed the

merit of breaking monotony. Monotony was anathema to the whole century, perhaps fortunately,

since their architects gave them so little of it."[202] He also notes that Liverpool Street made an effort

to combine in its design both iron and brick, materials that otherwise did not mesh well.[203] The

railway expansion in England faced criticism from many of the preeminent intellectuals of the day,

including, among others Ruskin, Wyatt, Barry, and Statham.[204]

The characteristics that railway stations most frequently shared with churches were a

preoccupation with time and the presence of towers. The former was a natural development – trains

ran on a schedule and so clocks took a central position in train station design, just as they had in

church design before.[205] Towers became a prime feature in English and American train station

design, while continental stations primarily favored arched constructions.[206] Meeks sees the

preponderance of towers in English station design as the result of an accumulation of cultural

associations with towers of various sorts[207] and likens the mania for building the highest tower of the

---

[202] Ibid., 90.

[203] See ibid.

[204] Ibid., 4.

[205] Liverpool Street Station eventually was crowned by the addition of two large, electrical four-faced clocks, which were suspended above the platforms. See Jackson, *London's Termini*, 111–112.

[206] See Meeks, *The Railroad Station: An Architectural History*, 66–67.

[207] Meeks writes, in his characteristic style, "Each bewhiskered gentleman would have heard his nurse gossiping about the collapse of Beckford's celebrated tower at Fonthill in 1825. […] Each visit to a collection of paintings would make him realize that ruined towers were pictorial above every other subject. […] Henry James tells us that the sight of a ruined tower, seen one day as he was crossing the Alps, suddenly made real to him the whole glorious tradition of European culture. The step from seeing towers through such an aura—one which we can never recapture—to building them was almost inevitable. Some process parallel to the conditioning of young birds would have been operative: whatever creature the fledgling first notices makes and irreversible and ineradicable impact upon its emotions, a conditioning called "imprinting." A similar conditioning may have resulted from so many-faceted and indoctrination into the lore of towers." Ibid., 94.

nineteenth century with later competition to build the highest skyscrapers in the twentieth (and twenty-first).[208]

While railway stations may not have been designed as literal copies of churches, they occasionally fulfilled a religious function. An example is seen in the building in London of the Brookwood Necropolis Railway. This station and its trains facilitated the transport of corpses from central London to the new Brookwood cemetery on the fringes of town. On the top floor of the station was "the *Chapelle Ardente*, the special chapel which provided a private resting place for coffins in the most ostentatious surroundings. It also provided a place where those who were unable to attend the actual funeral could assist in the first part of the service at the Necropolis station."[209] The conflation of the train station with a religious space in *Austerlitz* is redoubled if one considers the presence of incense in a church, whether in actively smoking form or in the trace of scent left behind after a service, and its uses in ceremonies of meditation and worship. Religion figures only tangentially in the makeup of Austerlitz's character. He speculates that one of the reasons that the pastor and his wife adopted him was to spare his "vom Christenglauben unberührte Seele vor der ewigen Verdammnis."[210] His allusion to having escaped persecution through his evacuation to England and what he later learns of his mother's death[211] certainly identify him as the child of a Jewish woman, yet he experiences no reawakening of faith and never identifies himself as a religious person. In the train station, however, he does appear to find a place for meditation. The quasi-sacred atmosphere, created in part by the quality of light and air in the station, eventually leads Austerlitz to have an epiphany or experience an otherworldly insight into his own past.

---

[208] See ibid.

[209] John M Clarke, *The Brookwood Necropolis Railway* (Oxford: Oakwood, 1995), 17.

[210] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 202.

[211] Austerlitz learns from Věra about his mother's persecution and eventual deportation, a result of her Jewish heritage, while visiting Prague. Ibid., 251.

While some characteristics of the main hall of the train station are repeated in the

underground setting of the Ladies Waiting Room, this setting is uniquely characterized by the quality

of light.

> Trotzdem dieses Licht in der Höhe sehr hell war, eine art Staubglitzern, könnte man sagen, hatte es, indem es sich niedersenkte, den Anschein, als würde es von den Mauerflächen und den niedrigeren Regionen des Raumes aufgesogen, as vermehre es nur das Dunkel und verrinne in schwarzen Striemen, ungefähr so wie Regenwasser auf den glatten Stämmen der Buchen oder an einer Fassade aus Gußbeton. Manchmal, wenn draußen über der Stadt die Wolkendecke aufriß, schossen einzelne gebündelte Strahlen in den Wartesaal herein, die aber meist auf halbem Weg schon erloschen. 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.[212]

In this passage, the mystical nature of the air in the Ladies Waiting Room is made evident in the

strange behavior of the light, which condenses like vapor, runs down the walls like water, and even

defies the laws of physics: some rays of light are interrupted mid-air, while others proceed toward

the ground in impossible ways, spiraling through the air. Light seems to become more tangible, and

its apparent magical powers suggest a kind of consciousness or agency.[213] The language used to

describe the penetration of light into darkness is almost violent –verbs such as *schießen* and *aufreißen*

describe their entry into the space. On the other hand, the forces that cause the light to diminish

before reaching the ground are more passive, but equally, if not more powerful. The words used are

aufsogen, *erloschen*, and *verschlucken*. Although the light seems to be attacking the darkness in this space,

the darkness does not have to actively defend itself in order for the light to succumb. The words

---

[212] Ibid., 198.

[213] This phenomenon of light is reminiscent of another of Appleton's symbols of prospect:
"Some distance along the shaded road a little patch of sunlight proclaims that a breach in the flanking forest allows the penetration of the sun. If the observer is alive to an awareness of his environment he will, perhaps without consciously recognizing it, sense the probability that, at this point, his field of vision may be extended, not merely within the confines of the direct vista but also at least in that other direction from which the sunlight enters." (Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, 82.)
Here Appleton describes just the sort of shafts of light that Austerlitz sees penetrating the dark of the train station. It seems fitting that this moment of illumination takes place in something that Appleton might read as a prospect-laden setting, however unnaturally the light in fact behaves.

Staubglitzern and *schwarz* remind the reader of the ever-present smoke of the train station while the division of the light into individual rays seems to imply that the light filters through a kind of fabric. In fact, Austerlitz describes the structures suspended in the space above him as a kind of net or "stellenweise ausgefransten Gewebe."[214] Fabric occurs as a theme with relative frequency: Austerlitz refers to a *Schleier*, through which he begins to see his history appearing and describes the resurfacing memories thus: "[…]das Entscheidende lag auch gar nicht in der im Grunde mich nur ablenkenden Frage, sondern in den Erinnerungsfetzen, die durch die Außenbezirke meines Bewußtseins zu treiben begannen[…]" These *Erinnerungsfetzen* or shreds or tatters of memory, also have a fabric-like character.[215] Meanwhile, Austerlitz describes the *Erinnerungsfetzen* running through his consciousness, describing his consciousness as if it were a city. In a way, his memories wander through his consciousness in the same way that he felt compelled to wander the city at night, both waiting for a moment of enlightenment.

To sum up, for Austerlitz, the city and the archetypal urban topos of the train station[216] do not have the menacing or overwhelming nature that is present in works such as Döblin's *Berlin, Alexanderplatz* that prominently feature urban spaces. Whereas in that text the city disorients the protagonist, in *Austerlitz* it orientates him. Austerlitz's wanderings through London and his loitering in the train station enable him to access the buried memory of his origin. Furthermore, the very

---

[214] Sebald, *Austerlitz,* 197–198.

[215] Of course the etymology of "text" refers to something that is woven.

[216] On the status of train stations in the city, Harbison writes,
"Railroad stations leave one of the strongest impressions of city life, which lingers after more strictly architectural ones have faced. These are some of the most ambitious and least demonstrative things ever built, which properly have no outside, their shape a primitive and amorphous one, a deliberate huge simplification to a single cell. They could be added to or their furniture shifted without disturbing the encasing structure, a loose molecular wall providing scant definition. Their image of freedom is that of the undifferentiated cell as a flexible machine, presented after one has got past the front part of the station, the stone, decorated part which is really just a big door. Strictly speaking, nothing is needed but a wall across the end of the shed with an entrance in it, but understandably railroads could not put these huge things in the middle of cities without making them look like buildings." Robert Harbison, *Eccentric Spaces* (Boston: D.R. Godine, 1988), 40.
John Ruskin also famously criticized the building of the British railway systems in the Victorian period.

characteristics that generally inspire feelings of anxiety in other urban texts – night, darkness, and

fog – seem to be prerequisite for Austerlitz's search for his past.

PRAGUE

While Sebald's London seems to reach out to our protagonist, offering moments of insight

and remaining benign instead of menacing, Prague, where Austerlitz attempts to recover the details

of his past, and Terezín, where he visits the site of his mother's presumable demise, take on an

entirely different character. Where London offered insights, albeit without details, Austerlitz's visit

to Prague yields details and anecdotes aplenty, but without the satisfaction one might have expected.

The revelations of Prague are much less substantial and more spectral, however detailed they may

be.[217]

Surely, the insubstantiality and unreal character of the scenes described by Věra in her

conversations with Austerlitz can be attributed to the way in which she reveals them to Austerlitz

and are relayed, in turn, by Austerlitz to the narrator. These passages repeatedly call attention to the

embedded narrative to which, by this point in the novel, the reader has become accustomed.

Whereas in other passages the narrator disappears almost entirely, here he continually reinserts

himself into the narrative by the frequent interpolation of "sagte Austerlitz," "sagte Věra," "so sagte

Věra zu mir, sagte Austerlitz" and so forth. The nested effect of this narrative style is heightened in

---

[217] Of course, Prague raises the specter of Kafka, whose writings always serve as key intertexts for Sebald. For more on the presence of Kafka in Sebald, see: Martin Klebes, "Infinite Journey: From Kafka to Sebald," in *W.G. Sebald: A Critical Companion*, ed. J.J. Long and Anne Whitehead (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 123–139.; Katja Garloff, "Kafka's Crypt: W. G. Sebald and the Melancholy of Modern German Jewish Culture," *Germanic Review* 82, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 123–140.; Ritchie Robertson, "W. G. Sebald as a Critic of Austrian Literature," *Journal of European Studies* 41, no. 3/4 (December 2011): 305–322.; Maria E. Brunner, "Gesteigerte Formen Der Wahrnehmung in Schwindel Gefühle. (German)," *Amsterdamer Beiträge Zur Neueren Germanistik* 72, no. 1 (December 2009): 475–492.;

A further essay to consider in the context of Prague is Hélène Cixous's essay about her compulsion to visit Prague and the various forces that keep her from finding the "Promised Pragues" she had imagined. See Hélène Cixous, "Attacks of the Castle," in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neal Leach (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 303–309.

the Prague passages by the shift to triple layering and the constant vacillation of voice, addressee, and narrator in the passages where Austerlitz speaks with Věra about his parents, his home, and his childhood serve to disorient the reader. Although others read this passage differently – Johannsen, for instance, understands the bracketed narrative as a way to mirror in language the presence of multiple layers of time and as evidence that Austerlitz's "Erinnerungsprozess" cannot be completed[218] – I would argue that this heavily layered style points out the uncertainty Austerlitz must certainly feel in having to have his own history told to him while underlining the narrator's inability to control the trajectory of the story he narrates.[219] While Austerlitz does not directly express any incredulity, it is palpable. Austerlitz's powers of imagination – or memory – seem to wane considerably in the time between his vision in Liverpool Street Station and his conversations with Věra in Prague. In fact, his first meeting with Věra already holds the seed of these silent doubts: "Daß ich sie, obschon sie trotz ihrer Gebrechlichkeit im Grunde ganz unverändert schien, nicht sofort erkannte, das lag, glaube ich, sagte Austerlitz, an der aufgeregten Verfassung, in welcher ich mich befand und in der ich meinen Augen kaum traute."[220] The halting syntax of this sentence (in part due to the narrator's insertion of "sagte Austerlitz"), points to a kind of hesitation, a wish both to recognize and not to recognize Věra. Věra calls her own memory into question when she says to Austerlitz,

> Seit ich nicht mehr gut aus dem Haus gehen kann und darum fast nichts Neues mir begegnet, sagte Věra, kehren die Bilder, die uns damals so sehr erfreuten, in zunehmender Deutlichkeit, quasi als Phantasien in mir zurück. […]Wenn einem die Erinnerung kommt, glaubt man mitunter, man sehe durch einen gläsernen Berg in die vergangene Zeit […][221]

---

[218] See Johannsen, *Kisten, Krypten, Labyrinthe: Raumfigurationen in Der Gegenwartsliteratur: W.G. Sebald, Anne Duden, Herta Müller*, 36.

[219] This lack of agency and inability to control the narrative is reminiscent of the way the narrator experiences urban space in the passages discussed earlier in this chapter.

[220] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 223.

[221] Ibid., 231–232.

Věra's memories take the form almost of fantasies and one wonders how much might be embellished, despite her apparent intimate knowledge of the events of Austerlitz's childhood and even despite the etymology of her name.[222]

All of which is not to say that Austerlitz does not experience – or seem to experience – moments of recognition during his time in Prague. It does seem, however, that those moments of insight are not brought on by actual relics of his forgotten past (photographs, anecdotes, even the presence of his own nanny), but rather by the city spaces in which his memories formed. Upon his arrival in Prague, Austerlitz describes the city as "die, wie ich nun fürchtete, mir völlig unbekannte und mit mir in keiner Weise verbundene Stadt jenseits des Stroms."[223] It is significant that, on his first night in what he presumes is his home town, Austerlitz chooses to stay on the Kampa island, separated by water from the main bulk of Prague and that while staying there he feels a great distance between himself and the city – he does not recognize it. The first impressions that Austerlitz has of even having been in Prague before come in the form of such small details as a child might fixate on while walking through a familiar street. He acknowledges that he does not absolutely recognize anything but has the feeling "als sei ich auf diesen Wegen schon einmal gegangen, als eröffnete sich mir, nicht durch die Anstrengung des Nachdenkens, sondern durch meine so lange betäubt gewesenen und jetzt wiedererwachenden Sinne, die Erinnerung."[224] Austerlitz likens memory to a sense that had been dulled by his experience and emphasizes that attempts to think his way into his past were unfruitful.[225] He is drawn to minute architectural details like window grates,

---

[222] Sebald may also have borrowed the name Vera from Vladimir Nabokov's wife.

[223] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 218.

[224] Ibid., 220.

[225] We can see this phenomenon at work also in Austerlitz's description of the photo of himself as a child: "An mich selber in diese Rolle aber erinnerte ich mich nicht, so sehr ich mich an jenem Abend und später auch mühte." Ibid., 267.

doorbells, branches of trees reaching over garden walls, all of which were likely period-specific more than place-specific. His recognition of these items does not necessarily indicate that he really had been in Prague before. Indeed, Sebald illustrates this passage with a photograph of a floor decoration, tantalizingly cut off, so that the reader can see all but one missing point of a star or flower shaped mosaic. The photos inserted in this section of the book are, with two exceptions, of architectural features or close-ups of landscape elements. The descriptions of the spaces allegedly represented in the photographs are all emotionally charged, while the two family photos, one allegedly of Austerlitz as a boy and one possibly, though probably not, of his parents standing on a stage, are pervaded by disappointment and alienation. Take, for example, the description of the house in which Austerlitz lived with his parents. This passage is interrupted by two photos: the floor mosaic and a photo of the stairway in the house. Both are rather cold and lacking in atmosphere: they seem to be lit by flash rather than natural light. Neither is inhabited by a person and neither seems calculated to inspire much emotional reaction in the viewer.[226] However, Austerlitz's description is filled with emotion and a sense of connection with the place:

> Und dann die Kühle beim Betreten des Vorhauses in der Šporkova Nr. 12, der gleich neben dem Eingang in die Mauer eingelassene Blechkasten für das Elektrische mit dem Symbol des herabfahrenden Blitzes, die achtblättrige Mosaikblume, taubengrau und schneeweiß, in dem gesprenkelten Kunststeinboden des Entrees, der feuchte Kalkgeruch, die sanft ansteigende Stiege, die haselnußförmigen Eisenknöpfe in bestimmten Abständen auf dem Handlauf des Geländers – lauter Buchstaben und Zeichen aus dem Setzkasten der vergessenen Dinge, dachte ich mir und kam darüber in eine so glückhafte und zugleich angstvolle Verwirrung der Gefühle, daß ich auf den Stufen des stillen Treppenhauses mehr als einmal mich niedersetzen und mit dem Kopf gegen die Wand lehnen mußte.[227]

---

[226] Many of the photos inserted in the novel are emotionally laden. The photo of the young Austerlitz-as-pageboy (Ibid., 266.), for example, is extremely poignant, as is the photo of a young girl with a dog in her lap, from much earlier in the novel (Ibid., 81.). Even some of the "purely" architectural photos included in the novel are more atmospheric than these, which should, perhaps be more emotional, given their context. For example, the photo of the abandoned country house filled with sacks of grain (Ibid., 155.) and the photos of the Archive in Prague (Ibid., 211, 212.).

[227] Ibid., 221–223.

This kind of emotional language is not frequently deployed in the novel. The syntax, especially the use of a long list of adjectival phrases and details, conveys a feeling of breathlessness, of the overwhelming sensation of returning home. Adjectives like *feucht* and *sanft* appeal to the senses while directional phrases direct the reader's mind's eye in a chaotic series of directions: from the doorway to the floor, to the steps rising upwards, to the railing, and finally turning around completely while Austerlitz sits down (probably facing down the stairs) to collect himself. Furthermore, pronouns are all but missing from this passage so that the reader sees everything from his perspective, at least until the point where Austerlitz rises out of himself to interpret the scene with the elegant phrase "lauter Buchstaben und Zeichen aus dem Setzkasten der vergessenen Dinge." This metaphor carries with it the double connotation of the word *Setzkasten,* meaning a type case (as in typography) or a seeding tray (for growing plants from seed, previous to transplantion). The "letters" with which Austerlitz will compose his history, and indeed, the "seeds" which give rise to it without any effort on Austerlitz's part, are these architectural details and not the anecdotes and personal photographs shown him by Věra.

Another anecdote that calls attention to this distinction (between the tangibility of narrated memory versus the memory called up by urban space) is to do with a visit Austerlitz and Věra made to the theater where his mother would be performing. Věra describes how Austerlitz, otherwise a very talkative child, had grown all but silent upon entering the theater and seeing his mother transformed into someone else. This anecdote does not seem especially significant – Austerlitz refers to it as an "eher beiläufige[…] Bemerkung" – but it does inspire Austerlitz to visit the theater in question.

> Und je angestrengter ich versuchte, von ihrem Erscheinen wenigstens eine Ahnung noch in mir zu finden, desto mehr dünkte es mich, als verengte sich der Theaterraum, als sei ich selber geschrumpft und säße als Däumling eingesperrt im Inneren eines Futterals oder einer mit Samt ausgepolsterten Schatulle. Erst nach einer gewissen Zeit, als irgend jemand hinter dem zugezogenen Vorhang geschwind über die Bühne gehuscht war und durch sein eiliges Laufen eine Wellenbewegung in den schweren Stoffbahnen ausgelöst hatte, erst dann, sagte

> Austerlitz, begannen sich die Schatten zu regen und sa ich drunten im Orchestergraben den befrakten, käferartigen Dirigenten und andere schwarze Figuren, die mit allerlei Instrumenten hantierten, hörte ihr Durcheinanderspielen beim Stimmen und glaubte auf einmal, zwischen dem Kopf eines der Musikanten und dem Hals einer Baßgeige hindurch, in dem hellen Lichtstreif zwischen dem Bretterboden und dem Saum des Vorhangs einen himmelblauen, mit Silberflitter bestickten Schuh zu erblicken.[228]

In this passage, Austerlitz reemphasizes the disjunction between trying to call forth a memory and the effortless – or involuntary – accessing of one, brought on by a space or architectural feature. In this case, Austerlitz is overcome by the anxiety produced by *trying* to remember and only when his thoughts are interrupted and his eye is drawn back to the tangible space around him is he able to access a piece of an actual memory.[229] It is as if Austerlitz is accustomed to the encyclopedic knowledge and birds-eye view he exhibits in previous descriptions of urban space. Here, on the other hand, he experiences a loss of agency – the inability to conjure memory when he wants – that actually mirrors the kind of disorientation and loss of agency experienced by the narrator.

Austerlitz's descriptions of Prague – and of other urban environments – are not generally marked by anxiety, but one scene in Prague does produce anxiety and a sense of being overwhelmed. Upon his return to Prague from Terezín, Austerlitz's otherwise successful reliance on geography to orient himself is thwarted by the peculiar sensation that traveling south always feels like traveling downhill. After taking note of that wholly irrational, almost childish, notion, Austerlitz feels himself getting lost: "[Es] schien […] mir, als rollten wir über eine Art Rampe hinunter in ein Labyrinth, in welchem wir nurmehr sehr langsam vorankamen, einmal so und einmal andersherum, bis ich jegliche Oreintierung verlor."[230] Austerlitz finds himself lost due to this strangely circuitous route but his anxiety is heightened by his feeling that Prague is suddenly overrun by people (contrary

---

[228] Ibid., 235–236.

[229] This is reminiscent of Proust's "involuntary memory."

[230] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 290.

87

to his previous experience in that city, and wholly in contrast to his immediately preceding experience of Terezín). The floods of people (note the verb *entgegenströmen*) cause him to lose his way back to his hotel completely. Austerlitz's anxiety is palpable, yet not expressed in terms of himself. He gets lost, certainly, but it is only the other people he encounters who have "fahlen, kummervollen Gesichtern." Significantly, this extreme disorientation occurs upon his return from Terezín, where he was forced to encounter the twentieth-century history he had to that point in life avoided, as well as discovering the likely fate of his mother. It seems as if he is so overwhelmed by history and his perceived memories that it actually disturbs his geographic sense of orientation.

Austerlitz feels this disorientation more keenly in the station where he arrives back in Prague. The train station is a key topos in the dialogue between present and past in *Austerlitz* and recurs as Věra recalls sending Austerlitz off with the *Kindertransport*. She describes her memory as "ein undeutliches, gewissermaßen verwischtes Bild."[231] This description is reminiscent of Austerlitz's own visions of "Bilder aus einer verblichenen Welt" himself and his adoptive parents, the Eliases, in the Liverpool Street Station. That vision seems clear, solid, even, but it is bracketed by descriptions of the light ("Halbdämmer," "im staubgrauen Licht") that give the whole scene a washed-out appearance. In addition, Věra's description of the train's departure seems to be the mirror image, or opposite of what happens in the Liverpool Street Station, where Austerlitz's vision in the Ladies Waiting Room seems to spring from the "schwarzweiße Rautenmuster der Steinplatten zu [seinen] Füßen."[232]

> Věra erinnerte sich auch an [...] den seltsamen Eindruck, den sie gehabt habe, daß der Zug, nachdem er unendlich langsam angerückt war, nicht eigentlich weggefahren, sondern bloß, in einer Art Täuschungsmanöver, ein Stück aus der überglasten Halle hinausgerollt und dort, noch nicht einmal in halber Ferne, versunken sei.[233]

---

[231] Ibid., 253.

[232] Ibid., 200.

[233] Ibid., 253–254.

Věra's last sight of Austerlitz seems to melt into the ground, to disappear into thin air. This metaphor reverses the motion of Austerlitz's memory rising out of the floor in the train station. Both of these images reemphasize the encoding of memory in environment that has been a theme throughout the text. Moreover, they illustrate the unpredictability of memory and the inability of the characters to control the formation, disappearance, or sudden reemergence of memory.

<div align="center">TEREZÍN</div>

The tone employed by Austerlitz in describing his visit to Prague is frequently warm and nostalgic, sometimes bewildered, but only rarely disoriented and anxious. When he travels to Terezín, however, his tone changes. This passage is filled with a sense of the uncanny – in fact, Austerlitz frequently uses the word *unheimlich* when describing the city – and his description of the city is predicated on a penetrating feeling of disorientation, something that is largely lacking in his other city descriptions.[234] Austerlitz's departure from Prague in the direction of Terezín is shrouded in sensory confusion ("ich [konnte] alles nur verschwommen wahrnehmen,"[235]) and he arrives in Lovosice, near Terezín, in a state of acute temporal confusion: "Als ich in Lovosice ausgestiegen war nach ungefähr einer Stunde, glaubte ich, wochenlang unterwegs gewesen zu sein, immer weiter ostwärts und immer weiter zurück in der Zeit."[236] This conflation of time and space – or indeed of time travel – is heightened by Austerlitz's synchronic narrative mode. He ruminates on the origins of particular buildings in the eighteenth century,[237] describes the woman working at the Ghetto

---

[234] The uncanniness of the city is not surprising, since this city that Hitler claimed to have "given" to the Jews was in fact a kind of prison.

[235] Sebald, *Austerlitz,* 270.

[236] Ibid., 270–271.

[237] cf. ibid., 272.

Museum as "unbestimmten Alters" and her hairdo as "altmodisch,"[238] and completely loses track of

time while in the museum.[239] Furthermore, in his approach to Terezín, Austerlitz refers to the *Festung*

and his mental image of "einer gewaltigen Anlage,"[240] which most readers would perhaps interpret as

an allusion to the ghetto itself, but which, in fact, harkens back to Austerlitz's interest in fortress

design. As Austerlitz observes, Terezín was originally designed as yet another star-shaped fortress

(this one originating with the Habsburgs in the eighteenth century) and that is the only context in

which Austerlitz thinks of the city. This is the result of his avoidance of all knowledge of twentieth-

century history, and hence of what actually happened in Terezín during the last years of the Nazi

regime. This misunderstanding (on the part of the reader) or misdirection (on the part of the

narrator) results in a kind of mimetic synchronic reading. The discrepancy between Austerlitz's

references and the reader's knowledge create a random chronological trajectory that divorces

Terezín from its actual history. The disjointed temporality of the Terezín narrative not only recalls

the layered history and random trajectory of Austerlitz's nighttime wanderings in London, but

reinforces his implicit criticism of a birds-eye view of history. This criticism is explicit in his

discussion of the Waterloo panorama in *Die Ringe des Saturn*: "Das also, denkt man, indem man

langsam im Kreis geht, ist die Kunst der Repräsentation der Geschichte. Sie beruht auf einer

Fälschung der Perspektive. Wir, die Überlebenden, sehen alles von oben herunter, sehen alles

zugleich und wissen dennoch nicht, wie es war."[241] The panorama depicts the battle of Waterloo as a

circular series of scenes that recall a stage set.[242] Furthermore, the viewer "befindet sich sozusagen

---

238 Ibid., 285.

239 cf. ibid., 289.

240 Ibid., 272.

241 Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 151–152.

242 See ibid., 151.

am imaginären Mittelpunkt der Ereignisse," which artificially centers and organizes the visual

narrative into a coherent whole based on an imaginary central perspective. This doubly mediated

portrayal of history aestheticizes the historical events, distances the viewer from the actual

experience of having been "on the ground" in the historical scene, and reinforces the subject-object

dichotomy. The viewer looking on the scene from above (or below, in the example of the

panorama) has no hope of understanding the reality of the scenes she sees in the painting. In this

context, it seems that Austerlitz's radical disinterest in history and focus on the aesthetic – his study

of penal architecture, for instance – is an embodiment of the danger of this kind of falsified

historical perspective. Where Austerlitz seems to look at London from an elevated perspective, he is

creating an artificial panorama of life in the city while denying any opportunity to experience it as an

actual resident would.

Beyond its curious temporality, the city is mysterious, unpredictable almost, with people,

buildings, and buses springing up "aus dem Nirgendwo"[243] and vanishing again just as quickly.[244]

Austerlitz remarks that the streets are very empty: he sees this as their most remarkable quality.

From the reader's perspective, the emptiness of the streets is a trace of the city's function during the

Nazi period, but Austerlitz conflates the oppressive effect of the empty streets with their geometric

design.[245] What seems at first to be a complete absence of people is unsettling, but when someone

finally does appear and disappear, it seems almost doubly disturbing:

> doch dauerte es nahezu eine Viertelstunde, bis ich drüben auf der anderen Seite des Karrees
> den ersten Menschen erblickte, eine vorübergebeugte Gestalt, die sich unendlich langsam an

---

[243] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 289.

[244] This is reminiscent of the springing-up and melting-away of the train station memories narrated by both Austerlitz and Vera.

[245] "War schon die Verlassenheit der gleich dem idealen Sonnenstaatswesen Campanellas nach einem strengen geometrischen Raster angelegten Festungsstadt ungemein niederdrückend[…] " Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 275.

einem Stock voranbewegte und doch, als ich einen Moment nur mein Auge von ihr abwandte, auf einmal verschwunden war.[246]

This person has an almost ghostly quality: the person is only sketchily described – the sex is not even clearly established, there are no facial features, even his or her clothing seems irrelevant – and he or she appears and disappears quite suddenly. The only other person Austerlitz encounters in the streets of Terezín is a "Geistesgestörte[r] in einem abgerissenen Anzug, [der] mitten im Davonspringen, wie man sagt, vom Erdboden verschluckt wurde."[247] In this case, Austerlitz attempts to relate the disappearance of the disturbed man by using a common turn of phrase, but the uncanny effect is not lessened. These apparitions are typical of Austerlitz's perception of Terezín. Even the Ghetto Museum appears suddenly as it was previously "von [ihm] zuvor übersehen[…]."[248] Though he doesn't say it appears out of thin air, the startled tone of his wording (*auf einmal*) heightens the sense of instability present in his descriptions of the town of Terezín. This sense, developed by the specific way in which the town's landscape is constructed makes Terezín the landscape most imbued with anxiety and disorientation.

Austerlitz makes his entrance into Terezín on foot, walking almost five miles from the train station of Lovosice. Eyes directed toward his destination, he claims no memory of the city of

---

[246] Ibid., 274. This passage seems to be an allusion to a similar scene in Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*: "Aber die Frau, die Frau: sie war ganz in sich hineingefallen, vornüber in ihre Hände. Es war an der Ecke rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs. Ich fing an, leise zu gehenn, sowie ich sie gesehen hatte Wenn arme Leute nachdenken, soll man sie nicht stören. Vielleicht fällt es ihnen doch ein.
Die Straße war zu leer, ihre Leere langweilte sich und zog mir den Schritt unter den Füßen weg und klappte mit ihm herum, drüben und da, wie mit einem Holzschuh. Die Frau erschrak und hob sich aus sich ab, zu schnell, zu heftig, so daß das Gesicht in den zwei Händen blieb." (Rilke, *Die Aufzeichnungen Des Malte Laurids Brigge: Kommentierte Ausgabe*, 10.) Rilke's *Malte* is an obvious intertext to *Austerlitz*. Rilke's novel exemplifies the themes of city as labyrinth, the individual being overwhelmed by the masses, and the penetration of the city into individual life. Sebald makes reference to this passage while Austerlitz describes Terezín in order to emphasize the anxiety the former ghetto provokes in the visitor.

[247] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 274–275.

[248] Ibid., 265. It is also interesting that in the same moment where the seeming unpredictability of the buildings themselves is emphasized, Austerlitz attempts to gain geographical purchase by using compass directions to orient himself and the reader. He suddenly finds himself standing before the ghetto museum "an der nordöstlichen Ecke des Stadtplatzes." Another moment in which Austerlitz resorts to map-based orientation or geography is in the museum, where he studies a map of the territory conquered by the Germans in World War II.

Lovosice, yet gives a detailed description of the view as one leaves the city. Austerlitz's description –

the "weites Panorama" – is divided into three planes, like a traditional landscape painting:

> im Vordergrund ein giftgrünes Feld, dahinter ein vom Rost zur Hälfte schon zerfressenes petrochemisches Kombinat, aus dessen Kühltürmen und Schloten weiße Rauchwolken aufstiegen, wahrscheinlich ohne Unterlaß seit einer langen Reihe von Jahren. Weiter noch in der Ferne sah ich die kegelförmigen böhmischen Berge[...][249]

While this description would seem intended to create a sense of depth in the view, it actually does

the opposite, flattening the actual miles between Lovosice and Terezín. Austerlitz's description

proceeds directly from the deserted industrial estate to his initial impression of the old garrisoned

city of Terezín, collapsing the miles of fields in between. The panorama of the seemingly deserted

industrial town is reminiscent of Austerlitz's earlier descriptions of industrial landscapes in Wales.

That landscape features a town that has been taken over, almost as if by a virus, by the coal mines,

"deren Ausläufer stellenweise bis in die Gassen hineinreichten."[250] The view from Austerlitz's

bedroom in Wales was of the town, which was dominated by the hoist and head frames of the coal

mines, and by the flaming ovens of a steel works.[251] These two landscapes function very differently

in the text, but both share a number of distinguishing features. First, both are dominated by vertical

elements: in Lovosice, the smoking towers of the chemical plant, in Wales, the towers of the coal

mines and steel works. Second, they are suffused by a sense of the sublime and a sense of

foreboding. Finally, both are extremely oppressive landscapes, in which the vertical elements

encroach on the viewer and inspire a kind of claustrophobia. The vertical elements in the Lovosice

landscape are quite near, both literally and figuratively, to the chimneys of the ovens at Auschwitz,

---

[249] Ibid., 271.

[250] Ibid., 77.

[251] cf. ibid. This landscape inspires Elias to give a moving, if not terrifying, sermon about the torments of Hell and, in combination with the directly following encounter with the bombed cinema, leaves an indelible impression on the young Austerlitz.

while the ovens and fires of the steel works in Wales also call the death camp to mind.[252] The sense

of foreboding and claustrophobia in the Lovosice panorama is enhanced by the sky, which

Austerlitz says hangs low and obscures the tops of the mountains in the distance.[253]

The industrial landscape between Lovosice and Terezín also serves as an intermediate step in

Austerlitz's passage through time. He travels from the modern, lively city (Prague), by train to a

largely-deserted town with an industrial landscape, and finally to Terezín, which is fully deserted and

shows no evidence of modernization.

Austerlitz's description of the deserted streets of Terezín is telling, both of the town's

character and of Austerlitz's anxieties. The streets are laid out in a strongly regular pattern,

repressing or contradicting any organic forms. Terezín is formally defiant of nature in the same way

that the events that took place there were also against nature. Austerlitz describes the desertedness

of the streets as "niederdrückend," but is most disturbed by the doors and windows of the buildings

on either side.

> so war es mehr noch das Abweisende der stummen Häuserfronten, hinter deren
> blinden Fenstern, sooft ich auch an ihnen hinaufblickte, nirgends ein einziger
> Vorhang sich rührte. [...] Am unheimlichsten aber schienen mir die Türen und Tore
> von Terezín, die sämtlich, wie ich zu spüren meinte, den Zugang versperrten zu
> einem nie noch durchdrungenen Dunkel, in welchem, so dachte ich, sagte Austerlitz,
> nichts mehr sich regte als der von den Wänden abblätternde Kalk und die Spinnen,
> die ihre Fäden ziehen, mit ihren hastig trippelnden Beinen über die Dielen laufen
> oder erwartungsvoll in ihren Geweben hängen.[254]

This passage is one of the most densely packed and charged descriptions of space in the entire

novel. First, the layout of the text itself conveys a sense of the unease Austerlitz felt in the street.

Some twenty lines of text describing the street are stretched over six pages in the book, interspersed

---

[252] Auschwitz is present throughout the novel, both in aspects of the landscape, as here, as well as in the strange
similarity between the title and character's name and the name of the camp. Comparisons between the landscapes of the
mines, of Theresienstadt, and Auschwitz are, therefore, inescapable.

[253] cf. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 271.

[254] Ibid., 275–282.

with a series of five photos of closed doors and windows, sometimes alone on the page, sometimes accompanied by a few lines of text. The emphasis on the absolutely still, closed curtains clearly refers to the windows in the Bala house and, by contrast, to his purposely uncovered windows in Alderney Street. The street is in an advanced state of decay and the spiders that make an appearance seem to have a similar effect on Austerlitz as the town itself, both beckoning and menacing.

The anxiety produced in this passage by the closed doors and "blind" windows can be productively read in the context of Jay Appleton's prospect-refuge theory. In discussing the prospect-refuge potentialities of a city street scene, Appleton emphasizes the "penetrability" of the scene as vital for the potential of refuge. Describing a view of a street in Kersey, Suffolk, he writes,

> Refuge symbols mainly take the form of buildings on both sides of the street, and it will be noted that there are many features which suggest penetrability. These include the inferred gaps [between houses], the irregularity of the building line, the overhang of eaves, gables and upper storeys, the steps which symbolize the means of passage between the vistal street and the flanking doorway refuges and, in the foreground, a little screen of vegetation to provide additional cover in front of the entrances.[255]

On the other end of the spectrum is a street in Merthyr Tydfil, Glamorgan, Wales:

> there is no arboreal vegetation visible at any point, there are no convincing offsets […]. The only true refuge symbols are the buildings on the right, but the impression of penetrability is extremely weak. There are no gaps in the building frontage which has no recesses of any magnitude and no projections, no irregularity in the roof-line, no steps or other symbols of invitation. The one window visible is closed. On the left there is a small gate in the foreground, but otherwise an apparently continuous wall, surmounted by a wire mesh fence, presents an impediment hazard affording little concealment but effectively preventing escape.[256]

According to Appleton, the symbols of refuge in a crowded city street are various means of escape – alleys, doors and windows, cross streets. Street scenes that show many of these and feature a varied grade and irregular rooftops imply openness, prospect, and penetrability. The lack of those features produces a landscape that does not fulfill the requirements for a balance of prospect and refuge. The

---

[255] Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, 176.

[256] Ibid., 176–177.

Terezín street scene with the "blind" house fronts has neither symbols of prospect nor refuge, and Austerlitz's anxiety in Terezín seems symptomatic of a vestigial habitat-seeking instinct. In these deserted streets, with no view into the windows or doors around him, and no recourse to a possible escape route, he is ultimately exposed, vulnerable to physical attack, but on a deeper level the anxiety provoked by his physical vulnerability may be indicative of his emotional vulnerability and lack of identity. What Austerlitz experiences in this passage is a kind of agoraphobia, a counterpart to the claustrophobia he felt in the Bala house and that was completely absent at Andromeda Lodge.

Another vital episode in Austerlitz's experience in Terezín is the time he spends lingering over the window displays of the "Antikos Bazar." The bazaar is one of two shops Austerlitz can see in Terezín – the other of which is a grocery store.[257] This suggests that the antiques and knickknacks displayed in these windows share equal importance and attention with the food offered by the grocery store. These are, after all, the only windows in the whole town into which Austerlitz can see. Described as "blinkende[…] Schaufensterscheiben,"[258] they constitute the only suggestion of anything shining or emitting light of any kind in the entire town. Though randomly assembled, these still lives,[259] as Austerlitz calls them, nonetheless seem somehow cohesive. It seems that they "hineingewachsen waren, in das schwarze, in den Scheiben sich spiegelnde Astwerk der rings um den Stadtplatz stehenden Linden."[260] The mingling of the trees and the window displays gives them

---

[257] cf. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 281.

[258] Ibid.

[259] His use of the art historical term 'still life' puts these windows into dialogue with the 'landscapes' and 'panoramas' he describes throughout the novel. These different art forms have entirely different functions both as works of art and within the novel. It is interesting to note that in one photo of such a 'still life,' the photographer is actually visible, though not immediately recognizable. In that case, the photo encapsulates still life, landscape (with the trees and buildings also clearly reflected in the window), and self portrait.

[260] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 282.

an organic or naturally occurring aspect that appeals to Austerlitz's spatial sense.[261] He sees these objects almost as natural parts of their environment, not as displaced objects. However, he does ponder over them, trying to find some ordering principle,[262] just as he does over the photos in the front room of his house in Alderney Street.[263]

As he leaves the shop windows behind, he comes across the Museum, which will provide some of the answers he is searching for.[264] It is as if the topography of Terezín were designed to lead Austerlitz to the museum, by way of the uncanny and oppressive scenes of the street. Austerlitz's journey through the streets of Terezín is synonymous with his subsequent train journey from Prague to Holland. The objects in the shop window function metonymically as the remains of the people who once owned them,[265] yet they are also displaced objects – the groups into which they are collected are incoherent at best, and their style seems completely out of place in the dismal streets of Terezín.

On the other hand, the streets of Terezín are sites of psychological discomfort for Austerlitz. This is fitting, given the history of the town and Austerlitz's personal ties to it, but the distress Austerlitz feels while there is brought on by the landscape of the deserted streets. Appleton, Lynch,

---

[261] In addition, the *Astwerk* is reminiscent of the network of roots in the Prague park. Throughout this book, trees play a prominent role in memory and in the construction of Sebald's narrated environments. Here the branches reflected in the shop window give Austerlitz a kind of mental foothold and he uses their dark lines to organize the objects in the display. But the trees serve a more important psychological function: in the wholly constructed, unnatural environment of Terezín, one that is appalling and forbidding, the trees function as a connection to Austerlitz's own life. He lingers over the shop window, attempting to understand how the objects displayed there are actually organized. But this pause also gives him a moment to organize his own life in the context of his newly gained knowledge and prepares him for his visit to the museum. Also of note is the fact that the trees reflected in the shop window are Lindens, which have a long history in both German and Czech culture. The presence of the trees is incongruent in the otherwise grey streets and raises the question of their origin. Were the trees planted by the Nazis who occupied the city during World War II? Or are they either a holdover of an earlier time or a post-war attempt at beautifying the depressing landscape?

[262] cf. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 283.

[263] We will discuss Austerlitz's photo sorting and memory work in the context of his home in Alderney Street further in chapter four.

[264] We will discuss the Terezín Ghetto Museum in greater depth in chapter five.

[265] cf. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 285.

and Tuan's theories of urban experience help to account for Austerlitz's anxious but productive perception of urban space: because human subjects experience cities in time as well as in space, cities are always already spaces of memory. Austerlitz, however, also thwarts some of this urban studies theory, especially regarding disorientation, because he does not experience the city as a space of disorientation: instead, the urban palimpsest of history becomes a mnemonic for his memories. As a result of his elevated perspective, Austerlitz's anxiety does not stem from disorientation but rather from the sudden, unexpected reappearance of memory, which forces him to confront the emotion of the experiences behind his lost memories. In Prague it seems that Austerlitz's memory would be jogged by personal artifacts and Věra's anecdotes, but in fact he finds that the memories are, instead, recalled by architectural and environmental details and will not come when bidden, only when unbidden. Terezín in turn represents the place where he is utterly subject to the anxiety stemming from disorientation, but he is impelled toward the Theresienstadt museum, where believes he finds answers. Austerlitz's disorientation anxiety in Terezín and upon his return to Prague results from what is actually radical orientation: the city moves him to the museum, where he must go to fill in the gaps in his historical knowledge, giving shape to the memories he seems to be resurrecting.

The Domestic Environment

Gerhard Fischer rightly points out that Sebald's narrators embody a kind of alter ego,

narrative persona, what he calls a "literarische[…] Identität," which is deeply affected by its (and

Sebald's) status as an expatriate.[267] This expatriate status, for which there is no good German term, is

one of permanent liminality and ambivalence about the place of origin:

> Die paradoxe Tatsache, dass der originäre Platz der Herkunft einem gleichzeitig auf Dauer
> präsent und fremder als alles andere vorkommen kann, belegt die besondere
> Erfahrungsstruktur des *expatriate*. Der expatriate lebt in einem Zustand permanenter
> Grenzüberschreitung und Liminalität. […] Es gibt ein Oszillieren zwischen dem Alten und
> dem Neuen, dem Vertrauten und dem Fremden. Aber je länger der Aufenthalt im Ausland
> dauert, desto schwieriger wird diese Dazwischen-Position.[268]

This ambivalence gives rise to a doubled perspective within the narrative which is, according to

Fischer, typical for an expatriate. What he calls the *Doppelsicht* allows the narrator "ein Phänomen

von zwei Seiten gleichzeitig zu sehen, aus dem Blickpunkt der alten Heimat und aus der Perspektive

der neuen."[269] This multivalent vision allows the narrator to draw connections and to make

contrastive observations about both the *Heimat* and the *Wahlheimat*. This geographical characteristic,

---

[266] Ibid., 70.

[267] see: Gerhard Fischer, "Schreiben Ex Patria: W.G. Sebald Und Die Konstruktion Einer Literarischen Identität," in *W. G. Sebald: Schreiben Ex Patria, Expatriate Writing* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 27–44.

[268] Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Ein Brief," in *Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben: Prosa II* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1951), 28.

[269] Ibid., 34.

Fischer claims, is the deciding factor in narrative perspective and tone.[270] Furthermore, Fischer argues, the perspective enjoyed by an outsider looking in on both original and chosen homelands allows for the creation of a new identity that can follow paths that diverge from the norm in nearly any way. The creation of an eccentric, creative, persona is precisely what Sebald undertakes in two different ways – he develops a kind of new identity for himself through the creation of narrators that resemble him in a number of ways, and within the texts he frequently develops characters that undertake a similar project of identity creation.[271] Fischer bases this argument on the example of the narrator of *Die Ringe des Saturn* (among other examples), a story which ends up being a pilgrimage to find himself: "Hier, am Ende des Buches und der Reise, finden wir den Autor-Erzähler am Ziel, er had den Weg nach Hause, zu sich selbst gefunden. Die Erkundung der neuen Heimat ist auch eine Reise zum eigenen Ich,"[272] a notion which is undercut by the presence of a photograph which purportedly identifies the narrator as the author himself.[273]

Where Fischer focuses on the author/narrator as exile, John Zilcosky avoids the term *Heimat* almost completely. Instead he studies the opposition of "home" and "away" in Sebald's works arguing that in the earlier works, Sebald challenged this dichotomy and the traditional positive connotation of "home."

> More disturbing than the fact that we might be always lost was, for Sebald, the fact that we might always know where we are, whether we like it or not: when we find ourselves in the same hotel in a city we once visited long ago; when we become disoriented only to keep

---

[270] As well as the aforementioned ambivalence about the homeland, Fischer diagnoses among other conditions, melancholy and hypochondria as symptoms of living as an expatriate. Additionally, and critically for our understanding of Sebald, he claims that all of these symptoms are "verstärkt durch intensives Selbstbefragen und Selbstkritik. Die pausenlose Selbstreflexion wird zu einem charakteristischen Identitätsmerkmal." Ibid., 29.

[271] see Ibid., 30.

[272] Ibid., 32.

[273] This is the opposite of what happens when the narrator of "Ambros Adelwarth" alludes to a photograph of himself which shows an utterly unrecognizable figure standing on the beach. A further discussion of the ambiguous role of photographs in the narrative can be found in chapter five of this dissertation.

circling back to the same spot; when we move away from our homes only to see our pasts creeping in everywhere around us. This persistence of the familiar, this unheimlich inability to lose one's way, haunted Sebald's early travel narratives.[274]

In the later works, however, Sebald's ambivalence about becoming lost becomes less clear. In Austerlitz, particularly, home acquires a kind of magical potential for allowing Austerlitz access to his original identity. This notion is cultivated by a frequent connection of "lostness," with images of death. This negative connotation is epitomized by the example of Gerald's homing pigeons – the pigeons are only able to survive being set free in the middle of the sea because of their superior navigational skills. These, along with other images, inspire Austerlitz to seek out his past.[275]

Peter Morgan, meanwhile, reads Sebald's frequent narratives of exile and displacement as a symptom of German identity's over-determination by the history of the Holocaust. This leads not only to difficulty with development of identity, but also to an alienation from Germany as a possible home-country: "History and self-realisation are in conflict with each other. Auschwitz comes to be a negative myth of German identity, making it impossible for the narrator to identify himself simply in terms of Germanness, ethnicity or 'Heimat'."[276] According to Morgan, this alienation is made manifest in "Il ritorno in patria," where Sebald couples his narrator's return to his hometown (W., which Morgan understands to be Sebald's Würzburg) with apocalyptic imagery. (He also notes that the title of the story uses the Italian title of a painting by Tiepolo to avoid using the politically charged terms Heimat or Vaterland.)[277] Morgan argues that the tension between Sebald's desire for belonging and his strong sense of resistance to "ethno-national identity, or 'Heimat'" are evidence

---

[274] John Zilcosky, "Lost and Found: Disorientation, Nostalgia, and Holocaust Melodrama in Sebald's 'Austerlitz'," *MLN* 121, no. 3 (April 1, 2006): 683.

[275] Ibid., 689–690.

[276] Peter Morgan, "The Sign of Saturn: Melancholy, Homelessness and Apocalypse in W.G. Sebald's Prose Narratives.," *German Life & Letters* 58, no. 1 (January 2005): 81.

[277] See ibid., 82.

that "he is troubled by the persistence of this sense of group-belonging in himself. It is something that, in spite of all of his attempts at exile, escape, and denial, he has not been able to eradicate. He is preoccupied with questions of 'Heimat' and exile, and his own self-identifications are laden with powerful and overwhelming affects when his homeland or compatriots come within his purview."[278] The overdetermination of German identity by Auschwitz is certainly a crucial theme in Austerlitz. Though Austerlitz's name is associated most clearly with the famous battle and the Paris train station, it also bears a resemblance to Auschwitz. Austerlitz's reconstructed identity, moreover, is clearly determined largely by the fact that his mother died in a concentration camp and he barely escaped a similar fate himself.

Martin Klebes also examines the relationship between the author as exile and Sebald's relationship to *Heimat* in his study of Sebald as "an author who moved abroad." As Fischer pointed out, the question of exile is charged generally and perhaps does not even apply to Sebald, specifically. Martin Klebes follows this line of questioning and concludes that, although there are similarities between Sebald's experiences and those of a Jewish exile author like Jean Améry, Sebald's experience cannot be called exile in the same sense.[279] Instead, Klebes traces Sebald's voluntary exile to discomfort with the idea of *Heimat* that is typical of his generation:

> […] the notion of an idyllic homeland became untenable for the immediate post-war generation, but only through the retrospectively unearthed documents of destruction and terror. "Heimat" exists henceforth primarily as the signifier of a problem, not of a solution to a problem; its problematic status may itself awaken "something like a feeling of Heimat", but never an immediate experience of connectedness to a place that could shed the limitation of the "as if."[280]

---

[278] Ibid., 83.

[279] See Martin Klebes, "No Exile: Crossing the Border with Sebald and Améry," in *W. G. Sebald: Schreiben Ex Patria, Expatriate Writing*, ed. Gerhard Fischer (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 73.

[280] Ibid., 81.

If Sebald is so traumatized by German history that he rejects the notion of *Heimat* completely, how does one understand his characters' apparent longing for home, for clarity of identity, and for information about their origins (whether their personal or a larger collective history)? In this chapter, I will explore this question by shifting the focus from larger geography to domestic spaces.

Inhabited interiors – the most explicitly constructed environments in the texts – are significant for the development and, on the other side, the deterioration or obliteration of identity. Sebald's characters – particularly Austerlitz – dwell on their identity or lack of it throughout the works – these issues and struggles with self-ideation are perhaps most apparent through the discourse of exile in the works. But rather than retrace the issue of *Heimat* in Sebald's works or focus on his status as an exile author, I read domestic spaces – homes in the smallest sense – as a metonym for *Heimat*. Certainly the characters in Sebald's texts have a privileged perspective by virtue of being expatriates, but rather than focus on national identity – whether native or chosen – they take an active role in recovering or creating their own identity. This is accomplished through the creation of domestic spaces which enable them to explore or shape their identities. When, however, the characters' agency is thwarted and they are thrust into domestic environments not of their own choosing, as we see in the example of Austerlitz, they are shaped by those environments. This two-way process involves the projection of the characters identity onto the spaces they inhabit and, conversely, a process by which the environments themselves impact the identity of the characters. Austerlitz's reaction to these environments, in turn, illuminates (albeit usually only in hindsight) hidden parts of his original identity – his actual home-identity. Encoding the search for personal identity in the politically neutral environment of the home enables Sebald to confront some of the issues of identity and memory inherent in the discussion of *Heimat* without recourse to nationalism, conservatism, and the complicated and painful German history that come with the term *Heimat* today. This metonymic relationship between home (in the sense of an abode) and *Heimat*, which

generally implies a nation or at least a large geographic area, is already present in the variable meaning of English word alone. As David Sopher points out, the unique characteristic of the word "home" is its flexibility in scale.

> The rich meaning of the English lexical symbol is virtually untranslatable into most other languages. […] It can refer with equal ease to house, land, village, city, district, country, or, indeed, the world. It transmits the sentimental associations of one scale to all the others in a way that the Romance Languages, for example, can not.[281]

Bearing this flexibility of the term "home" in mind, it seems that domestic environment is central in Sebald's as the place in which characters encounter their uncertainty about their identity. These environments are occasionally elevated and seemingly imbued with an agency of their own.[282] In such instances, the environment seems to have the power to shape the trajectory of a character's actions and to inspire self-examination and change. At the same time as these domestic environments help to shape the identities of those who inhabit them, characters like Austerlitz recognize the importance of home in forming an identity and determine the form of the domestic space in order to harness its potential for "super-imagination."[283] Imagination here is not an inapt description of Austerlitz's project – after all, reconstructing his identity and personal history, even assuming the legitimacy of Věra's stories and the other scraps of evidence he draws on, is highly dependent on imagination.

The central text I will examine in this light is *Austerlitz*. Austerlitz himself has a highly evolved spatial sense and relationship to his environment: beyond his detailed observation of the home environments he narrates, he works as an architectural historian. He meditates in long passages on views from windows, landscapes he passes through on his various trips, and on the

---

[281] David E. Sopher, "The Landscape of Home: Myth, Experience, Social Meaning," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, ed. Donald W. Meinig (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), 130.

[282] The phenomenon of urban environments acting as characters in the text was introduced in chapter two of this dissertation.

[283] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 227.

interiors of buildings, both those he inhabits and those he visits as part of his architectural research. Austerlitz's fascination with his environment is exemplified by a moment early in his school career, when he reads voraciously in encyclopedias and atlases, imagining an ideal landscape:

> Nach und nach entstand so in meinem Kopf eine Art idealer Landschaft, in der die arabische Wüste, das Reich der Azteken, der antarktische Kontinent, die Schneealpen, die Nordwestpassage, der Kongostrom und die Halbinsel Krim in einem einzigen Panorama beieinander waren, bevölkert mit sämtlichen dazugehörigen Gestalten.[284]

This schoolboy fantasy seems to foreshadow Austerlitz's later efforts to control and codify his surroundings while constantly searching for something that resembles a home – an ideal, impossible habitat that seems to recede ever further from his reach. Note here that the youthful Austerlitz is preoccupied with the "natural" landscape. With the realization that his identity – being named Dafydd Elias and coming from Wales – is artificial, he loses interest in this idea of untouched nature and turns his attentions to architecture and the built landscape. His disinterest in the "natural" environment may imply that he doubts the validity of an unspoiled original, but that doubt is not borne out in his search for his personal history. While he may doubt that an untouched environment may still exist, he displays an unshakeable faith in the search for his own original identity.

Austerlitz's understanding of and interaction with urban spaces (the urban desert of London and the deserted streets of Terezín) are complex and provide some insight to his attempts at regaining his memory.[285] However, the domestic spaces that Austerlitz inhabits, specifically the preacher's house in Bala, Wales, his friend Gerald's home at Andromeda Lodge, and his own house in London, demonstrate how he goes beyond the search for lost memory and attempts to retrieve or recreate a personal identity. My focus will primarily be on the interior space of the houses themselves, but in the case of Andromeda Lodge, the domestic sphere also encompasses the garden.

---

[284] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 93.

[285] See chapter three of this dissertation for more on Austerlitz's experience of the urban environment.

These domestic environments provide insight into the origin and effects of Austerlitz's environmental fascination, but also throw Austerlitz's status as a permanent outsider into relief against the belonging and solace we usually expect from intimate spaces.

The most influential space for the development of identity is the home. Drawing on Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space,* I understand the home not only as the basis for feelings of security, protection, and creative freedom but also as an environment that is conducive to the creation of identity. Bachelard undertakes a study of intimate places, focusing on what he calls *felicitous space* and "spaces that attract." The images Bachelard studies "seek to determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love. For diverse reasons, and with the differences entailed by poetic shadings, this is eulogized space."[286] In this description two important features of Bachelard's project become apparent: first, the spaces he studies are positively connoted and, no doubt for that reason, they are remembered. Yet, his use of the word "eulogized" also implies that these spaces are past spaces. Bachelard's study goes beyond the way in which places are remembered to include as well the way in which places are dreamed. For Bachelard, the house is the primary site of both memory and imagination:

> The house is the human being's first world. Before he is 'cast into the world,' as claimed by certain hasty metaphysics, man is laid in the cradle of the house. And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle. […] Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house.[287]

Bachelard sees in the house not only the abode which shelters a human from the elements, but also a receptacle for the human's imaginings and aspirations.[288] The dual meaning of 'house' – as a noun

---

[286] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space.* xxxv.

[287] Ibid., 6–7.

[288] Sopher points out one difficulty of translation: "Reading it in the English translation, in which *la maison* of the original is rendered by the English word "house," we are left vaguely disquieted. So much of the intimate, lived-in character of domestic space in Bachelard's memories and in the poems he quotes seems to have been drained away in the English; we feel that the "house" is empty, as if the movers have already left with the furniture." Sopher, "The Landscape of

and a verb – is essential for our understanding of Bachelard, who uses a number of terms to refer to

a person's dwelling:

> Thus the *house* is not experienced from day to day only, on the thread of a narrative, or in the telling of our own story. Through dreams, the various *dwelling-places* in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days. And after we are in the *new house*, when memories of other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Immemorial things are. We live fixations, fixations of happiness. We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them their original value as images. Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of *home* and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that is lost.[289]

House, dwelling-place, and home are all used to denote a person's abode. This passage emphasizes

the contrast between these terms. A house, a *new* house, and a dwelling-place are not (yet) imbued

with memory in the way that the *home,* located within the abstract site of "Motionless Childhood" is.

The home provides shelter for the human, but also contains and preserves a person's dreams,

wishes, and imaginings. Austerlitz did not enjoy such an idealized first home as a boy – instead the

first space in which we see the young Austerlitz is the Elias home in Wales which more closely

resembles a nightmare than Bachelard's cozy vision of home. This negative vision of home will be

central to my analysis of domestic spaces in *Austerlitz*.

Bachelard calls his study of these places 'topoanalysis,' which he claims consists of "the

systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives"[290] and sees the home "on whatever

theoretical horizon we examine it [as] the topography of our intimate being."[291] I take this notion of

'intimate being' to mean both 'being in an intimate space' but also 'identity.' The home, then, is not

---

Home: Myth, Experience, Social Meaning," 130. To combat this impoverishment of meaning through translation, I will refer to the Bachelard's "house" as "home."

[289] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 5. (My emphases in *italics*.)

[290] Ibid., 8.

[291] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, xxxvi.

only the site that enables a person to seek shelter and to dream, but it also becomes a site that enables a person to develop and reflect on her own identity. This is the context in which I will study the domestic spaces in *Austerlitz* – to what degree to the various "homes" Austerlitz inhabits encourage or inhibit the development or discovery of his "true" identity? Taking the home as the side of identity creation allows us to see the home as a way to structure and organize identity.

Austerlitz's trajectory bears striking similarities with these ideas of Bachelard. Austerlitz's belief that he was sent away from his original childhood home involves what he can only regard as repression of his first home during the majority of his life. This gap in Austerlitz's memory destabilizes the foundation upon which his identity is based and has the result of making him feel displaced, regardless of his location. His search for and slow reclamation of identity is necessarily entangled with a search for home. Furthermore, Austerlitz's attempts to reconnect with his ancestry are all encoded in the experience of particular environments. In Austerlitz's world, identity proceeds directly from and is profoundly influenced by home and: merely inhabited spaces cannot compensate for the lack of a home as Bachelard defines it.

TOPOPHILIC PLACES

While the majority of places in *Austerlitz* are negatively connoted or devoid of memory, a few of the narrated places in could be described as felicitous or attractive. One example is Austerlitz's Věra's apartment in Prague. As we have already seen, Austerlitz is flooded with memory as he approaches his childhood home.[292] While the street seems familiar to Austerlitz, he is overcome by a "glückhafte und zugleich angstvolle Verwirrung der Gefühle"[293] upon entering the house where he had once been at home. Entering Věra's apartment, Austerlitz is overcome by the familiarity of the

---

[292] More on Austerlitz's retrieval of memory in urban spaces, including Prague, in chapter three of this dissertation.

[293] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 223. The phrase "Verwirrung der Gefühle" is adopted from Heinrich von Kleist.

furnishings: "dies alles war während der gesamten Zeit meines Lebens, die sich jetzt in mir

überstürzte, an seinem Platz geblieben, weil Věra, wie sie mir sagte, sagte Austerlitz, seit sie mich

und meine ihr so gut wie schwesterlich verbundene Mutter verloren hatte, keine Veränderung mehr

ertrug."[294] The wholly unchanged suggests that it is located in what Bachelard terms the realm of

"Motionless Childhood." This sense of immemorialism – the apartment having been lifted out of

time or preserved in a particular moment – is heightened by the fluidity with which Austerlitz mixes

tenses in his recollection of his discussions with Věra and his own reawakening memories. An

extreme example of this can be found in the passage where Austerlitz recalls waiting for his mother

to return from a dress rehearsal:

> Věra sagte, ich sei offenbar von der Generalprobe im Ständetheater zutiefst beeindruckt
> gewesen, in erster Linie wohl, wie sie vermute, weil ich fürchtete, Agata hätte sich wahrhaftig
> verwandelt in eine zwar zauberhafte, aber mir doch volkommen fremde Gestalt, und ich
> selber, fuhr Austerlitz fort, eintsann mich nun wieder, von einem mir bis dahin unbekannten
> Kummer erfüllt gewesen zu sein, als ich, weit jenseits meiner Schlafenszeit, die Augen im
> Dunkeln weit offen, auf dem Diwan am Fußende von Věras Bett gelegen bin, auf die
> Viertelstundenschläge der Turmuhren gehorcht und gewartet hatte, bis Agáta nach Hause
> kam, bis ich den Wagen, der sie aus der anderen Welt zurückbrachte, vor dem Haustor
> anhalten hörte, sie endlich ins Zimmer trat und zu mir sich niedersetzte, umhüllt von einem
> seltsamen, aus verwehtem Parfum und Staub gemischten Theatergeruch. Sie trägt ein vorne
> geschnürtes, aschgraues Seidenmieder, aber ihr Gesicht kann ich nicht erkennen, sondern
> nur einen irisierenden, niedrig über der Haut schwebenden Schleier von weißlich getrübter
> Milchfarbe, und dann sehe ich, sagte Austerlitz, wie ihr der Schal von der rechten Schulter
> gleitet, als si mir mit der Hand über die Stirne streicht.[295]

Temporality is thematized in this passage by allusions to time (*Schlafenszeit*) and clocks (*die

Viertelstundenschläge der Turmuhren*). While the combination of preterite and past perfect in this passage

is not unusual, the sudden introduction of present tense in a new sentence is jarring. The description

of Austerlitz's mother in the present tense has a double effect on the reader. First, the reader has the

impression that Austerlitz is transported back to that time by the memory of his mother returning

---

[294] Ibid., 224.

[295] Ibid., 236–237.

from the theater, much as might be seen in a photograph, the image seeming still and unmoving.

Second, and more interestingly, the use of the present tense also freezes Agata in time. She is seen in

the eternal present – a tense which allows her to persist in memory, unchanged by passing time or

circumstances. The importance of Austerlitz's mother in relation to the notion of home cannot be

overstated. Yi-Fu Tuan describes the role of the mother in developing a sense of home – or primary

place – thus:

> If we define place broadly as a focus of value, of nurture and support, then the mother is the child's primary place. Mother may well be the first enduring and independent object in the infant's world of fleeting impressions. Later she is recognized by the child as his essential shelter and dependable source of physical and psychological comfort. […] The mother is mobile, but to the child she nonetheless stands for stability and permanence. She is nearly always around when needed. A strange world holds little fear for the young child provided his mother is nearby, for she is his familiar environment and haven. A child is adrift--placeless--without the supportive parent.[296]

This platialized relationship between mother and child also reminds us of the use of the permanent

present tense – another instance of Bachelard's "Motionless Childhood" – in Austerlitz's

descriptions of his mother. He persists in his belief that his mother is permanent and expresses it

implicitly in his description of her. Furthermore, his feeling of placelessness is heightened by the

absence of the mother. She seems to still exist in the timeless space of the Prague apartment, but is

palpably absent.

Agata is even more firmly situated in this otherworldly time by her return "aus der anderen

Welt" and the notion that she can move without effort between reality and make-believe, between

one world and the next. Her appearance is made more spectral and less worldly by the appearance of

a *Schleier* – a veil or haze – obscuring her face.

The narrative accounts for the apartment's stasis – it also seems to be fixed in the eternal

present – as the result of Věra's trauma after Austerlitz's mother's deportation. Yet this traumatic

---

[296] Tuan, *Space and Place*, 29.

stasis also parallels the timeless effect of memory, which we regard as unchanging. Upon seeing the

familiar furnishings, Austerlitz perceives his whole lifetime as if it were rushing over him. Are these

furnishings simply a reminder that unlocks a hidden part of Austerlitz's memory? It is as if Austerlitz

had so fixed childhood memories on these furnishings that they actually stand in for other aspects of

his past. Rather than the furnishings unlocking Austerlitz's forgotten past, I would argue that the

converse is true: Austerlitz seems to unlock the memories that reside in the furnishings.[297]

This deep encoding of memory in the domestic space of Věra's apartment is more explicitly

illustrated as Věra reminds Austerlitz of his habit of watching the neighbors from a window seat in

the apartment:

> In der guten Jahreszeit besonders, sagte Věra, habe sie bei der Rückkehr von dem täglichen Spaziergang als erstes immer die Geranienstöcke auf dem Sims beiseite rücken müssen, damit ich von meinem Lieblingsplatz auf der Fensterbank hinabschauen konnte auf den Fliedergarten und das niedrige Haus gegenüber, in welchem der bucklige Schneider Moravec seine Werkstatt gehabt habe, und während sie das Brot aufschnitt und das Teewasser zum Sieden brachte, hätte ich ihr in fortlaufendem Kommentar berichtet, womit Moravec gerade beschäftigt war […]. Věra war, indem sie mir von meiner seltsamen Beobachtungskunst erzählte, aufgestanden und hatte das innere und das äußere Fenster geöffnet, um mich hinabschauen zu lassen in den Nachbargarten, in dem der Flieder gerade blühte, so weiß und dicht, daß es in der einbrechenden Dämmerung aussah, als habe es mitten ins Frühjahr hinein geschneit. Und der süßliche, aus dem ummauerten Garten emporwehende Duft, der zunehmende Mond, der schon über den Dächern stand, das Läuten der Kirchenglocken drunten in der Stadt und die gelbe Fassade des Schneiderhauses mit dem grünen Altan, auf dem Moravec, der, wie Věra sagte, schon längst nicht mehr lebte, seinerzeit nicht selten zu sehen war, wie er sein schweres, mit Kohlenglut gefülltes Bügeleisen durch die Luft schwenkte, diese und andere Bilder mehr, sagte Austerlitz, 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, auch dann, als Věra, ohne ein Wort, die Türe aufmachte zu dem Zimmer, in welchem neben dem von der Großtante geerbten Baldachinbett mit den gedrehten Säulen und den hochaufragenden Kopfpolstern das kleine Kanapee noch stand, auf dem ich immer geschlafen habe, wenn die Eltern nicht zu Hause waren.[298]

---

[297] This effect is repeated and reinforced when Věra opens the door and Austerlitz sees and simultaneously remembers the canopy bed where, as she tells him, he used to sleep.

[298] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 229–230.

In this passage, the description of an activity (the boy Austerlitz looking out from the window seat) is accompanied by a physical action involving a place in the apartment (Věra opening the window above the seat). Together, these enable Austerlitz to access long-lost memories. As Zilcosky puts it, "The Sebaldian archive, normally so withholding, now bursts open."[299] A telling transfer of agency occurs in this passage. In the beginning, Věra has control of the narrative: The phrase "indem [Věra] mir von meiner seltsamen Beobachtungskunst erzählte" places the story and all insight into the past in Věra's hands. But soon after, we see this power to transmit memory transferred to sensory impressions instead: "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." This passage emphasizes the connection between place and the retrieval of memory. It is "das Hinausschauen[…] aus dem Fenster" that enables Austerlitz to remember. The senses are all engaged in this passage – the smell of lilacs wafts through the window, moonlight engages the visual, church bells ring in the distance. It is at first unclear whether all of these sensory impressions are let into the apartment with the opening of the window, but the reader soon realizes that "diese Bilder" have the force of memories for Austerlitz. With the images, Austerlitz feels able to resurrect a lost identity, uniting his name with a past that makes sense.

Not only is this place capable of resurrecting forgotten memories, it is also positively connoted. The description of the apartment is rich in detail and the description of the boy Austerlitz telling stories about what he sees is a pleasant one. Even the scene of the tailor laying a table for his dinner is an image of domestic bliss. This place is free of tension and charged with positive emotions. Furthermore, it seems to be one of the places that Austerlitz sees as a kind of transit-place for the dead:

---

[299] Zilcosky, "Lost and Found," 692.

> Es scheint mir nicht, sagte Austerlitz, daß wir die Gesetze verstehen, unter denen sich die Wiederkunft der Vergangenheit vollzieht, doch ist es 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[…].[300]

This passage contains Sebald's most explicit criticism of a purely temporal understanding of memory and offers an image that becomes the model for the construction of memory in the text. Ben Hutchinson comments at length on the "verschachtelte" – nested or bracketed – nature of Sebald's narrative, alluding to several moments in the text where the word "Schachtel" appears.[301] Hutchinson claims that the frequent reoccurrence of the word "Schachtel" in all its forms signals a self-conscious construction of the narrative itself[302] and that the notion of stereometry "entspricht Sebalds Rahmentechnik: Es sind genau die "ineinander verschachtelte[n] Räume" der verschiedenen Erzählschichten, die diesen Zusammenhang zwischen "Lebendigen" und "Toten" entstehen lassen."[303] However, Hutchinson argues, the spatialization of both memory and the narrative style in which it is couched fails to resurrect the past. Instead, the spatialized narrative can stage Austerlitz's lost history, but not take its place.[304] It seems then, according to Hutchinson that the spatial model fails just as surely as the temporal one.[305]

---

[300] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 269.

[301] Ben Hutchinson, *W.G. Sebald -- Die Dialektische Imagination*, Quellen Und Forschungen Zur Literatur- Und Kulturgeschichte ; 59. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 46–47.

[302] See chapter five of this dissertation for a discussion of Sebald's bracketed narrative and its heterotopic effect.

[303] Hutchinson, *W.G. Sebald -- Die Dialektische Imagination*, 47.

[304] "eine verlorene Vergangenheit zwar inszenieren, aber nicht ersetzen." Ibid., 48.

[305] Ingo Wintermeyer reads this passage as a kind of expression of survivors' guilt. He bases this on Austerlitz's thought that "wir, die wir uns noch am Leben befinden, in den Augen der Toten irreale und nur manchmal, unter bestimmten Lichtverhältnissen und atmosphärischen Bedingungen sichtbar werdende Wesen sind. Soweit ich zurückblicken kann, sagte Austerlitz, habe ich mich immer gefühlt, als hätte ich keinen Platz in der Wirklichkeit, als sei ich gar nicht vorhanden." Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 269. This feeling of nonexistence causes Austerlitz to question his own sanity and status in the world. Wintermeyer draws attention to the way in which Sebald uses this passage to distinguish between "Verfolgungsopfer" and "Täteropfer." (See Ingo Wintermeyer, "… Kaum Eine Schmerzensspur Hinterlassen … '? Luftkrieg, Literatur Und Der 'Cordon Sanitaire," in *Verschiebebahnhöfe Der Erinnerung : Zum Werk W.G. Sebalds*, ed. Sigurd

I find two aspects of this allusion to stereometry important. First, the use of such an obscure, specific scientific word is alienating. Second, and more important, stereometry refers to the calculation of a solid figure's volume from its surface measurements or to the measurement of a liquid's specific gravity.[306] Read metaphorically, this science relies on the external appearance of a solid – impermeable – object to determine its interior characteristics. This is precisely what Austerlitz attempts to do. Because he cannot access the actual content of his memories, he relies on external sources – Věra's stories or the contents of the Prague archive, for example – to gain insight. Certainly the apartment disturbs the reader's understanding of time, allowing as it does for the coexistence of past and present, but it also allows the dead to return – perhaps not literally – but in a form that is very real to Austerlitz. For Austerlitz, the furnishings and the physical characteristics of Věra's apartment are the vessels in which his memory has been locked away and experiencing the intimacy, security, and potential for imagination of Věra's apartment allows Austerlitz to access those memories.

<center>ANDROMEDA LODGE</center>

A second positively connoted place in the novel is Andromeda Lodge, the home of Austerlitz's school friend Gerald, where Austerlitz spent most of his school vacations rather than returning to his adoptive parents' home in Bala. This house and its gardens provided young Austerlitz with a place to escape the forbidding Bala house and distance himself from the identity he had assumed upon his adoption.

Martin and Ingo Wintermeyer (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), 148.) Wintermeyer also argues that Sebald's text seems largely to be "die sentimentale Vergegenwärtigung eines verlorenen ganzheitlichen Heimatbegriffes durch biographisch erlittene Entfremdungs- und Verlusterfahrung." (Ibid., 157.) In this sense, then, one could argue that Sebald lives vicariously through Austerlitz's attempts to trace his own history and find his own home. Sebald does not allow himself this luxury.

[306] "stereometry, n.". OED Online. March 2012. Oxford University Press.

Andromeda Lodge, whose name conjures up both the limitless freedom of the cosmos and the wild, harmonious growth of nature that sets it apart from all the other spaces in the book serves Austerlitz as a second (or first? certainly a preferred) home when he is invited there for his school holidays, what he calls his "Ferienasyl."[307] His choice of the word *Asyl* to describe his retreat to Andromeda Lodge over every holiday is charged with the political notion of asylum and the idea of exile. This notion of an escape from school starkly contrasts with the dread he felt upon having to go back to Bala during holidays at the beginning of his school career. Reflecting on the vacations he spent at Andromeda Lodge as a boy, Austerlitz "wünsch[t] sich heute […] daß [er] in dem Frieden, der dort ununterbrochen herrschte, spurlos hätte vergehen können."[308] Andromeda Lodge, unlike the Bala house, is a place where Austerlitz would have been happy to disappear. The warm, home-like feeling of the house allows him to explore parts of his identity that were hidden to him before. His relationship with Gerald actually helps to unearth part of his identity. In all of his other relationships in his life in Wales, Austerlitz is not in a position of authority and is only shown sparing affection. With Gerald, on the other hand, Austerlitz can take the younger boy under his wing and receive a constant outpouring of affection and adoration. Gerald also gives him access to a family life at Andromeda Lodge that is much more harmonious than the life he knows at Bala.

The primary impressions Andromeda Lodge makes on the reader are of the landscape surrounding the house. The landscape Austerlitz encounters at Andromeda Lodge is idyllic, with broad vistas revealing nearby towns, but also reaching far into the distance to the mountains and seaside beyond them.

> Das doppelstöckige, aus hellgrauen Ziegeln gemauerte Haus war gegen Norden und
> Nordosten geschützt durch die an dieser Stelle steil abfallende Hügelkette von Llawr Llech;
> nach Südwesten zu war das Gelände in einem Halbrund weit offen, so daß vom Vorplatz aus

---

[307] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 121.

[308] Ibid., 119.

115

der Blick über die Flußmündung in ihrer ganzen Länge von Dolgellau bis nach Barmouth hinunterging, während diese Orte selber, auf der einen Seite durch einen felsigen Vorsprung und auf der anderen durch eine Lorbeerböschung, ausgeschlossen waren aus dem kaum eine menschliche Behausung zeigenden Panorama. Nur jenseits des Flusses – unter betsimmten atmosphärischen Bedingungen, sagte Austerlitz, konnte man denken, eine Ewigkeit entfernt – sah man winzig klein das Dörfchen Arthog liegen, hinter dem sich bis beinahe dreitausend Fuß über dem weiter draußen schimmernden Meer die Schattenseite des Cader Idris erhebt.[309]

From this description we learn only that the house is made up of two stories and built from gray stone. Of the setting, though, the reader learns a good deal more. The house is ideally situated, with hills providing shelter to the cold north and east sides and to the front an open panorama sweeping across the south and west. There are almost no other houses (*Behausung*) to be seen until one's eye crosses the natural barrier of the river and sees a *Dörfchen* – the word conjures up not only the miniature, but also the picturesque. The view of such a settlement would be pleasant, but would not diminish the privacy of the house's setting.[310]

The climate at Andromeda Lodge is unusually clement, and slightly warmer than elsewhere in Wales, even in the immediately adjacent area.[311] The narrator makes the point that it constitutes a microclimate of its own. Surrounding the house are extensive gardens, which seem to be a second Garden of Eden, according to Austerlitz's description of the climate and variety of flora and fauna living there.

---

[309] Ibid., 122.

[310] Bachelard sees this kind of setting as a key to a home's intimacy. Of this setting's counterpart – an urban home – Bachelard writes: "[…] a house in a big city lacks cosmicity. For here, where houses are no longer set in natural surroundings, the relationship between house and space becomes an artificial one. Everything about it is mechanical and, on every side, intimate living flees." Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 17. In that sense as well, Andromeda Lodge is perfectly situated. It is not so remote as to feel isolated, but it is not so crowded as to lose its cosmicity and intimacy. This kind of vista is also an essential feature of Repton's Landscape Garden designs, creating the "appearance of extent and freedom." This view is also reminiscent of what Jay Appleton would define as a vista, a very strong symbol of prospect. See Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, 77–79. It is also interesting to think about this panorama in connection to the "Panorama der Stadt" Austerlitz describes in Prague and also the Waterloo panorama. For more on this, see chapter three.

[311] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 122.

In dem während der Kriegsjahre vollkommen verwilderten Garten, der rückwärts des Hauses den Hang hinaufging, wuchsen Pflanzen und Stauden, die ich nirgends in Wales gesehen hatte zuvor, Riesenrhabarber und mehr als mannshohe neuseeländische Farne, Wasserkohl und Kamelien, Bambusdickicht und Palmen, und über eine Felswand stürzte ein Bach zu Tal, dessen weißer Staub immer das gefleckte Dämmer unter dem Blätterdach der hohen Bäume durchwehte. Doch nicht nur die in wärmeren Zonen beheimateten Gewächse gaben einem das Gefühl, man sei jetzt in einer anderen Welt […].[312]

The gardens are described as "volkommen verwildert,"[313] which gives them the curious status of seeming to both predate and postdate cultivation; predating in the sense that Eden was uncultivated, wild, and fruitful, postdating in the literal sense that no one had tended to them for many years. The oversized plants have the effect of dwarfing the human inhabitants of the garden. Moreover, the garden is described in quasi-architectural terms. The ceiling of the garden, so to speak, is the *Blätterdach* and at least one wall is present (the *Felswand* over which a small waterfall flows). One can imagine, however, that the enormous ferns, giant rhubarb, and especially the *Bambusdickicht* would occlude the view as much as any wall would. The family living at Andromeda Lodge seems, at least in part, to live as much in the garden as outside it, giving weight to this understanding of the garden as an extension of the house.[314]

The reader encounters representatives of two traditions in the family at Andromeda Lodge. Great-uncle Alphonso represents a strong tradition of natural historians, whereas Uncle Evelyn represents the religious side of the family. Alphonso, we learn, spends most of his time outside "in einer abgeklärten Stimmung" and makes "weitschweifige Exkursionen sogar bei schlechtestem Wetter oder saß, wenn es schön war, in seinem weißen Kittel und mit dem Strohhut auf dem Kopf

---

[312] Ibid., 122.

[313] Ibid., 122.

[314] Alexander positions the garden as "a liminal space between the inside and the greater outside, the wilderness, and liminality admits dissolution, inversion, and Robert Herrick's sweet disorder. Paradise is domesticated, but the domestication is only ever partial; cultural borders, just like the herbaceous, are leaky and cannot be contained without labor." She bemoans the fact that gardens are routinely elided in discussions of domestic space. Catherine Alexander, "The Garden as Occasional Domestic Space," *Signs* 27, no. 3 (March 1, 2002): 868. In *Austerlitz*, the garden is clearly part of the domestic sphere and is portrayed as the setting for much of the action in Andromeda Lodge.

irgendwo in der Umgegend des Hauses auf einem Feldstühlchen und aquarellierte."[315] Alphonso

represents the tradition in the family whose earlier adherents had developed a friendship with

Charles Darwin, a friendship[316] which had led to the house becoming a kind of natural history

museum:

> Im übrigen, fuhr Austerlitz fort, fand sich fast in jedem der Räume von Andromeda Lodge
> irgendein Naturalienkabinett, Kästen mit zahlreichen, zum Teil verglasten Schubladen, in
> denen die ziemlich kugeligen Eier der Papageien zu Hunderten aufrangiert waren, Muschel-,
> Mineralien-, Käfer- und Schmetterlingssammlungen, in Formaldehyd eingelegte
> Blindschleichen, Nattern und Echsen, Schneckenhäuser und Seesterne, Krebse und Krabben
> und große Herbarien mit Baumblättern, Blüten und Gräsern.[317]

The ubiquity of these specimens in the house have the effect of bringing nature indoors, just as

elements of the house (roof and walls) had been projected onto the garden. The inside and outside

of the house are both, therefore, depicted as domestic (though not wholly domesticated) space. This

emphasizes the permeability of the walls and the liminality of the garden.

The interior of the house is sparingly described in comparison to the gardens and

surroundings. Two spaces in the upper floor of the house are described in some detail, the first

housing a kind of graveyard for the birds and the second an apartment for the chronically ill uncle

Evelyn, who suffers a congenital disease that leads to radical stiffening of the joints. Hoping to delay

the disease's progress, he paces in circles around his apartment, hanging on to a railing, and wearing

down a border of linoleum that had been installed around the perimeter of his rooms for the

---

[315] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 132. The image seems to recall Spitzweg's paintings.

[316] In the passage set in Andromeda Lodge, personal relationships are more significant than in any other domestic
environment. In the Bala house, the inhabitants are described almost as if in isolation – their relationships to one
another are not significant. Here, however, relationships (between Austerlitz and Gerald, between Austerlitz and Adela,
between the halves of the family, between the family and Darwin) are paramount. This agrees with Sopher's appraisal of
the home as an environment that is primarily defined by the people in it and the stories about them that situate family
and home in history: "At a different level of experience, or at a different scale, the landscape of home may be chiefly a
litany of names, pictures, and tales of places that record the direct experience of home by one's people: the members of
a family, a larger kin group or a folk." Sopher, "The Landscape of Home: Myth, Experience, Social Meaning," 137.

[317] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 126–127.

purpose.[318] Evelyn's rooms are sparingly furnished: "Es gab in den Zimmern Evelyns weder

Vorhänge noch irgend sonstiges Mobiliar, da er nichts unnötig in Gebrauch nehmen wollte, auch

wenn es sich um ein schon längst angeschafftes Stück handelte, das nur aus einem anderen Teil des

Hauses herbeigeholt werden mußte."[319] He leads a hermit's existence, suffers a martyr's pains, and

prays nightly to a host of saints. This last is known only because of an architectural curiosity in the

house:

> Man hörte ihn dann durch das Gitter eines Lüftungsschachts, der sein Schlafzimmer mit
> einem Wohnzimmer im Erdgeschoß verband und, unbeabsichtigterweise, als eine Art
> Kommunikationsanlage funktionierte, wie er stundenlang die verschiedensten Heiligen
> anrief, insbesondere […] die auf grauenvollste Weise zu Tode gebrachten Märtyrerinnen
> Katharina und Elisabeth, und sie um Fürsprache bat bei seinem, wie er sich ausdrückte,
> allfälligen Hintritt vor den Richterstuhl seines himmlischen Herrn.[320]

The airshaft that pierces both floors of the house emphasizes its verticality and cements the reader's

notion that the upper floor resembles an attic. Bachelard argues that houses are essentially vertical

and that city apartments, where living space is condensed to a single (horizontal) floor thwart the

symbols of intimacy present in a traditional house.[321] Furthermore, the attic (or upper floor) and

cellar of a house are privileged, intimate, and sometimes frightening places. Drawing on Jung,

Bachelard describes the nature of the attic and cellar thus:

> In the attic, fears are easily "rationalized." Whereas in the cellar, even for a more courageous
> man than the one Jung mentions, "rationalization" is less rapid and less clear; also it is never
> *definitive*. In the attic, the day's experiences can always efface the fears of night. In the cellar,

---

[318] See Ibid., 130.

[319] Ibid., 130–132.

[320] Ibid., 131–132.

[321] While Bachelard argues that solely horizontal homes (in the city) lack the potential for intimacy present in traditional (vertical) houses, intimacy is still created in Vera's Prague apartment by the inclusion of a number of enclosed, intimate spaces. For example, the bed that calls to mind Austerlitz's memories of sleeping there while his mother was still out is a canopy bed, possibly with curtains that could be closed. The window seat is another such privileged site of intimacy. It is Austerlitz's own special place for daydreaming – which in his case takes the form of watching and spinning stories about the neighbors. See Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 17.

darkness prevails both day and night, and even when we are carrying a lighted candle, we see shadows dancing on the dark walls.[322]

While the descriptions of the upper floor in Andromeda Lodge are not marked by fear, it is important to remember that such spaces are frequently seen as separate from the everyday. Attics (and cellars, though there is no cellar at Andromeda Lodge) are the site of fears, but also of heightened dreaming. Certainly this other-ness is apparent in the two upstairs spaces we encounter at Andromeda Lodge.

These two divergent characters – Uncle Evelyn and Great-Uncle Alphonso – represent the family's two warring traditions: strict religious belief on the one side and adherence to science on the other. The family divides its time between fervently serving God (represented by Evelyn) and researching and naming animals and plants (represented by Alphonso), just as Adam was told to do in Eden. The character (and history) of the house alludes to characteristics in Austerlitz himself. The family's connection with Darwin, who is said to have repeatedly visited, is of great symbolic weight. Adela tells Austerlitz that whenever he visited, Darwin always praised the "paradiesische Aussicht."[323] This exact wording is perhaps unlikely to have been used by Darwin, although the microclimate in which Andromeda Lodge is located does recall the Galapagos Islands, whose flora and fauna motivated Darwin's theory of evolution. It was there, for example, that Darwin first began his important study of finches. The connection between Austerlitz and Darwin, established through Andromeda Lodge, calls to mind the similarities in their searches for roots and origins.

In this passage that the reader also learns about Austerlitz's predilection for lingering at windows:

Die Aussicht aus dem Zimmer mit dem blauen Plafond, das Adela stets als mein Zimmer bezeichnete, grenzte wahrhaftig ans Überwirkliche. Ich sah von oben auf die einem grünen

---

[322] Ibid., 19.

[323] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 127.

120

> Hügelland gleichenden Wipfel der Bäume, Zedern und Schirmpinien zumeist, die von der Straße unterhalb dem Haus gegen das Flußufer abstiegen, ich sah die dunklen Falten in den Gebirgsmassen auf der anderen Seite und schaute Stunden hinaus auf die mit den Tageszeiten und Witterungsverhältnissen in einem fort sich verändernde Irische See. Wie oft bin ich nicht am offenen Fenster gestanden, ohne einen Gedanken fassen zu können vor diesem niemals sich wiederholenden Schauspiel.[324]

This description of the view places Austerlitz in a curious position: above him is a blue ceiling (which one could easily confuse for the sky) and below him the tops of the trees. This is a result certainly of the elevation of the room relative to the ground, but seems also to be an effect of the emotional state Austerlitz achieves through gazing out the window. A number of words and phrases connect this episode of window-gazing to the habit the child Austerlitz had in Prague.[325] The phrase "in einem fort" is used in both descriptions – in the Prague passage it applies to the child Austerlitz's storytelling while here it applies to the ever-changing sea. The word *Schauspiel* reminds us of Austerlitz's mother's career as an actor, but also of young Austerlitz's habit of peeking out from between the curtains to see what his neighbors are doing. While the human neighbors the boy observed with such enthusiasm were creatures of habit, the natural force of the sea is not repetitive, the changing winds and qualities of light creating ever-changing patterns and colors. Austerlitz experiences a kind of meditative state when staring out of his window at Andromeda Lodge.[326] The view accorded to him and the freedom to spend hours standing at the window at Andromeda Lodge allow Austerlitz to begin rebuilding his identity in reverse. Rather than starting with a name and developing an identity along a traditional trajectory as he grew, Austerlitz begins by reclaiming old

---

[324] Ibid., 142.

[325] It should be noted that, although we discussed the Prague episode earlier in this chapter, the Andromeda Lodge episode actually precedes it in the text. From a narrative perspective, the connections we see here should be understood as prefiguring the Prague episode.

[326] The reader notes that windows are thematized throughout the text. It is important to bear in mind their function as an instrument of prospect in the sense that Appleton meant it. Windows provide a person the ability to see without exposing herself to danger or threat. The Bala house shows us an example of a perversion of this basic function of windows and Austerlitz's Alderney Street house depicts a reversal in which the open, illuminated windows actually deny the house's inhabitant a view of the outside while simultaneously exposing them to view. For a more thorough discussion of Appleton's Prospect-Refuge theory, see chapter three of this dissertation.

habits and proceeds to regaining his original name and eventually filling in the blanks through research.

The freakish climate of Andromeda Lodge allows a multitude of unusual plant varieties to thrive. Andromeda Lodge is positioned as the perfect habitat for displaced or exiled creatures, which would otherwise not survive the chilly English climate. In precisely the same way, Austerlitz himself experiences Andromeda Lodge.

<div align="center">NEGATIVELY CONNOTED DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENTS</div>

Domestic spaces in Sebald's works do not frequently reflect this kind of positive environment, however. More frequently they are cold environments that are either unsettling or both devoid of and repressive of identity. In *Die Ausgewanderten* the reader encounters a number of these uncomfortable domestic spaces, two of which we will briefly discuss here. The first is the house in "Dr. Henry Selwyn" that the unnamed first-person narrator and his partner visit and eventually move into as tenants. The reader encounters the house almost immediately at the beginning of the story:

> Wir gingen die weit ausholende Einfahrt leicht abwärts und die über den mit feinem Kies ebenmäßig bedeckten Vorplatz. Zur Rechten, hinter den Stallungen und Remisen, erhob sich hoch in den klaren Herbsthimmel ein Buchenstand mit einer Krähenkolonie, die jetzt, am frühen Nachmittag, verlassen war, die Nester dunkle Stellen unter dem nur manchmal bewegten Blätterdach. Die Fassade des breit hingelagerten klassizisitischen Hauses war überwachsen von wildem Wein, das Haustor schwarz lackiert. Mehrmals betätigten wir den Türklopfer, einen messingnen, geschwungenen Fischleib, ohne daß sich im Innern des Hauses etwas gerührt hätte. Wir traten ein Stückweit zurück. Die Scheiben der zwölffach unterteilten Fenster schienen alle aus dunklem Spiegelglas. Es war nicht, als ob irgend jemand hier wohnte.[327]

Although the house is full of character – its classical architecture, the trees near the house, and even the door-knocker in the shape of a fish could give the house a pleasant air – but the house appears

---

[327] Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 9.

to be completely deserted. Furthermore, the windows – which should have given the visitors at least a glimpse of the interior – baffle their attempts at gaining any kind of access. Windows are frequently an image for vision and prospect; as we have seen above, Austerlitz basks in the views afforded by various windows in his youth. In a way, windows function as the eyes of a house. These windows, however, are opaque where they should have been transparent. This characteristic certainly blocks the viewer from looking into the house, but one worries, perhaps, that the opposite is true – that they also block the view from inside the house looking out. This produces a keen discomfort in the narrator, who remembers another house in Charente "deren Fenster geradeso glänzend und blind gewesen waren wie die des Hauses, vor welchem wir jetzt standen."[328] The use of the adjective *blind* to describe the windows underlines the anxiety about vision inherent in the image of the blocked or too-reflective windows.

Upon entering the house, the narrator discovers that the windows do function as instruments of prospect: "der Ausblick von den hohen Fenstern auf den Garten, den Park und die Wolkenbänke am Himmel war weit mehr als nur ein Ausgleich für das düstere Interieur."[329] The house is possessed of an interior that does not match the exterior and the view from the windows has an almost magical ability to change the inhabitants' opinion about the inside: "Man brauchte nur hinauszuschauen, und schon […] entschwebte, wie durch ein Wunder, der türkisgrüne und vielleicht gar nicht ganz ungefährliche Gaskühlschrank."[330] The view from these rooms looks out onto the garden which surrounds the house and which is also imbued with a kind of magical power. Despite years of neglect, even the kitchen garden continues to produce in almost unnatural quantities:

---

[328] Ibid.

[329] Ibid., 15.

[330] Ibid.

123

Freilich bringe der Garten, der einmal zur Versorgung eines vielköpfigen Haushalts angelegt worden und aus welchem das ganze Jahr hindurch mit großer Kunstfertigkeit gezogenes Obst und Gemüse auf den Tisch gekommen sei, aller Vernachlässigung zum Trotz auch heute noch so viel hervor, daß er weit mehr als genug habe für seine eigenen, zugegebener maßen immer geringer werdenden Bedürfnisse. Die Verwilderung des einstmals vorbildlichen Gartens habe übrigens, sagte Dr. Selwyn, den Vorteil, daß das, was wachse in ihm, oder was er hie und da, ohne größere Anstalten, angesät oder angepflanzt habe, von einem, wie er meine, außergewöhnlich feinen Geschmack sei. Wir ginge nzwischen einem ins Kraut geschossenen Spargelbeet mit schulterhohen Laubbüscheln und einer Reihe mächtiger Artischockenstauden hindurch zu einer kleinen Gruppe von Apfelbäumen, an denen eine Unzahl rotgelber Früchte hing. Ein Dutzend dieser Märchenäpfel, die tatsächlich in ihrem Geschmack alles übertrafen, was ich seither gekostet habe, legte Dr. Selwyn auf ein Rhabarberblatt und machte sie Clara zum Geschenk mit der Bemerkung, die Sorte trage, sinnvollerweise, den Namen Beauty of Bath.[331]

A number of elements in this passage recall the kind of garden we might expect in a fairy tale: clearly the description of the apples as *Märchenäpfel* introduces the notion, but also the curious ever-increasing quality of the produce and its persistence in growing and bearing fruit despite neglect also seems magical. Seen in this context, the overgrown grape vines that cover the façade of the house also seem to be a nod toward the fairy tale tradition, marking the house as somehow bewitched.

In "Ambros Adelwarth" the reader does not encounter a detailed description of Ambros's home in Mamaroneck, but does see a picture of its living room and a brief comment on the house's appearance. "So bis auf die letzte Kleinigkeit geordnet wie auf dieser Fotografie war e simmer im ganzen Haus. Mir kam es oft vor, als rechne der Onkel Adelwarth jederzeit mit dem Eintreffen eines fremden Gasts. Es ist aber nie jemand gekommen, woher denn auch, sagte die Tante Fini."[332] In the image, the reader sees an immaculate, modest living room with what appear to be souvenirs from Ambros's many travels. The description of the room's permanent readiness for guests who never appear, however, seems to recall the house from "Dr. Henry Selwyn," which seems deserted, although it is inhabited.

---

[331] Ibid., 14.

[332] Ibid., 148–149.

FIGURE 3. Ambros Adelwarth's living room.[333]

Both of these domestic spaces appear in a book that thematizes emigration and exile and whose characters are never shown in an environment that resembles a home in the intimate Bachelardian sense. Instead of a place for imagining, these domestic spaces seem to be, at best, spaces for memory and, at worst spaces that stymie thought and feeling. In that context, it is not surprising that these homes are cold and lack in personality. However, when we consider the homes inhabited by Austerlitz, it is striking to see the same coldness present in two of the most important domestic spaces in the text – the house in Bala, where he lived with his adoptive family, and his own house in London.

---

[333] Ibid., 148.

The reader first encounters the house in Bala when Austerlitz and Gerald make their way from school to Andromeda Lodge, stopping briefly in Bala.[334] This makes sense geographically, but also sums up Austerlitz's experience there. His time in Bala was a kind of mandatory layover between his early life, in Prague – as he believes – and the life he would eventually lead in England and while traveling throughout the rest of Europe. This house, where Austerlitz lived with his adoptive parents becomes the most disquieting domestic space that Austerlitz describes to the narrator, representing the "home" that becomes what Kochar-Lindgren calls "merely a sign of the brutal erasure of history."[335] This brutal erasure of history reaches all levels of Austerlitz's identity. First and foremost, he is renamed. Rather than continuing to refer to him as Jacques Austerlitz, the preacher and his wife rename the boy Dafydd Elias. Moreover, when the preacher does show some interest in Austerlitz's wellbeing, he phrases his inquiry in the third person, asking, "and how is the boy?" This has the effect of maintaining the distance between "father" and "son" and further depersonalizes Austerlitz. Blumenthal-Barby comments on the essentiality of the name to the preservation of identity: "To have a name means to have an identity, a story. If a name gets erased, the story of its bearer gets lost. As the erasure of one's name implies the loss of one's story, the loss of one's story lays the groundwork for the *misappropriation* of one's life (and death)."[336] Certainly loss of a name implies loss of identity, but as we see with Austerlitz, restoring the name does not restore the identity. Instead, the trappings of identity need to be recovered as well.

---

[334] cf. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 120.

[335] Gray Kochar-Lindgren, "Charcoal: The Phantom Traces of W.G. Sebald's Novel-Memoirs," *Monatshefte* 94, no. 3 (October 1, 2002): 368.

[336] Martin Blumenthal-Barby, "Holocaust and Herring: The Resuscitation of the Silenced in W.G. Sebald's The Rings of Saturn," *Monatshefte* 103, no. 4 (2011): 541.

The descriptions of the Bala house depict it as a veritable mansion, with spare rooms that remain shut up, unused, simply gathering dust. He emphasizes that the house is far too big for the childless couple to live in alone. Elias and Gwendolyn seem themselves to be out of place in their own home. Nearly every description of the Bala house dwells on its closed windows, dim light, and curtains shut against the outside. This was particularly oppressive to the young Austerlitz and, at one point, he is overwhelmed simply to see a house with open windows: "vielleicht habe ich deshalb, Jahre später an einem Sommertag, als ich irgendwo unterwegs, an einem Haus vorbeikam, dessen sämtliche Fenster offenstanden, mich auf eine so unbegreifliche Weise aus mir herausgehoben gefühlt."[337] This feeling of freedom is what Austerlitz experiences at Andromeda Lodge.

The most curious characteristic of the Bala house is an architectural idiosyncrasy: one of Austerlitz's bedroom windows is visible from the outside of the house, but was actually bricked up and totally non-functional from the inside.[338] This detail underlines the feeling of imprisonment Austerlitz expresses, and diminishes his freedom and access – or prospect – to the outside world. Not only was he deprived of half the view he should have had from his window(s), but he was prevented from expressing a part of his identity that was central in his early childhood. His first discovery of this loss occurs at Andromeda Lodge. By contrast, the mismatched exterior and interior of the house in Bala reinforces the feeling that Austerlitz's external surroundings do not match with his identity.

The Bala house is marked by coldness and silence: "Und so wie in dem Haus in Bala die Kälte herrschte in ihm auch das Schweigen."[339] The warmth and peacefulness (*Frieden*) of Andromeda Lodge functions as a foil for the silent (*schweigen*), chilly house in Bala, a contrast that is

---

[337] Sebald, *Austerlitz,* 71.

[338] cf. ibid., 120.

[339] Ibid., 71.

127

reiterated in many images. Austerlitz's adoptive mother also seems overcome by the nature of the

house, doing all of the housework in silence.[340] The silence seems to be wholly oppressive and may

have found its ultimate expression following the death of the preacher's wife. In Bala, Austerlitz's

feeling of placelessness is underscored by a second deprivation of a mother figure. He had been

removed from his biological mother and now is under the care of a woman who is, herself, so

paralyzed by silence and seeming despair, that she cannot fill that role for the boy. Even before his

wife's death, the preacher himself is also generally silent inside the house. While preparing for his

sermons every week, he contemplates them mutely and then on Sunday delivers a spontaneous and

energetic sermon:

> Der Prediger saß indessen, wie das seine unabänderliche Gewohnheit war, in seinem
> Studierzimmer, das auf ein finsteres Eck des Gartens hinausging, und dachte sich seine am
> nächsten sonntagzu haltende Predigt aus. Keine diese Redigten hat er je niedergeschrieben,
> vielmehr erarbeitete er sie nur in seinem Kopf, indem er sich selber damit peinigte,
> wenigstens vier Tage lang. Völlig niedergeschlagen kam er jeweils am Abend aus seiner
> Kammer hervor, nur um am folgenden Morgen wieder in ihr zu verschwinden. Am Sonntag,
> wenn er vor die im Betthaus versammelte Gemeinde hintrat und ihr of eine Stunde lang mit
> einer, wie ich noch zu hören glaube, sagte Austerlitz, tatsächlich erschütternden Wordgewalt
> das allen bevorstehende Strafgericht, die Farben des Fegefeuers, die Qualen der Verdammnis
> sowie, in den wundervollsten Stern- und Himmelsbildern, das Eingehen der Gerechten in
> die ewige Seligkeit vor Augen führte, war er ein verwandelter Mann.[341]

In this passage, the house seems to be a site of silence, while the church allows the preacher to

berate his congregation and terrify them with his torrent of words about the horrors of damnation.

In contrast to the preacher's exhaustion from his daily ruminations, he is oddly energized – "in

verhältnismäßig aufgeräumter Stimmung."[342] Austerlitz, on the other hand, permanently feels

confined to "Einsilbigkeit."[343] The silence of the Bala house represents to the older Austerlitz all the

---

[340] Austerlitz's adoptive mother is always referred to as the preacher's wife – "die Frau des Predigers" – and never in relationship with Austerlitz.

[341] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 72.

[342] Ibid., 73.

[343] Ibid.

discomforts and difficulties of adjusting from his home with his mother in Prague to the coolness and quietness of Britain, though he did not know the basis of his discomfort while he was a child. He describes the early days of his time in Wales as a long stretch of "Jeden-Tag-von-neuem-Begreifenmüssen, daß ich nicht mehr zu Hause war."[344] The oppression of the house extends beyond the silence of those who live there; of the perpetually-drawn curtains and spare furnishing in each of the rooms, Austerlitz says, "[sie] dämmerten […] in einem Halbdunkel dahin, das bald schon jedes Selbstgefühl auslöschte in mir."[345] Here we see that Austerlitz does not reproach the preacher and his wife for renaming him and dropping him into an entirely new life – instead the house itself is endowed with the power not only to force the family into silence, but also to suppress Austerlitz's sense of identity.

> Tatsächlich bin ich während all der von mir in dem Predigerhaus in Bala verbrachten Jahre nie das Gefühl losgeworden, etwas sehr Nahaliegendes, an sich Offenbares sei mir verborgen. Manchmal war es, als versuchte ich aus einem Traum heraus die Wirklichkeit zu erkennen; dann wieder meinte ich, ein unsichtbarer Zwillingsbruder ginge neben mir her, sozusagen das Gegenteil eines Schattens.[346]

As Austerlitz describes his memory, he presents it as if he has 20/20 hindsight. Despite Austerlitz's conviction that his memories are genuine, it is essential to bear in mind his unreliability. Not only is his account recounted to the reader by the anonymous narrator, but in Austerlitz's account, he contrasts the recovered memory of his first home with his dimly remembered childhood. The amnesia about his origins that he claims to have suffered would have prevented his recognizing "daß er nicht mehr zu Hause war."

---

[344] Ibid., 70.

[345] Ibid.

[346] Ibid., 84.

ALDERNEY STREET

The final domestic space that I will discuss is Austerlitz's peculiar house in Alderney

Street.[347] This house is only described in the waning light of day and at night and creates an artificial

impression, due to Austerlitz's purging and annihilation of any signifiers that did not have to do with

his memory-work – his obsessive attempts to reconstruct his personal history by shuffling through a

stack of photographs. The narrator provides the reader with the only descriptions of Austerlitz's

peculiar house in Alderney Street and, although the reader is given no description whatsoever of the

house previous to Austerlitz's decision to clean out and repaint the house, the 'After' picture is

bleak. The walls, floors, and ceilings are all painted in matte shades of grey, as is the large table[348] on

which Austerlitz plays his sort of photo memory game. In his nearly-bare house, an army cot and

Bordeaux crates serve as furnishings for the guest room in which the narrator sleeps, and, in his

living room, little more than a pair of chairs in front of the fireplace,[349] the grey-painted table, and an

---

[347] Sebald's choice of Alderney as the name of Austerlitz's street is intriguing: Alderney was one of the three Channel Islands to be taken and occupied by Germany in World War II. The islands were given code names: Guernsey became "Gustav," Jersey was called "Jakob," and Alderney was dubbed "Adolf." (See Peter King, *The Channel Islands War, 1940-1945* (London: R. Hale, 1991), 133.) The islands were occupied by German forces and became the sites of labor and concentration camps. The camps on Alderney were named, in turn, after North Sea islands, "Sylt," "Norderney," and "Helgoland." Large numbers of Jews were deported from France to Alderney and from there either executed or sent to work as slave labor in other camps. (See Madeleine Bunting, *The Model Occupation: The Channel Islands Under German Rule, 1940-1945* (Hammersmith, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995), 183.) While the camps were on a smaller scale than the ones on the European mainland, fatalities were still numerous. King writes "The numbers involved were smaller, and therefore the number of deaths was comparatively small. But however lenient German occupation as a whole, there is no evidence that the SS or [Dr. Fritz] Todt saw the Channel Islands camps as special cases for kid-gloves treatment. The death rate in Sylt in the 15 months it was under SS jurisdiction seems to have been one third of the prisoners: a figure in line with its parent camp [Neuengamme] in Germany. The treatment of Todt workers witnessed by Islanders was exactly similar [sic] to that elsewhere in Europe and so were camp conditions. The death rate among them might well be expected to run parallel, and there is some evidence that it did. It is not an exaggeration to speak of some of the Islands camps as death camps." (King, *The Channel Islands War, 1940-1945*, 132.) After liberation, records about the number of deaths and names of the dead seem to have disappeared, resulting in some uncertainty about the number of prisoners in the camps. However, a report from the *Organisation Todt* reported that their Channel Islands "labour force" – i.e. prisoners forced to do slave labor – numbered about 15, 000, with 2,000 on Alderney. While this is the smallest number of prisoners held on any of the islands, Alderney had the largest number of camps, and the official report excluded both political prisoners and Jews from the count. (See Charles Greig Cruickshank, *The German Occupation of the Channel Islands* (London; New York: Published for the Trustees of the Imperial War Museum by Oxford University Press, 1975), 205.)

[348] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 175.

[349] Ibid., 176.

oddly long ottoman,[350] which is similar to one Austerlitz describes from the apartment in Prague where his parents are supposed to have lived.

In his house in Alderney Street Austerlitz rebels against the stuffiness of drawn curtains and closed windows at the Bala house by refusing to hang curtains in his own house. This choice, however, may also contribute to his restlessness at home: the lack of curtains provides a view outside the house, but at night allows the outside world to see in –reminiscent of the nocturama – while giving Austerlitz only a limited view of the outside.[351]

While the lack of curtains may represent one small rebellion against the Bala house, Austerlitz's choice of paint reenacts, after a fashion, one detail of the house in Bala. Austerlitz describes the preacher's wife using talcum powder in such great quantities, "daß der Linoleumboden um ihr Lager herum und bald das ganze Zimmer und die Korridore im oberen Stock überzogen waren von einer weißen, durch die Feuchtigkeit der Luft leicht schmierig gewordenen Schicht." This "einweißen des Predigerhauses" calls to mind the erasure of identity that Austerlitz attributes to the house in Bala – the powder that coats the entire house seems almost to be a projection of the despair of Austerlitz's adoptive mother.[352] It stifles the other inhabitants of the house, Austerlitz in particular. So it is curious to note that in his own home in Alderney Street, Austerlitz similarly covers over any distinctive characteristics of the house – with gray paint instead of white talcum powder, but with the same effect. He creates his own blank slate – his own "Lager" in which to carry out his obsessive memory work.

---

[350] Ibid., 175.

[351] According to Appleton, then, this lack of privacy and prospect would both lead to the kind of anxiety that would force Austerlitz to seek a new habitat.

[352] This image is also connected to the Biblical image of the 'whited sepulchre.' In the book of Matthew, the contrast between interior and exterior is also thematized in this accusation of hypocrisy: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness." (Mt. 23:27 AV)

Through the erasure of its own character by monochromatic painting, the house in Alderney Street becomes, a "shelter for day-dreaming," a place for Austerlitz to "dream in peace." In contrast to Bachelard, who had a rather cozier house in mind – a space that provides shelter for imagining, but equally one that *inspires* such daydreams – in Alderney Street, Austerlitz creates something more Spartan – a space with no meaning of its own to distract him from his own search for a lost place and its forgotten meaning.[353] It is also reminiscent of a different type of space described in Bachelard, namely the blank interior space that enables serious creativity:

> One feels in these repetitions, or to be more exact, in this constant strengthening of an image into which one has entered (and not of a room into which one has entered, a room which the author bears within himself, and which he has made live with a life that does not exist in life) one feels, as I said, that it is not the writer's intention merely to describe his *familiar* abode. Memory would *encumber* this image by stocking it with *composite memories* from several periods in time. Here everything is simpler, more radically simple.[354]

Here Bachelard describes Pierre-Jean Jouve's "cell of himself," which in that poet's description is white-washed.[355] Clearly, here Bachelard has left the realm of concrete places and is describing the figurative interior place into which a writer retreats in order to create. Austerlitz, however, does not have access to such a place. His fractured identity and missing past cause him to live externally, focusing on the surfaces of things, studying architecture, obsessing over photographs. His remodeling of his house in Alderney Street is, perhaps, an attempt at creating an external embodiment of the internal space for creation that he lacks. Instead of creating poetry as Bachelard's

---

[353] The other space that Austerlitz inhabits is his office. This space is only described briefly, but offers insight to Austerlitz's character while he was still working in academia. The narrator says that it resembles a "Bücher- und Papiermagazin" and points out that there is barely room for Austerlitz in it, much less for a student to come and visit. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 52. This, again, seems to imply that Austerlitz receives very few visitors in general, including those who would have a professional reason to seek him out. In this case, as well, Austerlitz surrounds himself entirely with his work. He is surrounded in his office by stacks of books and papers, and no blank space is left for other thoughts to encroach on his work. This description of his office could possibly be read as a kind of 'Before' picture of Austerlitz's house. The theme of inundation, albeit of two very different kinds in these two settings, is consistent.

[354] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 229.

[355] "*La cellule de moi-même emplit d'étonnement / La muraille peinte à la chaux de mon secret.*" (*Les Noces*, p. 50, quoted in Ibid., 228.)

theory suggests, Austerlitz spends his time in his "gray-washed" space obsessively attempting to

recreate or retrieve – or perhaps fully invent – his memories of life before his relocation to England.

The monochromatic space is also reminiscent of the "grayscale" of the photographs he studies. The

only visible trace of this memory work is also the only potentially decorative element in the house:

the even rows of photographs on his large grey table. These photos, "älteren Datums und etwas

abgegriffen an den Rändern"[356] bear witness to the endless hours Austerlitz spends flipping through

them, rearranging them, and searching for some insight. This constant attempt to reconstruct his

past and his "pausenlose Selbstreflexion," as well as his compulsion to tell his story to the narrator is

reminiscent of what Gerhard Fischer calls a "characteristisches Identitätsmerkmal" of the

expatriate.[357] Furthermore, the table on which the photos are spread out in his front room, the first

room into which any visitor would enter. Austerlitz is not inhibited about his odd choice of

furnishing or by his obsessive photo-shuffling. Purely functional, the house makes few concessions

to aesthetics or appearance: his work and his life are on view to the world. This prominent

placement could also indicate that Austerlitz wishes to draw attention to it, that he has perhaps left

the photos out in an effort to illustrate his story to the narrator. Furthermore, Austerlitz is practicing

what Sebald himself calls *konkretes Eingedenken,*[358] which Fischer describes in this way:

> Eingedenken ist bei Sebald weder das quasi mythische Heraufbeschwören einer vergangenen
> Zeit noch die historisierende Annäherung an die Vergangenheit, wie sie angeblich "wirklich
> gewesen" sein soll. Das konkrete Eingedenken ist nicht mit Einfühlung oder Aneignung zu
> verwechseln und schon gar nicht mit einer undifferenzierten, unkritischen Identifizierung.
> Mehr als ein Akt der emotionalen Empathie, des Sicheinfühlens, Mitfühlens oder Mitleidens,
> fordert Eingedenken einen Prozess der Analyse, des Quellenstudeiums, des systematischen
> Forschens und Nachforschens; es ist ein Akt der aktiven Erinnerungsarbeit, der intellektuelle
> Reflexion und historische Imagination auf rationaler und faktengetreuer Basis voraussetzt.[359]

---

[356] Sebald, *Austerlitz,* 175.

[357] von Hofmannsthal, "Ein Brief," 29.

[358] quoted in Fischer, "Schreiben Ex Patria: W.G. Sebald Und Die Konstruktion Einer Literarischen Identität," 41.

[359] Ibid., 40.

In Austerlitz's actions we see particularly clearly Sebald's notion of active memory work. This work is naturally based on Austerlitz's attempt to trace facts and concrete evidence, but the scant documentary evidence available requires a good deal of imagination to fill in the missing years. The Alderney Street house provides the blank canvas upon which Austerlitz can project his historical imagination and begin to piece together his history.

The history of Austerlitz's somewhat unusual décor is the most interesting facet of it. Shortly after retiring, Austerlitz decided to destroy all the work he had done in his architectural studies because it seemed too fragmented to become anything coherent, and because his faculties seemed suddenly to dissolve:

> Nirgends sah ich mehr einen Zusammenhang, die Sätze lösten sich auf in lauter einzelne Worte, die Worte in eine willkürliche Folge von Buchstaben, die Buchstaben in zerbrochene Zeichen und diese in eine bleigraue, da und dort silbrig glänzende Spur, die irgendein kriechendes Wesen abgesondert und hinter sich hergezogen hatte und deren Anblick mich in zunehmendem Maße erfüllte mit Gefühlen des Grauens und der Scham.[360]

This passage follows a longer section of the novel that describes a crisis that is markedly similar to the *Sprachkrise* which Hofmannsthal's fictional Lord Chandos describes in *Ein Brief*. Chandos describes the time before his crisis as:

> eine große Einheit: geistige und körperliche Welt schien mir keinen Gegensatz zu bilden, ebensowenig höfisches und tierisches Wesen, Kunst und Unkunst, Einsamkeit und Gesellschaft; in allem fühlte ich Natur, in den Verirrungen des Wahnsinns ebensowohl wie in den äußersten Verfeinerungen eines spanischen Zeremoniells […] wenn ich auf meiner Jagdhütte die schäumende laue Milche in mich hineintrank, die ein struppiger Mensch einer schönen sanftäugigen Kuh aus dem strotzden Euter in einen Holzeimer niedermolk, so war mir das nichts anderes, als wenn ich, in der dem Fenster eingebauten Bank meines studio sitzend, aus einem Folianten süße und schäumende Nahrung in mich sog.[361]

This description of an idyllic time where art and life were not contradictory, where the cow's warm milk straight from the udder was no more or less nourishing than reading a good book, points out

---

[360] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 184.

[361] von Hofmannsthal, "Ein Brief," 10–11.

both the cause of and eventual solution to Chandos's crisis. His original state was one of

consonance instead of dissonance, in which the life of the mind was equal to and indistinguishable

from life in the world. The examples[362] Chandos relies on to describe the "Unbenanntes" "kaum

Benennbares" from which he later draws solace in the form of an "überschwellenden Flut höheren

Leben"[363] are equally domesticated and hew very closely to the pastoral ideal. It seems that Nature is

not, for Chandos, an unbridled force of any kind, and the sublime is far from what he seeks. In fact,

the examples he explores seem to call attention to the defects and imperfections – the conflicts –

present in Chandos's model of Nature.

The specific terminology used in each narrator's description of the experience of the failure

of language is very similar – Sebald's "einzelne Worte" are reminiscent of Hofmannsthal's frequent

use of "zusammengefaßte Worte,"[364] "die abstrakten Worte"[365] and so on; the "willkürliche Folge

von Buchstaben" in Sebald shows the dissolution of language into a series of incomprehensible

signs in the same way that Chandos bemoans that "Es zerfiel mir alles in Teile, die Teile wieder in

Teile und nichts mehr ließ sich mit einem Begriff umspannen"[366] and later, that "Es ist mir dann, als

bestünde meine Körper aus lauter Chiffern, die mir alles aufschließen."[367] This last description of the

Sprachkrise in the Chandos letter demonstrates a way out of the crisis itself: Chandos suggests that a

bodily and emotional experience of what happens around him is one way to access the pleasure he

previously experienced through creative production. He suggests that "Oder als könnten wir in ein

---

[362] "Eine Gießkanne, eine auf dem Feld verlassene Egge, ein Hund in der Sonne, ein ärmlicher Kirchhof, ein Krüppel, ein kleines Bauernhaus." Ibid., 15.

[363] Ibid., 9.

[364] Ibid., 8.

[365] Ibid., 13.

[366] Ibid., 14.

[367] Ibid., 18.

neues ahnungsvolles Verhältnis zum ganzen Dasein treten, wenn wir anfingen, mit dem Herzen zu denken."[368] It becomes clear that Chandos's crisis is not merely a crisis of language, but rather a crisis in his ability to connect with the world, to experience the world resulting from his previous compulsion to express everything in words. The failure of his ability to express his experiences in language is, instead, a symptom of the distance created between himself and the world by the relationship between artist and subject that he had previously cultivated.

The passage in which Sebald describes his growing difficulty with writing and the breakdown of his own language is a pastiche of Hofmannsthal's text. Among the similarities between the two are Sebald's use of archaic and idiosyncratic vocabulary – "mich dünkten," but a few marked differences are also evident: while Chandos's crisis is marked by the failure of language in creative production, Austerlitz's crisis plays out in the realm of analytical work and leads him to feel, like Hofmannsthal, alienated from the world:

> Schon spürte ich hinter meiner Stirn die infame Dumpfheit, die dem Persönlichkeitsverfall voraufgeht, ahnte, daß ich in Wahrheit weder Gedächtnis noch Denkvermögen, noch eigentlich eine Existenz besaß, daß ich mein ganzes Leben hindurch mich immer nur ausgelöscht und von der Welt und mir selber abgekehrt hatte.[369]

Austerlitz's crisis takes a different path than Chandos's, arising out of his early retirement from academia (an early retirement taken in the hope of his concentrating on his work), first stopping his progress on that work and destroying it, and then pointing out his long term alienation from himself and from the world. In Lord Chandos's case, his crisis forces him to stop working and strips away his ability to put experience into words, which then causes his alienation from his family and friends. In Austerlitz's case, it may be that his alienation gave rise to the crisis, while in Chandos's case, it appears that the alienation he experiences is a result of the crisis itself. This reversal is repeated in

---

[368] Ibid.

[369] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 182.

the relationship of the narrators to their surroundings – one could argue that Chandos's crisis comes from an alienation from his surroundings, while Austerlitz's leads him to alienate himself from his surroundings by expunging all traces of his work and himself from them. However, both Chandos and Austerlitz experience the desire for escape and use excursions into the outdoors as a way of recuperating.

Austerlitz obviously takes comfort in thinking about space,[370] he ascribes his own characteristics to spaces he inhabits, and he immediately redesigns his own home to accommodate a new pastime. Furthermore, he describes his own language crisis with spatial and platial metaphors. For example, he experiences anxiety "vor der Schwelle eines jeden zu schreibenden Satzes,"[371] using a spatial metaphor to express his writer's anxiety, likens his stasis and alienation to the lassitude of "hochgradig seekranke Leute, wenn sie etwa auf einem Dampfer über das Kaspische Meer fahren,"[372] and most eloquently, describes himself as a person lost in the city of language, without a map or legend:

> Wenn man die Sprache ansehen kann als eine alte Stadt, mit einem Gewinkel von Gassen und Plätzen, mit quartieren, die weit zurückreichen in die Zeit, mit abgerissenen, assanierten und neuerbauten Vierteln und immer weiter ins Vorfeld hinauswachsenden Außenbezirken, so glich ich selbst einem Menschen, der sich, aufgrund einer langen Abwesenheit, in diese Agglomeration nicht mehr zurechtfindet der nicht mehr weiß, wozu eine Haltestelle dient, was ein Hinterhof, eine Straßenkreuzung, ein Boulevard oder eine Brücke ist.[373]

This last is particularly poignant as he uses similar questions as might have come up in his deserted architectural studies to illustrate his own disorientation while trying to pursue his work. In short, not only does Austerlitz see some places as exerting great power over him and use others to his own

---

[370] His work consisted of "eine[…] Reihe von Versuchen über Themen wie Hygiene und Assanierung, Architektur des Strafvollzugs, profane Tempelbauten, Wasserheilkunst, zoologische Gärten, Abreise und Ankunft, Licht und Schatten, Dampf und Gas und ähnliches mehr." Ibid., 178.

[371] Ibid.

[372] Ibid., 182.

[373] Ibid., 183.

advantage, but his own self-image and understanding is impregnated with spatial metaphors and images. His crisis takes place equally as much in spatial terms as it does in linguistic ones.

It is essential also to take note of what Austerlitz calls "auslöschen" and "abkehren" in the context of the re-decoration of his house in Alderney Street and in the context of the identity erasure and re-creation that took place at the house in Bala. As Austerlitz comes to grips with his inability to continue his work in architecture, he realizes that, through work, he has been obliterating himself and removing himself from the world. The most interesting thing about this realization is that it prompts him to obliterate the traces of his identity as architectural historian and go in search of his "original" identity.

The Hofmannsthal pastiche not only echoes the breakdown of language in the Chandos-Brief, but also reveals the inspiration for Austerlitz's paint choice. Perversely, while alluding to the text about the *Sprachkrise*, Sebald uses a play on words – an almost tasteless pun: Austerlitz's "Gefühle des Grauens" inspired the literal "grau" of his house. In his zeal to rid his house of all his work, he seems to have taken the "bleigraue Spur" as inspiration for his painting and, in effect, covered his walls with what remained to him of his work. In this way, he both eliminated his work and immersed himself in it. The psychological effect of his purging, which he calls his "Zerstörungswerk"[374] was briefly satisfying, but Austerlitz could feel the creeping dread returning that he had felt before.

This process of purging and starting, so to speak, from a clean slate was a necessary condition for the intense memory-work Austerlitz feels compelled to do. In the same way that the Bala house erased his identity in order to prepare him for a new life, he had to erase the personality he had accumulated over a lifetime of academic work and travel in order to go in search of his own, true identity.

---

[374] Ibid., 186.

Although home is a key theme in *Austerlitz*, none of the domestic spaces Austerlitz resembles Bachelard's description of a topophilic house that encourages imagination and provides a safe shelter for daydreaming. Instead, Austerlitz lives in a series of negatively connoted domestic spaces, all of which prove detrimental to the identity formation Bachelard suggests is the ideal goal of a home. Instead of fostering his identity development and imagination, the Bala house erases Austerlitz's early childhood identity and prepares him for a new life with a new name. The Alderney Street house also serves as a site of erasure, this time Austerlitz's compulsive destruction of the life that had accumulated between his arrival in Britain and his retirement, an attempt to prepare him to search for what he regards as his "true identity." Both Bala and Alderney Street are marked by spatial anxiety and a desire for escape, the result of their utter lack of the positive domestic characteristics Bachelard describes. The only exception to the overwhelming negativity of domestic space is Andromeda Lodge, which serves as an intermediate, neutral ground and entirely removes Austerlitz from his everyday life to that point. At Andromeda Lodge, some characteristics of an idealized Bachelardian home are present, allowing young Austerlitz freedom of imagination and a place for his mind to grow. Ultimately, though, the strange characteristics of the house and its environment reinforce the themes of displacement, illuminating Austerlitz's "true" identity as a displaced person, a person in exile. Finally, in the Prague apartment Austerlitz encounters something like a memorial to Bachelard's ideal childhood home, a domestic space that seems to provide Austerlitz insight to his personal history and identity, but is passed over by time, confined to the stasis of "Motionless Childhood."

EXTRATERRITORIALE ORTE:[375]

HETEROTOPIAN NARRATIVES AND SPACES

A frequently studied feature of Sebald's texts is the intermedial, nonlinear nature of his narratives. The unusual character of the text is developed by the introduction of seemingly chaotic lists, the seamless integration of images into the narrative, and a multiply bracketed, nonlinear narrative. This style reenacts on a textual level some of the feelings of uncertainty, disorientation, and confusion that are present in the narrative itself. I argue that Sebald's destabilized narrative and idiosyncratic textual practice constitute a dialogue with the phenomenon of heterotopia articulated by Foucault and, together with the representation of a battery of heterotopic spaces within the narrative, reasserts the primacy of space and the breakdown of linear temporality in processing memory, history, displacement and their cumulative effects on the human subject.

Although it is not one of Foucault's central focuses and represents a tiny portion of his work, his theory of heterotopias has become a touchstone for fields as diverse as architecture, sociology, biopolitics, and geography.[376] This theory has also begun to take hold in German literary

---

[375] Ibid., 339.

[376]Henry Urbach reviews recent debates in architecture that involve a Foucauldian notion of heterotopia. See Henry Urbach, "Writing Architectural Heterotopia," *Journal of Architecture* 3, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 347–354. Kevin Hetherington reads heterotopia as "a space of imagination" and brings Foucault into dialogue with Deleuze in his study of museums and diagrams. See Kevin Hetherington, "Foucault, the Museum and the Diagram," *Sociological Review* 59, no. 3 (2011): 457–475. Yana Meerzon reads "exilic space" as a kind of heterotopia and studies panoptical space in Joseph Brodsky's play *Marbles*, written while he was in exile in the United States. See Yana Meerzon, "The Ideal City: Heterotopia or Panopticon? On Joseph Brodsky's Play 'Marbles' and Its Fictional Spaces," *Modern Drama* 50, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 184–209. An example from English literary studies, Christopher Craft reads the portrait as a heterotopian mirror in The Picture of Dorian Gray. See Christopher Craft, "Come See About Me: Enchantment of the Double in The Picture of Dorian Gray," *Representations* 91, no. 1 (2005): 109–136. Trevor Barnes uses Foucault's theory of heterotopia as a way of visualizing the space of intellectual change. He uses the "quantitative revolution" in geography as a case study, arguing that the conditions under which new ideas take hold are heterotopic in nature. See Trevor J. Barnes, "Placing Ideas: Genius Loci, Heterotopia and Geography's Quantitative Revolution," *Progress in Human Geography* 28, no. 5 (October

and cultural studies. In the realm of cultural studies, Phillip Broadbent pairs Foucault's theory of heterotopia with Jameson's postmodern simulacra to study representations of post-*Wende* Berlin.[377] Brent Saindon also studies heterotopian space in Berlin. He focuses on Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum, arguing that it constitutes a doubled heterotopia, the result of the inclusion of an art installation (Menashe Kadishman's *Shalechet*) in a central position within an otherwise historically-oriented museum.[378] Joseph Dudley studies the use of heterotopian space and the question of postmodern non-being in his study of Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine*.[379] Jutta Gsoels-Lorensen conducts a nuanced reading of the heterotopian space of the cemetery and other spaces that are marked by difficult access in Barbara Honigmann's generational narratives.[380] Although Foucault's heterotopia gives shape to some scholarship on German literature and culture, it has not yet been brought to bear on Sebald's works.

Foucault first articulated the notion of heterotopia in the preface to *The Order of Things*, although the term previously existed in the realm of medicine, meaning a growth of tissue in an unexpected or unusual location. In his initial description of heterotopia, he presents a quotation from Borges that features a passage from "a certain Chinese encyclopaedia" that organizes animals into a series of seemingly random, in part nonsensical categories.[381] This passage, Foucault argues,

---

2004): 565–595. Joseph Pugliese brings Foucault's theories to his study of crisis heterotopias in biopolitical conflicts that focus on Christmas Island and Lampedusa. See Joseph Pugliese, "Crisis Heterotopias and Border Zones of the Dead," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 23, no. 5 (October 2009): 663–679.

[377] See Philip Broadbent, "Generational Shifts: Representing Post-Wende Berlin," *New German Critique*, no. 104 (July 1, 2008): 139–169.

[378] See Brent Allen Saindon, "A Doubled Heterotopia: Shifting Spatial and Visual Symbolism in the Jewish Museum Berlin's Development," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98, no. 1 (February 2012): 24–48.

[379] See Joseph M. Dudley, "Being and Non-Being: The Other and Heterotopia in Hamletmachine," *Modern Drama* 35, no. 4 (December 1992): 562–570.

[380] See Jutta Gsoels-Lorensen, "'Un Drame Interdit D'accès': Remembrance and the Prohibited Past in Barbara Honigmann's Generational Texts," *The German Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (July 1, 2007): 369–390.

[381] The passage to which Foucault refers comes from Borges's "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins" (1942).

challenges our understanding of order not solely because of the apparent randomness of the categories, but because those categories are then sorted into an ordered list and enumerated using an alphabetical sequence. The appearance of order implied by the presence of the alphabetical list calls attention to the bizarre juxtapositions created by the list and this contributes to a familiar "disconcerting effect of the proximity of extremes, or […] with the sudden vicinity of things that have no relation to each other."[382] He goes on to ask of these zoological categories, "Where could they ever meet, except in the immaterial sound of the voice pronouncing their enumeration, or on the page transcribing it? Where else could they be juxtaposed except in the non-place of language?" and concludes that this location is necessarily "an unthinkable space."[383] As Oliver Simons points out, Foucault locates the disturbing nature of these textual heterotopias in their challenge to our understanding of order: "Als Heterotopie bezeichnet Foucault dieses Beschreibungsverfahren, nicht weil es einen anderen, exotischen Raum entwirft, sondern weil es das Denken von Ordnungsräumen grundsätzlich ändert."[384] This challenge to order is certainly seen in the bizarre juxtapositions of lists like Borges's, but also in texts where syntax itself is challenged. Foucault aligns utopias with an organized system of language and argues that heterotopias frustrate language.[385]

---

[382] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994). p. xvi. [Michel Foucault, *Les Mots Et Les Choses; Une Archéologie Des Sciences Humaines.*, Bibliothèque Des Sciences Humaines (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).]

[383] Foucault, *The Order of Things*. p.xvi-xvii.

[384] Simons, *Raumgeschichten*, 29.

[385] Foucault also draws a compelling parallel between the loss of language and the loss of place, using a study of "certain aphasiacs" as an example. He says "The uneasiness that makes us laugh when we read Borges is certainly related to the profound distress of those whose language has been destroyed: loss of what is 'common' to place and name. Atopia, aphasia. (Foucault, *The Order of Things*. p. xviii-xix.)

Sebald's syntax is heterotopic in the sense that, although he uses *Schachtelsätze* – sentences

that are interrupted by embedded dependent clauses – to create a sense of regularity, he does so in

an extreme way. Beyond rhythmic interruptions and occasionally exceptionally long, labyrinthine

sentences, Sebald mirrors the effect of his bracketed syntax in his narrative style. His narratives are

characterized by the use of bracketed narration which sometimes involves as many as four narrators,

all of whom are unreliable. Finally, Sebald's narrative and syntactical interruptions are joined by the

insertion of photographs and images to create an intermedial narrative.[386]

All of these elements conspire to create a heterotopic reading experience in Sebald's texts.

Sebald makes use of a stylistic non-place or heterotopia to create a narrative that frustrates the

reader's expectations and questions the validity of linearity. The first feature of Sebald's heterotopic

textual practice that I will discuss is his frequent use of lists like the one in Borges to which Foucault

alluded. In *Die Ringe des Saturn*, Sebald seems to make implicit reference to Foucault's discussion of

---

[386] While it will not be a central focus of this chapter, it is worth noting that Sebald resists traditional genre distinctions, creating something like a heterogenre. He challenges the tradition in Germany of including a genre designation on the cover of a book by including instead idiosyncratic subtitles. For instance, *Die Ausgewanderten* is designated as "Vier lange Erzählungen," and *Die Ringe des Saturn* as "Eine englische Wallfahrt." This second line of text is wholly missing from the cover of *Austerlitz. Nach der Natur*, Sebald's book-length poem is designated as "Ein Elementargedicht" but is occasionally referred to as a novel. In her essay on the spatialization of historical narratives, Gerstenberger groups *Nach der Natur* together with Ransmayer's *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis* and Nadolny's *Die Entdeckung der Langsamkeit* as "novels of the late 1980s and early 1990s." Katharina Gerstenberger, "Historical Space: Daniel Kehlmann's *Die Vermessung Der Welt* [*Measuring the World*, 2005]," in *Spatial Turns Space, Place, and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture*, ed. Jaimey Fisher and Barbara Caroline Mennel (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2010), 107. It has almost become a necessary gesture in any essay on Sebald's works to include a sentence addressing the problem of genre. An example of this preoccupation with genre in Sebald scholarship is Margaret Bruzelius's essay on *Die Ringe des Saturn* and *Heart of Darkness*. She summarizes some critics' reactions to genre:
 "What kind of books are these melancholy journeys told by a narrator whose name is revealed only in passing and illustrated with grainy black and white photographs? *A New York Times Book Review* reviewer asks "What does one call them? Meditations, elegies, mutations grown from memoir, history, literary biography and prose poetry." Die Ringe des Saturn is said to "cross and recross the border between genres, taking up temporary residence in fiction, autobiography, thumbnail biographies of other men, travelers' tales, and a prayerful rumination on the crumbling of livelihoods and lives." (*Undiscover'd Country: W.G. Sebald and the Poetics of Travel*, ed. Markus Zisselsberger (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2010), 249.)
For her part, Bruzelius argues that, using the standard setpieces and conventions of the adventure romance genre, Sebald creates a narrative that both conforms to and meditates on those conventions and that the genre in fact determines the narrative tone that pervades both Conrad's and Sebald's works.

Borges,[387] by referring to another passage from the Argentinian writer: "Unter den in diesem Werk

in alphabetischer Ordnung versammelten Phantasiewesen findet sich, wie mir unlängst erst

aufgefallen ist, auch der sogenannte Baldanders, dem Simplicius Simplicissimus im sechsten Buch

seinser Lebensgeschichte begegnet."[388] As Foucault did in his passage on Borges, Sebald points out

the textual level of this passage, focusing on the purported organization – alphabetic, in this case –

of the catalogue of creatures. In calling attention to the organization of the text and referring to the

origin of most of the creatures in fantasy, Sebald highlights the disjunction between the

organizational façade of the alphabetical list and the nonsensical contents of the list itself.

Sebald frequently creates his own version of these lists in his texts. Another example is the

narrator's description in *Die Ringe des Saturn* of the hospital museum's contents:

> Nun gab es aber bekanntermaßen in der Zeit, in der man im Zuge der allgemeinen Sanierung
> der Gesellschaft die sogenannten Bürgerspitäler einrichtete, in vielen dieser Häuser ein
> Museum oder, genauer gesagt, ein Gruselkabinett, in dem Früh- und Mißgeburten,
> Wasserköpfe, hypertrophe Organe und ähnliches mehr in Formalingläsern zu medizinischen
> Demonstrationszwecken aufbewahrt und gelegentlich der Öffentlichkeit zur Schau gestellt
> wurden.[389]

In this example, of course, the list represents the former real-life juxtaposition of medical specimens

in the hospital museum. The improbability of this list comes at least as much from the nature of the

specimens as from their juxtaposition with one another. As Foucault describes this phenomenon,

"What is impossible is not the propinquity of the things listed, but the very site on which their

propinquity would be possible. […] Where else could they be juxtaposed except in the non-place of

language? Yet, though language can spread them before us, it can do so only in an unthinkable

---

[387] As Ryan points out, Sebald was certainly familiar with Foucault's works, referring to them in his essays. cf. Judith Ryan, *The Novel After Theory* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2011), 5.

[388] This passage, quoted in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, comes from Jorge Luis Borges, *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni, [1st] ed. (New York,: Dutton, 1969). [Jorge Luis Borges, *El Libro De Los Seres Imaginarios* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Kier, 1967).] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 34.

[389] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 19–20.

space."[390] The unthinkable space to which he alludes is the list itself, which creates within the narrative a moment of impossibility and improbable juxtapositions, a space in which the author can exploit the "disconcerting effect of the proximity of extremes."[391]

In "Ambros Adelwarth," the reader encounters a number of lists that create a similar disconcerting effect, but which hew perhaps more closely to Foucault's notion of the heterotopic list. One example is a list of town names that the narrator passes on the highway as he drives north to Ithaca in search of his great uncle's story:

> Monroe, Monticello, Middletown, Wurtsboro, Wawarsing, Colchester und Cadosia, Deposit, Delhi, Neversink und Niniveh – es kam mir vor, als bewegte ich mich, ferngelenkt mitsamt dem Automobil, in dem ich saß, durch ein überdimensionales Spielzeugland, dessen Ortsnamen von einem unsichtbaren Riesenkind willkürlich unter den Ruinen einer anderen, längst aufgegebenen Welt zusammengesucht und –geklaubt worden waren.[392]

The list is organized into groups of towns with the same initial letter, which lends the list a sense of organization. However, the list is not alphabetized. Moreover, the narrator claims to pass these towns while proceeding along Highway 17 toward Ithaca. Despite this assertion, not all of the towns lie very near to Highway 17 and they do not appear in the order the narrator lists them. They have been deliberately rearranged into the alphabetical groupings, having the effect almost of a mnemonic device. Furthermore, the narrator draws attention to the arbitrariness of the names by suggesting that a giant child has arranged them and now pilots the car through this strangely sign-posted landscape. The evocation of a child in this context, together with the rhythm and structure of the list, makes it seem almost as though the list is a kind of nursery rhyme, a collection of words assembled due to their sounds and syllables rather than any logical organization. The rearrangement of these town names into an apparently organized, but actually random list thwarts the reader's

---

[390] Foucault, *The Order of Things,* xvi-xvii.

[391] Ibid, xvi.

[392] Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 153.

expectation of an itinerary. Another list in "Ambros Adelwarth" seems to also thematize the

mnemonic effect of listing:

> Während einer unmittelbar an die Ewigkeit angrenzenden Erdkundestunde—draußen lag die
> Welt in einem von der Taghelle unberührten Morgenblau—erforschte ich auch einmal, so
> erinnerte ich mich, die Landstriche, durch die ich jetzt fuhr, sowie das höher im Norden
> gelegene Adirondeck-Gebirge, von dem mir der Onkel Kasimir gesagt hatte, daß es dort
> geradeso aussehe wie bei uns daheim. Ich weiß noch, wie ich damals mit dem
> Vergrößerungsglas nach dem Ursprung des immer kleiner werdenden Hudson-Flusses
> gesucht und mich dabei verloren habe in einem Planquadrat mit sehr vielen Berggipfeln und
> Seen. Unauslöschlich sind mir von daher bestimmte Ortsbezeichnungen und Namen wie
> Sabattis, Gabriels, Hawkeye, Amber Lake, Lake Lila und Lake Tear-in-the-Clouds im
> Gedächtnis geblieben.[393]

In this passage, memory is explicitly thematized by the words *erinnern* and *Gedächtnis* and implicitly by

uncle Kasimir's remembrance of the mountains back home and by the narrator's own memory of

studying the atlas during geography class. This list, too, is chaotic, not organized alphabetically or

along any particular trajectory or itinerary – in fact, the narrator says that he "lost himself" in this

area of the atlas and, as such, the list mirrors the meandering of a person wandering, lost, through

the mountains or the meandering eye of the child studying the atlas. Furthermore, the narrator

"losing himself" in the page of the atlas mimics the effect that such a list has on the reader of

Sebald's text. These lists have a disorienting effect on the reader while simultaneously propelling the

eye forward. Such a list both frustrates and compels the act of reading.

In other passages, Sebald deploys lists that seem to reflect a cataloging impulse more than

any more important thematic purpose. One example is found in the narrator's description of the

Waldgarten surrounding the clinic in Ithaca:

> So deutlich waren die Anzeichen des Zerfalls, so eigenartig blinkten die Scheiben im
> Sonnenlicht, daß ich nicht wagte, näher heranzutreten, und statt dessen zunächst in dem
> Park mich umsah, in welchem Nadelbäume beinah jeder mir bekannten Art, libanesische
> Zedern, Thujen, Silberfichten, Lärchen, Arolla- und Monterey-Pinien und feingefiederte
> Sumpfzypressen bis zu ihrer vollen Größe sich hatten entwickeln können. Einige der Zedern
> und Lärchen waren bis zu vierzig, eine Schierlingstanne gewiß an die fünfzig Meter hoch.

[393] Ibid., 155–156.

> Zwischen den Bäumen taten sich kleine Waldwiesen auf, in denen blaue Sternhyazinthen, weißes Schaumkraut und gelber Bocksbart nebeneinder wuchsen. An anderen Stellen standen verschiedene Farne oder bewegte sich über dem Laubgrund das neue, von den einfallenden Strahlen durchleuchtete Blattgrün japanischen Ahornsträucher. Den Dr. Abramsky fand ich, nachdem ich fast eine Stunde in dem Waldgarten herumgewandert war […].[394]

This list is also not organized according to any recognizable logic. Instead, the sheer number of examples and the excess of description seem to be a pastiche of nineteenth century writing styles and recalls what are known as "epic lists" in classical antiquity.[395] This catalog of foliage also reflects through the names or origins of some of the trees, the meandering itinerary followed by Ambros Adelwarth himself: his origins in Europe are represented by the common or European Spruce (*Fichte*), his stay in Switzerland by the Arolla Pine (also known in English as the Swiss Pine), the time he spent in Japan is represented by *japanische Ahornsträucher* (dwarf Japanese maples), and his travels from Italy to Jerusalem are represented by Lebanese cedars. A palpable contrast develops between this grove of trees and the signs of decay seen in the description of the clinic itself. While the clinic grows ever nearer to collapse, the trees remain green and growing. This contrast is underlined by the presence of *Thujen*, a tree that is native to both North America and East Asia whose Latin name is *arborvitae* and that is commonly known as the Tree of Life – a curious presence in the place that is permeated by decay and death – or at least the history of Ambros's death. Finally, the spatial

---

[394] Ibid., 159-160.

[395] The influential Romanist and Hispanist Leo Spitzer traced the genealogy of modern chaosism [*caotismo*] to Whitman, whose "rigorous asyndeton […] violently brings together the most disparate things, the most exotic with the most familiar, the gigantic with the minuscule, nature with products of human civilization, like a child who was skimming through the catalogue of a great store and annotating in a disorderly fashion the articles that, by chance, came under his gaze."Leo Spitzer, "La Enumeración Caótica En La Poesía Moderna," in *Lingüística e Historia Literaria*, 2nd ed. (Madrid: Gredos, 1961), 258 Translated by Eric Calderwood. Earlier precursors of "chaotic enumeration," according to Spitzer, include the "bazaar style" invented in Europe and used by Balzac, among others. (See Ibid., 259–260.) Significantly, he distinguishes between "chaotic enumeration" and the earlier "panegyric enumeration that was characteristic of Christian liturgies." (Ibid., 261 Translated by Eric Calderwood.) Spitzer notes that Rilke occasionally employed a kind of enumeration reminiscent of the "Tu es" tradition in Christianity. Finally, Spitzer argues that this kind of enumeration is the expression of certain shifts in literature and society in the nineteenth century, especially the erasure of borders between social classes and literary genres and the breaking down of literary and social hierarchies. He calls this phenomenon an "exclusively human democracy." (See Ibid., 288.)

arrangement of the trees and their enumeration give the reader the mimetic impression of actually

walking through the grove. The trees seem to propel the narrator toward the doctor.[396]

A more extreme case of the cataloging impulse is found later in "Ambros Adelwarth," where

Ambros lists in his journal over two pages of charities, churches, clinics, and hospitals located in

Jerusalem:

> Nach Norden zu liegen die russische Kathedrale, das russische Männer- und Frauenhospiz,
> das französische Hospital de St. Louis, das jüdische Blindenheim, die Kirche und das Hospiz
> des hl. Augustinus, die deutsche Schule, das deutsche Waisenhaus, das deutsche
> Taubstummenasyl, the School of the London Mission to the Jews, die Abessinische Kirche,
> the Anglican Church, College and Bishop's House, das Dominikanerkloster, das Seminar
> und die Kirche St. Stephan, das Rothschildsche Institut für Mädchen, die Gewerbeschule der
> Alliance Israélite, die Kirche Notre Dame de France und am Teich von Bethesda der St.
> Anna Convent; […][397]

The whole list (covering more than two pages of text) appears to be organized roughly by geography

with this section of the list representing only the institutions "to the north." But to the north of

what? The geographic orientation of the list is centered only on the unfixed location of the narrator

and not on any particular landmark, which effectively destroys the only organizational principle

present in the massive catalog of charitable institutions. This list also reenacts the notion of an

"unthinkable space" by bringing together a series of countries that speak different languages, adhere

to different religious sects, and do not necessarily share borders. It paradoxically provides

orientation without a reference point.

Another element of Sebald's narrative that heightens the reader's awareness of the text itself

as heterotopia is his seamless integration of photographs and other visual artifacts into the text,

---

[396] Recall my discussion of a similar list of trees found in *Die Ringe des Saturn* and discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation. There the trees serve a similar contrastive function and their spatial description also seems to propel the narrator through space toward his eventual destination.

[397] Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 204–205.

usually without comment. These photographs first appear to serve as evidence, validating the content of the narrative, but in reality, their function is much more complex.

In her analysis of the function of photographs and other images in Sebald's texts, Silke Horstkotte discusses not only the content of the images, but also their placement within the text, their interaction with the text, and the reader's response to them.[398] She argues against the notion that the photographs inserted into Sebald's texts are meant to act as evidence for the veracity of the story, but instead argues that the images make up an essential part of what she calls "the phototextual collage." She argues that the aestheticization and recontextualization of the photographs undermines any purported authenticity they seem to possess:

> Historical photographs and family albums are offered as proof to the stories' authenticity, yet the photos' positioning, as well as their narrative framing, reveal the notion of authenticity and of the documentary as a hoax: the photos function as an affective address but fail to refer indexically to an otherwise documented 'reality.'[399]

Horstkotte contrasts examples where images are inserted into the text without comment to ones where the text clearly alludes to an image (one example is the photo of the narrator on the beach taken by Uncle Kasimir). In these cases the photos create less tension in the text. However, they frequently frustrate the reader's expectations, in the case of the photo of the narrator on the beach by not showing his face.[400]

Gerhard Fischer also analyzes this image, reading it as part of the construction and complication of narrative identity. Fischer focuses on the effect of expatriate life on characters in the text as well as on the author and narrator. He claims that Sebald (and his characters and narrators) engage in a persistent mutation of identity as a result of the permanent state of liminality and

---

[398] Silke Horstkotte, "Photo-Text Topographies: Photography and the Representation of Space in W. G. Sebald and Monika Maron," *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (April 1, 2008): 49–78.

[399] Ibid., 54–55.

[400] cf. Ibid., 56.

outsider status which an expatriate necessarily inhabits. This amounts to a "performative[s] Identitäts-Spiel" in which the author, first-person narrator, and characters are conflated. Fischer reads the photographs that purport to be portraits of a text's narrator (this occurs in *Die Ringe des Saturn*, *Die Ausgewanderten*, and *Schwindel. Gefühle*) and that end up either obscured beyond recognition or being photographs of Sebald himself as an evidentiary gesture.[401] While Fischer relies on these photographs to illustrate his argument, he does not comment on the medium involved. The photographs seem to be simply an extension of the ambivalent or mutable identity already present, expressed through a different medium. However, it seems that the photographs themselves perform a complication of identity of which narrative alone is not capable. In cases like the photograph in *Die Ringe des Saturn* that purports to show the narrator at the end of his journey:

> Am Ende dieser kreisförmigen Fußreise fügt der Autor wieder eine Illustration ein, es zeigt angeblich den Erzähler selbst, an einen riesigen, alten Zedernbaum gelehnt, im Park von Ditchingham. Das Foto zeigt einen jungen, hochgewachsenen Mann scheinbar selbstsicher und gelassen, mit Brille und Schnauzbart. Diesmal ist das Bild des Autors, wie es aus anderen Photographien bekannt ist, deutlich zu erkennen. […] Der Kommentar zum Foto behauptet, dass die Aufnahme bei einer anderen Gelegenheit zehn Jahre früher entstanden ist, und dass die Bäume im Park inzwischen weitgehend verschwunden sind. Der Mann auf der Fotografie stehe dort, so das Resüme des Erzählers, "in Unkenntnis noch der unguten Dinge, die seither geschehen sind." Auch hier wird die Frage der Identität bewusst im Unklaren gelassen. Was das Bild verspricht, löst die Narration nicht ein. Illustration und Text sind keineswegs deckungsgleich.[402]

The text itself calls attention to the false claims suggested by the photograph. The image's placement in the narrative implies that it was taken at the end of the journey, while the text clarifies that it was, in fact, taken ten years earlier. Furthermore, the text tells the reader that the tree, which is intact in the photo, is long gone. The appearance of the author at this point in the narrative, however, when the narrative *Ich* says that he is leaning against the tree which no longer exists, disorients the reader. Finally, looking at the passage preceding the photograph, the reader sees another false connection:

---

[401] See Fischer, "Schreiben Ex Patria: W.G. Sebald Und Die Konstruktion Einer Literarischen Identität," 28–32.

[402] Ibid., 32–33.

150

The passage immediately preceding the description of the photograph paraphrases passages from

Chateaubriand's massive autobiography:

> Al ser 1807 von seiner langen Reise nach Konstantinopel und Jerusalem zurückkehrte, kaufte er sich in La Vallée aux Loups unweit der Ortschaft Aulnay ein zwischen bewaldeten Hügeln verborgenes Gartenhaus. Dort beginnt er, seine Erinnerungen niederzuschreiben, und er schreibt, ganz am Anfang, von den Bäumen, die er gepflanzt hat und von denen er jeden einzelnen umsorgt mit eigener Hand. Jetzt, so schreibt er, sind sie noch so klein, daß ich ihnen Schatten spende, wenn ich zwischen Sie und die Sonne trete. Aber später einmal, wenn sie aufgewachsen sein werden, werden sie mir den Schatten zurückgeben und meine alten Tage behüten, wie ich sie behütet habe zu ihrer Jugendzeit. Ich fühle mich den Bäumen verbunden, ich schreibe Sonette an sie une Elegien und Oden; wie Kinder kenne ich sie alle bei ihren Namen und wünsche mir nur, daß ich einmal sterben darf unter ihnen.[403]

The proximity of this tree description to the photo of the tree with the author/narrator and the

continuing description of other trees in Norfolk seems to conflate those disparate groves of trees,

just as the text conflates the narrator with the author and both of them with Chateaubriand. In this

example, as in many others, the insertion of an image into the narrative breaks down the linearity of

time and disorients the reader with respect to who is actually narrating.

In "Ambros Adelwarth" veracity and authenticity are repeatedly and forcefully brought into

question by the various speakers in the text as well as by the false referentiality of the images. For

example, Aunt Fini expresses her own doubts about the veracity of Adelwarth's story, saying,

> Manches Mal dünkten mich seine Erlebnisberichte, beispielsweise von Enthauptungen, deren Zeuge er in Japan geworden war, dermaßen unwahrscheinlich, daß ich glaubte, er leide an dem Korsakowschen Syndrom, bei dem, wie du vielleicht weißt, sagte die Tante Fini, der Erinnerungsverlust durch phantastische Erfindungen ausgeglichen wird.[404]

As we learn, Adelwarth was not, in fact, losing his memory, but perhaps suffering from a surfeit of

it. When he discovers his inability to narrate his own past, it seems that Adelwarth wants nothing

more than to completely destroy his memory when he discovers his limitations when speaking about

it. This resembles with what Blumenthal-Barby understands as one characteristic of their mental

---

[403] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 312.

[404] Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 149.

illness. "What these and other mentally confused figures in Sebald's text seem to share is, roughly speaking, the experience of being traumatized and, more often than not, an ensuing speechlessness or inability to narrate their stories."[405] It is this inability to share his past that eventually drives Adelwarth to the clinic in Ithaca and to comply with the damaging electric shocks.

However, Adelwarth also questioned reality at times, reassuring himself that he is himself and that he is where he is at those moments. Blumenthal-Barby notes that there is perhaps also a spatial quality to mental illness. He remarks that "Ver-rücktheit" implies displacement as well as insanity.[406]

The photos – both those included in the text and those simply alluded to or described – are presented within the text to provide material traces of the narrator's research endeavor. The photograph of Ambros Adelwarth in Arab costume was certainly staged and taken by a tourist photographer, many of the photos are so 'amateur,' to borrow Bruzelius's term, that one cannot even recognize the under- or overexposed faces, and in the photos where one can clearly see 'Adelwarth's' face, it is clear that different models were used for each one. While the quality of the photos does seem amateur, they may have been selected as illustrations precisely because of their inscrutability.

While the insertion of photographs destabilizes the content and draws the reader's attention to the form of the narrative, the actual structure of the narrative confirms the text as a heterotopia. Two characteristics of Sebald's style enhance the heterotopic quality: nonlinearity and the use of bracketed narrative. These two frequently work together to create a reading experience that is not only disorienting, but occasionally actually distracts from the content of the text. This sets up a parallel between the narrator's consciousness of form and the reader's awareness of it.

---

[405] Blumenthal-Barby, "Holocaust and Herring," 553.

[406] Ibid.

Austerlitz exhibits some of the most intense moments of bracketed narration in all of Sebald's texts. In that book, the narrator recounts Austerlitz's story, which is shot through with quotations and paraphrases of conversations with other people. The result is a multi-layered and frequently disorienting narrative. However, while the constant shift in narrators would already be distracting, Sebald draws attention to the artifice of the narrative with great frequency by inserting textual signposts, which would seem to help the reader orient herself. Curiously, the way in which these phrases are inserted into the text frequently interrupts the narrative in such a way that heightens the reader's disorientation. An example can be found in the Prague passage:

> Am wichtigsten aber sei es mir gewesen, sagte Věra, sagte Austerlitz, den Augenblick nicht zu versäumen, da Moravec die Nadel und den Faden […] weglegte. […] Jetzt legt er das Ärmelholz auf den Kasten, jetzt geht er in die Küche hinaus, jetzt bringt er das Bier herein, jetzt wetzt er das Messer […], so oder so ähnlich, immer gleich und doch immer ein wenig anders hätte ich ihr, sagte Věra, fast jeden Abend das Nachtmal des Schneiders beschrieben […][407]

This passage is an intensely embedded narrative, with two references to the origin of the narrative (Věra), and one to the person telling the story (Austerlitz), reminding the reader of the presence of the narrator. This multi-layered narrative consciously doubles the unreliability of the narrative: the reader must doubt the veracity of a story being recounted third hand. And the grammar deployed in this passage enhances the unreliability of the narrative. Austerlitz's use of indirect speech in recounting childhood habits that he does not, as such, remember maintains the distance between him and his history that has been constructed throughout the novel. In addition, the change of register from the subjunctive to the indicative ("Jetzt legt er das Ärmelholz auf den Kasten […]") could imply Austerlitz's identification with the scene he narrates from his own memory. Instead, he interrupts that seeming moment of authenticity with the second "sagte Věra," underscoring the artifice of the narrative and possible artificiality of the memory itself.

---

[407] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 228.

This type of unnamed, unreliable first-person narrator is present in all of Sebald's prose works. Nearly all of the narratives are recounted from such a narrator's perspective. When combined with false evidence provided by images and documents that are not what they purport to be, and with the nonlinearity so frequently employed by Sebald, his narrative style may be read as a critique of 'traditional' narrative. He questions, challenges, and ultimately rejects conventional forms of narrative in favor of others which call attention to and heighten the heterotopism of his text.

The most extreme example of heterotopic narrative and disorienting syntax appears when Austerlitz bemoans having not spoken with H. G. Adler about the history of the concentration camp at Terezín.[408] This passage is comprised of a single sentence spanning eleven pages of text. It includes catalogues of the professions of the concentration camp inmates, their home cities and countries, the various types of work they were expected to carry out as slave labor in the camps, and a litany of anecdotes from the camp.[409] The sentence is interrupted by a photograph of a list titled "Verzeichnis der als Sonderweisungen bezeichneten Arbeiten."[410] This list, including such disparate entries as "1. Dienststelle," "10. Landwirtschaft," "32. Schutzbrillenerzeugung," "37. Kaninchenhaarscheren," is numbered, but not alphabetical or apparently organized in any other way. Some of the juxtapositions are jarring (it seems as though no single list could include both "Krematoriumbau" and "Bijouterie") and the lack of apparent order stands in contradiction to the bureaucratic apparatus behind the writing of such lists. The single long sentence is made up of a

---

[408] H. G. Adler was a "German-speaking Jewish intellectual from Prague" who survived internment at Theresienstadt and two other labor camps under German rule. His novel *Panorama* (H. G Adler, *Panorama. Roman in Zehn Bildern.* (Olten,: Walter, 1968). First translated into English in 2011 – Austerlitz must have read it in German.) reflects his internment in Theresienstadt and is hailed as "the definitive account of that eerie "showcase" camp." (Judith Shulevitz, "Book Review - Panorama - By H. G. Adler. Translated by Peter Filkins," *The New York Times*, January 28, 2011, sec. Books / Sunday Book Review, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/30/books/review/Shulevitz-t.html.) This long sentence in *Austerlitz* seems to be a capsule summary of the experiences recounted in Adler's book.

[409] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 339–349.

[410] Ibid., 340.

series of catalogs, depicting a place that Austerlitz describes as an "extraterritoriale[r] Ort,"[411] and doing so in a sentence with such disparate contents and disorienting syntax that the reader, if she does not completely lose the thread, has the feeling of having read whole paragraphs. These pages are the ultimate expression of heterotopic narrative, even while giving a thumbnail picture of life in the "real" heterotopia of the concentration camp.

HETEROTOPIAS OF "REAL" SPACE

After introducing the heterotopic potential of linguistic or textual space, Foucault returned to the idea of the heterotopia in a lecture he presented some years later, focusing instead on the "real" or concrete spaces that serve a similar purpose in society. Rather than attempting a straightforward definition of a heterotopia, he resorts, instead, to what he calls "heterotopology."[412] He proposes a series of six principles upon which to base an understanding of heterotopias:

1. He suggests that these heterotopias are a very real and necessary – in fact a universal – part of all societies. These heterotopias can be generally divided into two groups: heterotopias of crisis (which are steadily vanishing) and heterotopias of deviance.[413]

2. The function of heterotopias is mutable, depending on the needs of the culture surrounding them.[414]

3. "The heterotopia has the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other."[415]

4. Heterotopias are linked to specific moments in time and persist in that link regardless of the progress of time evident in the culture surrounding them.[416]

---

[411] Ibid., 339.

[412] cf. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," 353. [Michel Foucault, "Des Espaces Autres," in *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, vol. 5 (Paris: Groupe Moniteur, 1984), 46–49.]

[413] cf. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," 353.

[414] cf. Ibid.

[415] Ibid., 354.

[416] cf. Ibid.

5. Heterotopias are always marked by a certain difficulty of access. Some heterotopias are characterized by a difficulty of escape, for example a psychiatric hospital or prison.[417]

6. Heterotopias reside in a middle space, drawing attention, on the one hand, to the illusoriness of the rest of space, while, on the other hand, creating a separate real space.[418]

Among the many types of locations that qualify, according to these criteria, as heterotopias, all can be divided roughly into two groups: heterotopias of crisis ("it comprises privileged or sacred or forbidden places that are reserved for the individual who finds himself in a state of crisis with respect to the society or environment in which he lives: adolescents, women during the menstrual period or in labour, the old, etc.") and heterotopias of deviance (occupied by individuals whose behavior deviates from the current average or standard.").[419]

Beyond the textual heterotopia present in Sebald's syntax and manipulation of the text, I will focus on two types of concrete 'other spaces'. First, I will discuss those spaces that create or draw attention to tension between 'real spaces' and their heterotopic counterparts, particularly the classic heterotopias of deviance – hospitals and prisons. I will then turn to the more unorthodox heterotopia of the zoo to demonstrate the way in which Sebald's texts cast animals as mirrors or foils for the human characters in the text. Finally, I will introduce Augé's notion of non-place (a constructed environment that is devoid of emotional attachment) in order to explore the notion of mobility in heterotopian spaces. These non-places tend to obliterate identity and remove the individual from her accustomed context in order to provide a setting for self-reflection or, in some cases, the creation or exploration of a different identity. These spaces are represented by various

---

[417] cf. Ibid., 355.

[418] cf. Ibid., 356.

[419] Ibid., 353.

locations of transit or tourist destinations. To facilitate my reading of those spaces, I will use Marc

Augé's theory of non-places to expand on Foucault's framework of heterotopias.

HETEROTOPIAS OF DEVIANCE – HOSPITALS AND PRISONS

In addition to listing them as heterotopias in his lecture on that topic, Foucault dealt in great

detail with the development of hospitals and prisons in his books on those institutions. In *The Birth*

of the Clinic, he studies the space of illness, by which he means the spatial metaphors at work in

classifying disease, the spatial experience of the sick body, and the space in which diseases are and

ought to be treated.

> Like civilization, the hospital is an artificial locus in which the transplanted disease runs the
> risk of losing its essential identity. It comes up against a form of complication that doctors
> call prison or hospital fever […] And in any case, can one effect the unfortunate impression
> that the sight of these places, which for many are nothing more than 'temples of death', will
> have on a sick man or woman, removed from the familiar surroundings of his home and
> family? This loneliness in a crowd, this despair disturb, with the healthy reactions of the
> organism, the natural course of the disease […].[420]

While implicating the hospital in the complication of disease by the proximity to other sick people,

Foucault seems almost to be coming curiously to the defense of the 'pure' disease, and indicting the

hospital as a place of loneliness and despair – a 'temple of death' – instead of a place of healing.

Further than simply the hospital building itself, however, Foucault means to discuss the whole

apparatus by which diseases are treated and studied, "all the gestures by which, in a given society, a

disease is circumscribed, medically invested, isolated, divided up into closed privileged regions, or

distributed throughout cure centres, arranged in the most favorable way."[421] This apparatus can be

understood to include, as well as the hospital, "a whole corpus of medical practices and institutions

---

[420] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 17.
[Michel Foucault, *Naissance De La Clinique; Une Archéologie Du Regard Médical.* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France,
1963).

[421] Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 16.

[that] confront[…] the primary and secondary spatializations with forms of a social space whose genesis, structure, and laws are of a different nature."[422] The result of the development of such a system is a structure of exclusion in order to protect society at large. In this sense, the purposes of the hospital and prison are similar.

The heterotopic characteristic that is most important for an understanding of both hospitals and prisons is the question of access. In his description of heterotopias, Foucault notes that, on the one hand, "Usually, one does not get into a heterotopian location by one's own will. Either one is forced, as in the case of the barracks or the prison, or one must submit to rites of purification," while, on the other, "other heterotopias […] have the appearance of pure and simple openings, although they usually conceal curious exclusions."[423] Hospitals and prisons clearly belong to the former category.

Prisons and other carceral spaces become one of many red threads in Sebald's narratives. Hospitals, although they appear less frequently than prisons, are also spaces of importance for the establishment of the theme of constraint and the desire for escape that is conjured when one is trapped inside one of these spaces. *Die Ringe des Saturn* opens with the narrator being hospitalized for an undiagnosed – or unnamed – condition that results in staggering pain and near-total immobilization.[424] The passage describing his time in the hospital conveys his desire to escape and

---

[422] Ibid.

[423] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," 355.

[424] Though the condition is unnamed, it is generally understood to be some kind of back injury. The choice to begin the narrative with his hospitalization is reminiscent of both Günter Grass and Vladimir Nabokov's choice to do the same. *Die Blechtrommel* begins with the words "Zugegeben: ich bin Insasse einer Heil- und Pflegeanstalt, mein Pfleger beobachtet mich, läßt mich kaum aus dem Auge; denn in der Tür ist ein Guchloch, und meines Pflegers Auge ist von jenem Braun, welches mich, den Blauäugigen, nicht durchschauen kann." (Günter Grass, *Die Blechtrommel* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), 9.) *Lolita's* fictional foreword identifies Humbert Humbert as both a prisoner and a patient ("their author had died in legal captivity, of coronary thrombosis, on November 16, 1952, a few days before his trial was scheduled to start." (Vladimir Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, ed. Alfred Appel (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 3.) and Humbert Humbert reiterates this in his opening paragraphs, addressing directly the "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury." (Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, 9.) The characterization of both of these protagonists relies heavily on the readers' knowledge of their incarcerated and/or committed states. Furthermore, the narrator's immobility is also

what he experiences as an overpowering sense of constraint – not only physical movement is

constrained, but the narrator's field of vision is also sharply reduced by his prone position and the

limitations of the window frame:

> Jedenfalls beschäftigte mich in der nachfolgenden Zeit sowohl die Erinnerung an die schöne Freizügigkeit als auch die an das lähmende Grauen, das mich verschiedentlich überfallen hatte angesichts der selbst in dieser entlegenen Gegend bis weit in die Vergangenheit zurückgehenden Spuren der Zerstörung. Vielleicht war es darum auf den Tag genau ein Jahr nach dem Beginn meiner Reise, daß ich, in einem Zustand nahezu gänzlicher Unbeweglichkeit, eingeliefert wurde in das Spital der Provinzhauptstadt Norwich, wo ich dann, in Gedanken zumindest, begonnen habe mit der Niederschrift der nachstehenden Seiten. Genau entsinne ich mich noch, wie ich gleich nach der Einlieferung, in meinem im achten Stockwerk des Krankenhauses gelegenen Zimmer überwältigt wurde von der Vorstellung, die in Suffolk im Vorsommer durchwanderten Weiten seien nun endgültig zusammengeschrumpft auf einen einzigen blinden und tauben Punkt. Tatsächlich war von meiner Bettstadt aus von der Welt nichts anderes mehr sichtbar als das farblose Stück Himmel im Rahmen des Fensters.
> Der im Laufe des Tages des öfteren schon in mir aufgestiegene Wunsch, der, wie ich befürchtete, für immer entschwundenen Wirklichkeit durch einen Blick aus diesem sonderbarerweise mit einem schwarzen Netz verhängten Krankenhausfenster mich zu versichern, wurde bei Einbruch der Dämmerung so stark, daß ich mich, nachdem es mir irgendwie, halb bäuchlings, halb seitwärts gelungen war, über den Bettrand auf den Fußboden zu rutschen und auf allen vieren die Wand zu erreichen, trotz der damit verbundenen Schmerzen aufrichtete, indem ich mich an der Fensterbrüstung mühsam emporzog. In der krampfhaften Haltung eines Wesens, das sich zum erstenmal von der ebenen Erde erhoben hat, stand ich dann gegen die Glasscheibe gelehnt und mußte unwillkürlich an die Szene denken, in der der arme Gregor, mit zitternden Beinchen an die Sessellehne sich klammernd aus seinem Kabinett hinausblickt in undeutlicher Erinnerung, wie es heißt an das Befreiende, das früher einmal für ihn darin gelegen war, aus dem Fenster zu schauen.[425]

The reference here is to Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*, where Gregor Samsa struggles to look out the

window of his room:

> Oder er scheute nicht die Mühe, einen Sessel zum Fenster zu schieben, dann die Fensterbrüstung hinaufzukriechen und, in den Sessel gestemmt, sich ans Fenster zu lehnen, offenbar nur in irgendeiner Erinnerung an das Befreiende, das früher für ihn darin gelegen

---

reminiscent of The narrator's immobility is also reminiscent of Gregor Samsa's progressive injury and eventual paralysis in Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*, which is an essential intertext for the hospital passage in *Die Ringe des Saturn.* "Er machte bald die Entdeckung, daß er sich nun überhaupt nicht mehr rühren konnte. Er wunderte sich darüber nicht, eher kam es ihm unnatürlich vor, daß er sich bis jetzt tatsächlich mit diesen dünnen Beinchen hatte fortbewegen können." Franz Kafka, *Gesammelte Werke: Erzählungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1983), 103.

[425] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 12–13.

wra, aus dem Fenster zu schauen. Denn tatsächlich sah er von Tag zu Tag die auch nur ein wenig entfernten Dinge immer undeutlicher; das gegenüberliegende Krankenhaus, dessen nur allzu häufigen Anblick er früher verflucht hatte, bekam er überjaupt nicht mehr zu Gesicht, und wenn er nicht genau gewußt hätte, daß er in der stillen, aber völlig städtischen Charlottenstraße wohnte, hätte er glauben können, von seinem Fenster aus in eine Einöde zu schauen, in welcher der graue Himmel und die greaue Erde ununterscheidbar sich vereinigten.[426]

In his description of the narrator's view from the hospital window, Sebald creates a network of allusion to this passage from Kafka. The hospital that Gregor Samsa used to see from his window is transformed into the hospital in which the narrator convalesces in Sebald. *Das Befreiende* is repeated in Sebald's passage, and the window itself is central. In Gregor Samsa's case, his vision is diminishing and the space around him seems to expand as he shrinks. Sebald's narrator experiences a similar contortion of vision and space, but in his case, his space and visual field seem to shrink as a result of his prone posture and immobility. The feeling of constraint perceived so keenly by Sebald's narrator is transmitted clearly to the reader through an emphasis on the contrast between freedom and immobility. Sebald's passage opens with the word *Freizügigkeit* and ends with *Befreiende*, but an accumulation of words like *Unbeweglichkeit*, *lähmend*, and *krampfhaft* overwhelm the idea of freedom and assert, in its place, constraint. The anxiety produced by physical constraint is redoubled by the narrator's feeling that his visual reach is also shrinking. The most interesting obstruction of a clear view is the "schwarzes Netz" that spans the window. In the photo accompanying this passage, we see that (purportedly) the hospital window was made of a kind of safety glass that has a wire mesh embedded in it to prevent shattering.[427] The narrator seizes on this image and it not only redoubles

---

[426] Kafka, *Erzählungen*, 81.

[427] Blumenthal-Barby suggests that this is to prevent suicide. (See Blumenthal-Barby, "Holocaust and Herring," 554.) Lethen studies the grid in its art historical context. (See Helmut Lethen, "Sebalds Raster. Überlegungen Zur Ontologischen Unruhe in Sebalds Die Ringe Des Saturn.," in *W.G. Sebald: Politische Archäologie Und Melancholische Bastelei*, ed. Michael Niehaus and Claudia Öhlschläger (Berlin: E. Schmidt, 2006), 13–30.) Richard Gray undertakes a characteristically thorough and convincing study, juxtaposing the grid and vanishing point, which he sees working together to criticize Enlightenment rationality. (See Richard T. Gray, "From Grids to Vanishing Points: W. G. Sebald's Critique of Visual-Representational Orders in Die Ringe Des Saturn.", October 2009.)

his feeling of visual constraint, but becomes a pattern for the organizational system the narrator

seeks in his account of his walking journey.[428] These intimations of impotence are compounded by

the passivity of his phrasing, "[ich] wurde eingeliefert." The narrator finds himself utterly at the

mercy of others and completely stripped of spatial freedom. This is a reminder of the constraints

and difficulty of both access and escape inherent in Foucault's heterotopias of deviance.

Later, the narrator describes the experience of coming back to consciousness after a back

operation. While still under the influence of waning anaesthesia and pain medication, the narrator

experiences an overwhelmingly positive understanding of all the sensory stimuli around him. "Ich

hörte nur die auf und ab gehenden töne, Naturlaute, wie sie hervorgebracht werden von den Kehlen

der Vögel, ein vollendetes Klingen und Flöten, halb Engelsmusik, halb Sirenengesang."[429] The drugs

have the effect of erasing the feeling of confinement that had previously plagued him and, instead,

given him the sensation of being immersed in a half-natural, half-magical place. However, when the

drugs finally wear off, the narrator remembers where he is and sees what he takes to be an ominous

sign:

> Erst als im Morgengrauen die Nachtschwestern abgelöst wurden, da ging es mir wieder auf,
> wo ich war. Ich begann meinen Körper zu spüren, den tauben Fuß, die schmerzende Stelle in
> meinem Rücken, registrierte das Tellergeklapper, mit dem draußen auf dem Gang der
> Krankenhaustag anhob, und sah, als das erste Frühlicht die Höhe erhellte, wie, anscheinend
> aus eigener Kraft, ein Kondensstreifen quer durch das von meinem Fenster umrahmte Stück
> Himmel zog. Ich habe diese weiße Spur damals für ein gutes Zeichen gehalten, fürchte aber
> jetzt in der Rückschau, daß sie der Anfang gewesen ist eines Risses, der seither durch mein
> Leben geht.[430]

As the awareness of his surroundings returns to the narrator, the beautiful sounds of the previous

night transform into clattering. The narrator perceives the line of airplane exhaust as a motif around

---

[428] The search for an organizational principle, as well as the function of this window and Thomas Browne's *Quincunx* is
discussed in depth in chapter two.

[429] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 28–29.

[430] Ibid., 29.

which his life begins to organize itself. This spatial metaphor can be read in two ways. The narrator

says that the trail of jet exhaust was perhaps the beginning of a crack or rift that goes through his life

from that point on. I would argue that the crack could be read as dividing the time before from time

after the crack's appearance while also splitting the narrator's experience, spreading as a crack does

through glass.

It would appear at first glance that the feeling of constraint relates only to the narrator's

confinement in the hospital, but in fact it may extend to the narrator's perception of his trajectory as

fixed. We have already seen how that narrator perceives the airplane's trail as a visual trace of the

forces that propel him. And this thought actually also serves as a transition to the narrator's

description of Thomas Browne, who studied "die Unsichtbarkeit und Unfaßbarkeit dessen, was uns

bewegt."[431] These unseen forces were brought to bear on Thomas Browne's skull, which becomes

another metaphor for the ineluctability of certain trajectories:

> Thomas Browne war […] nach seinem 1682 an seinem siebenundsiebzigsten Geburtstag
> erfolgten Tod in der Stadtpfarrkirche St. Peter Mancroft begraben worden, wo seine
> sterblichen Reste dann ruhten bis zum Jahr 1840, als der Sarg, bei den Vorbereitungen zu
> einer Beisetzung an nahezu derselben Stelle des Chors, beschädigt und sein Inhalt teilweise
> ans Licht gebracht wurde. Infolge dieses Vorfalls gelangte der Schädel Brownes und eine
> Locke von seinem Haupthaar in den Besitz des Arztes und Kirchenvorstehers Lubbock, der
> die Reliquien seinerseits testamentarisch dem Spitalmuseum vermachte, wo sie zwischen
> allerhand anatomischen Absonderlichkeiten unter einem eigens gefertigten Glassturz bis
> 1921 zu sehen waren. Erst dann nämlich war der von der Pfarrei St. Peter Mancroft
> wiederholt gestellten Forderung einer Rückführung des Schädels Brownes nachgegeben und,
> beinahe ein Vierteljahrtausend nach dem ersten Begräbnis, mit aller Feierlichkeit ein zweites
> anberaumt worden. Browne selbst hat in seinem berühmten, halb archäologischen, halb
> metaphysischen Traktat über die Praxis der Feuer- und Urnenbestattung zu der späteren
> Irrfahrt seines eigenen Schädels den besten Kommentar geliefert an der Stelle, wo er
> schreibt, aus dem Grabe gekratzt zu werden, das sei eine Tragödie und Abscheulichkeit.
> Aber wer, so fügt er hinzu, kennt das Schicksal seiner Gebeine und weiß, wie oft man sie
> beerdigen wird.[432]

---

[431] Ibid.

[432] Ibid., 21.

This *Irrfahrt* layers three heterotopias – a grave site, a hospital, and a museum – onto the background of a journey.

Another hospital with heterotopic associations appears in "Ambros Adelwarth" in the form of the Samaria clinic in Ithaca. We first learn of the clinic as the place where Cosmo Solomon sought treatment, but ultimately died.[433] We later learn that Ambros follows in his previous employer's footsteps and sought treatment there for his extreme, catatonic depression. The reader encounters the clinic itself solely through the eyes of the narrator, who goes there in search of more information about his uncle's death. The clinic is described as a kind of fantasy hunting lodge:

> Über eine lange Einfahrt ging es durch einen mindestens vierzig Hektar großen Park zu einer ganz und gar aus Holz gebauten Villa hinauf, die mit ihren überdachten Veranden und Altanen teils an ein russisches Landhaus erinnerte und teils an eine jener mit Trophäen vollgestopften, riesigen Zirbelhütten, wie sie die österreichischen Erzherzöge und Landesfürsten zu ende des letzten Jahrhunderts überall in ihren steirischen und Tiroler Revieren zur Einquartierung des auf die Jagd geladenen Hoch- und Industrieadels hatten errichten lassen.[434]

At first glance, this clinic does not seem to have the markers we know from other hospital and clinic heterotopias. The park surrounding the building gives an impression of freedom and visible evidence of leisure activities does not suggest confinement. In addition, Ambros checks himself into the clinic, which complicates the notion of difficult access and forced confinement in "heterotopias of deviance." However, the clinic is in an advanced state of decay –the narrator alludes to "die Anzeichen des Zerfalls" as his reason for initially avoiding the clinic building. He proceeds to search for the doctor, eventually finding in him some evidence of the clinic's history as a heterotopia of deviance. Dr. Abramsky himself exhibits a kind of deviant behavior, living as a hermit within the clinic's grounds: "Seit Mitte Mai 1969—ich habe unlängst den 15. Jahrestag meiner Emeritierung gefeiert—lebe ich heraußen, je nach Witterung entweder im Boots- oder im Bienenhaus und

---

[433] Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 143.

[434] Ibid., 159.

kümmere mich grundsätzlich nicht mehr um das, was vor sich geht in der sogenannten wirklichen Welt."[435] Not only does the doctor live unconventionally (in a boathouse or with his bees), but he has also completely distanced himself from the 'sogenannte wirkliche Welt.' His description of Ambros Adelwarth confirms the clinic as a site of deviance – clearly the patients were all admitted in order to seek treatment for their deviant behavior. Cosmo's case, his deviant behavior consisted of the following: "Er hielt sein Taschentuch zusammengeballt in der Faust und biß wiederholt vor Verzweiflung in es hinein. Als es finster wurde draußen, legte er sich auf den Boden, zog die Beine an den Leib und verbarg das Gesicht in den Händen."[436] He persists in this posture until he is delivered to the clinic in Ithaca. Ambros's case was slightly less dramatic:

> In der Nachweihnachtszeit des zweiundfünfziger Jahrs verfiel er dann in eine so abgrundtiefe Depression, daß er, trotz offenbar größtem Bedürfnis, weitererzählen zu können, nichts mehr herausbrachte, keinen Satz, kein Wort, kaum einen Laut. Ein wenig seitwärts gewandt, saß er an seinem Schreibbureau, die eine Hand auf der Schreibunterlage, die andere im Schoß liegend, und hielt den Blick vor sich hin auf den Boden gesenkt."[437]

We learn very little more about Cosmo's death at the clinic, but Ambros's is described in some detail. Ambros becomes the subject of an experimental technique of electric shock therapy, the so-called "Block- oder Annihilierungsmethode" which Dr. Fahnstock called "eine psychiatrische Wunderwaffe."[438] This treatment consisted of an intensive barrage of electric shocks which caused most patients to rebel and resist treatment. Here we see another example of Ambros's deviant behavior:

---

[435] Ibid., 161. See also Dr. Henry Selwyn, who moves out of the main house and into a folly or *Einsiedlung* on the property. Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 18.

[436] Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 143.

[437] Ibid., 149.

[438] Ibid., 168. Significantly, we learn that this method was developed by a German psychiatrist named Braunmühl, almost certainly a reference to the medical experiments conducted by doctors in the Nazi period on concentration camp inmates. (cf. Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 164.)

> Bemerkenswert war auch, mit welcher Bereitwilligkeit Ambrose sich der Schockbehandlung unterzog, die zu Beginn der fünfziger Jahre, wie mir rückblickend erst aufgegangen ist, wahrhaftig an eine Folterprozedur oder ein Martyrium heranreichte. Mußten die anderen Patienten nicht selten mit Gewalt in die Apparatekammer gebracht werden (*frogmarchend*, lautete der Ausdruck, dessen sich Dr. Abramsky an dieser Stelle bediente), so saß Ambrose zum anberaumten Zeitpunkt jedesmal schon auf dem Hocker vor der Türe und wartete, den Kopf an die Wand gelehnt, die Augén geschlossen, auf das, was ihm bevorstand.[439]

And so we learn that even Ambros's response to treatment was deviant in the context of the clinic. Where the others struggled against their prescribed treatment, Ambros complied and actually seemed to be seeking a way to completely erase his memory.[440] Since he had checked himself in and the clinic does not seem to be a secure facility, Ambrose Adelwarth's time appears to have been less a period of confinement than an attempt at escaping the oppression of his own memories.

Related to the hospital in its connotations of deviance and confinement, but fulfilling a punitive rather than sanative function, the prison is another heterotopia that appears frequently in Sebald's works. In Austerlitz, disused spaces formerly used for the confinement and torture of prisoners form the key locations that give rise to discussion of prisons in general. The two central prison structures that we encounter in the text are the camp at Terezín, where Austerlitz's mother was imprisoned before being deported to the East, and Breendonk, a former garrisoned fort-turned concentration camp-turned museum.

The narrator visits Breendonk on Austerlitz's suggestion and finds it disturbing. The fort itself is introduced with a brief account of its recent history:

> Und wie ich beim Zuwarten in den Zeitungen herumblätterte, da stieß ich […] auf eine Notiz über die Festung Breendonk, aus welcher hervorging, daß die Deutschen dort im Jahr 1940, gleich nachdem man das Fort zum zweitenmal in seiner Geschichte an sie hatte übergeben müssen, ein Auffang- und Straflager einrichteten, das bis zum August 1944 bestand und das seit 1947, soweit als möglich unverändert, als nationale Gedenkstätte und als Museum des belgischen Widerstands dient.[441]

---

[439] Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 163.

[440] cf. Ibid., 167.

[441] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 32.

The narrator's awareness of the fort's multi-layered history informs his visit and introduces it in terms that tally with the concept of heterotopia. Although Foucault suggests that heterotopias are frequently fixed at one point or another in history, this one has a typically Sebaldian multivalent temporality determined by the functions imposed upon it by the various forces that occupied it over the years. Originally the site of a military installation and now serving as a museum and memorial, the fort has always had a heterotopic nature. As with so many other heterotopias, access is not straightforward – the fort changed hands through violence during war but now is accessible only with the purchase of a ticket.[442] The difficulty of access is also encoded in the architecture of the fort:

> umgeben von einem Erdwall, einem Stacheldrahtzaun und einem breiten Wassergraben, das an die zehn Hektar umfassende Festungsareal inmitten der Felder liegt, fast wie eine Insel im Meer. Es war für die Jahreszeit ungewöhnlich heiß, und große Quellwolken kamen über den südwestlichen Horizont herauf, als ich mit dem Eintrittsbillet in der Hand die Brücke überquerte. […] Ich scheute mich, durch das schwarze Tor in die Festung selber zu treten […][443]

Although the fort itself was designed for impregnability and protection, it is surrounded by an earth wall, barbed wire, and a moat. Access is further restricted by a gate and ticket booth. These many layers of protection and prohibition position the fort as a forbidden space while the sale of tickets to visit it suggests a spectacle. The fort's status changes radically when the visitor is inserted into the scene, turning it into a curiosity and cementing its status as a tourist destination. It is important to note that the visitor's own desire or anxiety is complicit in preventing access to the site – he finds himself reluctant to enter. Perhaps this is due to his knowledge of the site's history, but it could also be a response to the site's own forbidding appearance.

---

[442] cf. Ibid., 33.

[443] Ibid.

Breendonk is typical of other prison spaces in the way in which power structures at work are made visible and embedded in the architecture. This fort, "eine einzige monolitische Ausgeburt der Häßlichkeit und der blinden Gewalt,"[444] exerts a palpable influence on the narrator; he says that "je länger ich meinen Blick auf [die Festung] gerichtet hielt und je öfter sie mich, wie ich spürte, zwang, ihn vor ihr zu senken, desto unbegreiflicher wurde sie mir."[445] The presence of this kind of power in the architecture of the building itself is reminiscent of the architectural encoding of power present in Foucault's description of the panopticon. Although the physical design of a panopticon is contrasted with that of "the 'old houses of security,' with their fortress-like architecture,"[446] one can imagine that the effect it has on its inmates is similar to that described by the narrator facing down the fortress. Foucault argues that the panopticon is successful as an instrument of discipline because "it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions – to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide – it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which is ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap."[447] The narrator's anxiety while studying the fortress from the outside comes, on the one hand, from his imagining the forced labor of the inmates there, but on the other hand it seems to come from his feeling that the fortress itself is observing and controlling him.

The monstrosity of the fortress also comes, however, from its illegibility: the narrator comments that "[die Festung] ließ keinen Bauplan erkennen" and that it

> wuchs so weit über meine Begriffe hinaus, daß ich sie zuletzt mit keiner mir bekannten Ausformung der menschlichen Zivilisation, nicht einmal mit den stummen Relikten unserer Vor- und Frühgeschichte in irgendeinen Zusammenhang bringen konnte. Und je länger ich

---

[444] Ibid., 35.

[445] Ibid., 34.

[446] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 202. [Michel Foucault, *Surveiller Et Punir: Naissance De La Prison*, Bibliothèque Des Histoires (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).]

[447] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 200.

meinen Blick auf sie gerichtet hielt und je öfter sie mich, wie ich spürte, zwang, ihn vor ihr zu senken, desto unbegreiflicher wurde sie mir.[448]

The narrator falls under the malevolent spell of the fortress, whose visible raw power seems to force him to lower his eyes – not in respect, but out of fear – and, try as he might, he cannot place the building in any kind of human historical context. The fortress seems to have grown organically, an extension of power itself. Only when he is no longer outside the fortress and only when given access to its floor plan does he recognize its symmetrical and "rationale[…] Struktur."[449] However, that perspective does not restore it in his opinion to a human creation. Instead, it resembles a giant cancerous growth.[450] The structure of the fort resists understanding: "da konnte ich in ihm, trotz seiner nun offenbaren rationale Struktur, allenfalls das Schema irgendeines krebsartigen Wesens, nicht aber dasjenige eines vom menschlichen Verstand entworfenen Bauwerks erkennen."[451]

The inside of the fort, however, is a different matter. Here the narrator elaborately imagines the types of people who worked in the dark rooms, focusing, however, entirely on the Nazi past rather than all the various histories that gave different functions to those rooms, and which soldiers and their prisoners experienced differently. The narrator's experience inside the fort, however, is mediated by the apparatus of a museum designed to educate visitors. The floor plan of the fort is labeled with the names or functions of the rooms: "*ehemaliges Büro, Druckerei, Baracken, Saal Jacques Ochs, Einzelhaftzelle, Leichenhalle, Reliquienkammer* und *Museum,*"[452] which inspires some of the scenes the narrator imagines. Furthermore, we learn that the museum is organized along a prescribed path

---

[448] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 34.

[449] Ibid., 36.

[450] This image is particularly potent in the context of the medical meaning of heterotopia. While they are typically benign they are unusual growths of tissue that are generally removed to avoid complication.

[451] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 36.

[452] Sebald's italics. Ibid., 39.

made up of "vierzehn Stationen, die der Besucher in Breendonk zwischen Portal und Ausgang passiert."[453]

These fourteen stations are reminiscent of the fourteen Stations of the Cross, a tradition that is prevalent in the Catholic and Lutheran traditions. When praying the Stations of the Cross, worshipers generally move through a space, frequently around the periphery of the church sanctuary, praying before images of Jesus Christ's journey from his condemnation to his burial. It is interesting to note that the final station of the cross depicts Christ's burial. When this tradition is observed in Jerusalem, one follows what is called the Via Dolorosa and ends in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre where the final station is housed deep underground.[454] Further connecting the museum to the Stations of the Cross, the narrator's final station inside the fort museum is deep underground[455] ("man [spürt] sogleich, daß man in [der Kasematte] überwölbt ist von einer mehrere Meter starken Schicht Beton."[456]). Rather than a burial chamber, however, this small room is labeled as a torture chamber on the map to which the narrator frequently refers.[457]

The mediation of signs, labels, and museum exhibits impacts not only the narrator's experience of the narrated spaces, but also the reader's understanding of the narrative. In thinking

---

[453] Ibid., 38.

[454] It is interesting to note that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre actually appears in "Ambros Adelwarth." Ambros and Cosmo are led on a tour of the *Grabeskirche* by "ein verwachsenens Männlein mit einer mordsmäßigen Nase." Ambros's account of the tour of the church does not actually comment on the church, but dwells on the dwarf and his curious language. (cf. Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 205–206.)

[455] The anxiety in this passage is reminiscent of Bachelard's explanation for the fear inspired by basements: "The cellar dreamer knows that the walls of the cellar are buried walls, that they are walls with a single casing, walls that have the entire earth behind them. And so the situation grows more dramatic, and fear becomes exaggerated." Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 20.

[456] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 40.

[457] Note that on the image of the map included in this passage, the *Folterkamer* (torture chamber) is in close proximity to the *Lijkenkamer* (morgue). This clarifies not only the connection to the Stations of the Cross, but also the probable outcome of any interrogation conducted in the torture chamber.

Judith Ryan points out that the illustrations of various forts and prisons "clearly allude to those in *Discipline and Punish*, though they are drawn from other sources." Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*, 151.

about the fort as a tourist destination, it is useful to think of Augé's thoughts on texts present in

non-places: "The real non-places of supermodernity […] have the peculiarity that they are defined

partly by the words and texts they offer us: their 'instructions for use', which may be prescriptive

("Take right-hand lane'), prohibitive ('No smoking') or informative ('You are now entering the

Beaujolais region')."[458] While Augé restricts his discussion of these texts to those present in places of

transit (airports, highways, trains, to which we will return) or commerce (supermarkets), tourist

destinations are also full of labeling or informative texts. While the narrator does not comment on

the presence of directions in the museum, the presence of labels give shape to his imagination of the

various rooms. Take, for example, the *Kasino* in the fort, which the narrator describes thus:

> Was ich aber im Gegensatz zu dieser in Breendonk ebenso wie in all den anderen Haupt-
> und Nebenlagern Tag für Tag und jahrelang fortgesetzen Schinderei durchaus mir vorstellen
> konnte, als ich schließlich die Festung selber betrat und gleich rechterhand durch die
> Glasscheibe einer Tür in das sogenannte Kasino der SS-Leute, auf die Tische und Bänke,
> den dicken Bullerofen und die in gotischen Buchstaben sauber gemalten Sinnsprüche an der
> Wand, das waren die Familienväter und die guten Söhne aus Vilsbiburg und aus Fühlsbüttel,
> aus dem Schwarzwald und aus dem Münsterland, wie sie hier nach getanem Dienst beim
> Kartenspiel beieinander saßen oder Briefe schrieben an ihre Lieben daheim, denn unter
> ihnen hatte ich ja gelebt bis in mein zwanzigstes Jahr.[459]

In this passage there are two layers of texts: first, whatever sign or label made it clear that this room

was called the casino by the SS officers who worked in the fort and second, the *Sinnsprüche* – the

mottos – which were painted on the walls in gothic script, intended clearly to guide behavior in the

fort. The description of the men who worked in the fort themselves is strange in the context of the

dank underground of the fort itself and certainly clashes with the images of torture that follow. The

narrator emphasizes the normality of these men and relies on his memories from home rather than

tying his image of the soldiers enjoying their free time to the fort itself.

---

[458] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (London; New York: Verso, 2008), 77. [Marc Augé, *Non-lieux: Introduction à Une Anthropologie De La Surmodernité*, Librairie Du XXe Siècle (Paris: Seuil, 1992).]

[459] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 37–38.

The narrator feels the menacing influence of this room even before entering it, complaining that he feels as though there is progressively less air and that the ceiling is pressing down above.[460] But the room itself calls up the potent memory of a butcher's shop from the narrator's childhood and he finds himself overcome with emotion and anxiety. The parallel between butcher shop and torture chamber is clear in this passage:

> Diese Kasematte […] ist ein enger, an der einen Seite spitz zulaufender, an der anderen abgerundeter Raum, dessen Boden um gut einen Fuß tiefer liegt als der Gang, durch den man ihn betritt, und darum weniger einem Verlies gleicht als einer Grube. Indem ich in diese Grube hinabstarrte, auf ihren, wie es mir schien, immer weiter versinkenden Grund, auf den glattgrauen Steinboden, das Abflußgitter in seiner Mitte und den Blechkübel der daneben stand, hob sich aus der Untiefe das Bild unseres Waschhauses in W. empor und zugleich, hervorgerufen von dem eisernen Haken, der an einem Strick von der Decke hing, das der Metzgerei, an der ich immer vorbeimußte auf dem Weg in die Schule und wo man am Mittag oft den Benedikt sah in einem Gummischurz, wie er die Kacheln abspritzte mit einem dicken Schlauch.[461]

The narrator goes on to say that he only learned a few years later from Jean Améry's description about the kind of torture that was carried out in that room; his anxiety when visiting the room was, he claims related only to his childhood memory. Here we see another embodiment of the room's function in its architecture: the hook hanging from the ceiling was, we learn, used for hoisting prisoners up by their hands in such a way that their shoulders would dislocate, unable at that angle to support the weight of the body. A description of this torture, paraphrased from Jean Améry, is included in this passage, using language that evokes the auditory sense, creating in the reader's mind the experience of torture or, at least, of witnessing it. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault studies the evolution of carceral systems up to the mid-nineteenth century. He draws attention to the metamorphosis of punishment from earlier spectacles of physical punishment to less sensational forms of punishment carefully conducted away from the public gaze. He dwells on the example of

---

[460] cf. Ibid., 39–40.

[461] Ibid., 40–41.

the guillotine, which from its invention had been the source of spectacle, but when eventually was

moved away from public view:

> In France, the guillotine, that machine for the production of rapid and discreet deaths, represented a new ethic of legal death. But the Revolution had immediately endowed it with a great theatrical ritual. For years it provided a spectacle. It had to be removed to the Barrière Saint-Jacques; the open cart was replaced by a closed carriage; the condemned man was hustled from the vehicle straight to the scaffold; hasty executions were organized at unexpected times. In the end, the guillotine had to be placed inside prison walls and made inaccessible to the public […] by blocking the streets leading to the prison in which the scaffold was hidden, and in which the execution would take place in secret […]. Witnesses who described the scene could even be prosecuted, thereby ensuring that the execution should cease to be a spectacle and remain a strange secret between the law and those it condemns. One has only to point out so many precautions to realize that capital punishment remains fundamentally, even today, a spectacle that must actually be forbidden.[462]

Here Foucault points out the basic contradiction inherent in capital punishment: one is executed in

order not only as punishment, but also to discourage others from committing the same crime.

However, the creation of a spectacle around the execution may tend to make the execution an end

in itself, which is certainly not desired. Looking at the torture chamber in Breendonk, it seems to fall

under the same rubric as the guillotine in this description by Foucault: the fact of torture was

probably not disputed or debated within the fort and yet, it was hidden from view, at the end of a

long, dark corridor and located near the morgue so that bodies could be disposed of with minimal

exposure and inconvenience. This has the effect of creating a heterotopia of deviance within the

heterotopia of the prison itself which, in turn, doubles the anxiety felt by the narrator and increases

the tension between the heterotopia and the "normal" world.

---

[462] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 15.

"DOCH IN WAHRHEIT WISSEN WIR NICHTS VON DEN GEFÜHLEN DES HERINGS."

ANIMALS – THE ZOO AS HETEROTOPIA

Although the spaces described in the context of zoos and other displaced animals are not as intimately connected with human power structures, Sebald's descriptions of them do have some characteristics in common with the more menacing hospital and prison sites. In Sebald's works, the reader encounters a series of curious zoological images ranging from apocalyptic pronouncements on the extinction of species to encounters with pets. Reading these spaces as heterotopias will highlight the tension created between the world depicted by animals and that of the human figures in the text. Foucault discusses a number of spaces that draw attention to the tensions between the real world and its heterotopic counterpart:

> Thus on the rectangle of its stage, the theatre alternates as a series of places that are alien to each other; thus the cinema appears as a very curious rectangular hall, at the back of which a three-dimensional space is projected onto a two-dimensional screen. Perhaps the oldest example of these heterotopias in the form of contradictory locations is the garden. […] The garden is the smallest fragment of the world and, at the same time, represents its totality, forming right from the remotest times a sort of felicitous and universal heterotopia (from which are derived our own zoological gardens).[463]

Just as Foucault suggests happens in the theater, cinema, or garden, zoological tableaux give the viewer a glimpse of a remote world while preserving a kind of critical distance. These spaces frequently embody a kind of refiguring of or projection screen for the human experience of those who observe them. The anthropomorphization of animal life, particularly in the case of animals seen in a zoo, creates a forceful double juxtaposition – the tension between the animals' real habitat and the habitat in which they are observed is palpable and, at the same time, the animals' behavior, motivations, and concerns are juxtaposed – and occasionally conflated – with those of the observer.

Animals develop as a significant leitmotiv in *Austerlitz* is established from the beginning of the novel. The narrator, having spent too long wandering the streets of Antwerp and "von

---

[463] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," 354.

Kopfschmerzen und unguten Gedanken geplagt,"[464] visits the zoo near the central train station and, after watching birds in an aviary for a while, goes into the Nocturama. The narrator describes the unnaturally dark space as a "verkehrte[s] Universum"[465] and a "falsche[…] Welt"[466] and notes that his eyes are slow to adjust to the dark. The most poignant image from this passage describes a raccoon engaged in manically washing an apple slice:

> Wirklich gegenwärtig geblieben ist mir eigentlich nur der Waschbär, den ich lange beobachtete, wie er mit ernstem Gesicht bei einem Bächlein saß und immer wieder denselben Apfelschnitz wusch, als hoffe er, durch dieses, weit über jede vernünftige Gründlichkeit hinausgehende Waschen entkommen zu können aus der falschen Welt, in die er gewissermaßen ohne sein eigenes Zutun geraten war.[467]

This passage demonstrates a number of heterotopic qualities in the Nocturama. First, the structure of the raccoon's enclosure is a microcosm of a larger, real-world habitat. Second the raccoon is constantly observed. Third, the raccoon seems to be held against his will. The narrator perceives in the raccoon's obsessive behavior an attempt to escape his surroundings – a place he arrived in without his cooperation. The narrator's perception of the raccoon's situation colors his description of it. Furthermore, the placement of the Nocturama at the beginning of the novel is not innocent – its prominent position in the narrative signals to the reader its importance in shaping our perception of the novel's eponymous main character. The basic structures of the Nocturama are also reminiscent of a moment from Foucault's description of the panopticon:

> Bentham does not say whether he was inspired, in his project, by Le Vaux's menagerie at Versailles: the first menagerie in which the different elements are not, as they traditionally were, distributed in a park […]. At the centre was an octagonal pavilion which, on the first floor, consisted only of a single room, the king's *salon*; on every side large windows looked out onto seven cages (the eighth side was reserved for the entrance), containing different species of animals. By Bentham's time, this menagerie had disappeared. But one finds in the

---

[464] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 9–10.

[465] Ibid., 12.

[466] Ibid., 11.

[467] Ibid., 10–11.

programme of the Panopticon a similar concern with individualizing observation, with characterization and classification, with the analytical arrangement of space. The Panopticon is a royal menagerie; the animal is replaced by man, individual distribution by specific grouping and the king by the machinery of a furtive power. With this exception, the Panopticon also does the work of a naturalist.[468]

Read in this context, the animals' enclosures in the Nocturama become more sinister, as if the animals are being observed as part of a punishment.

The depiction of the animal world as a mirror for the human world is an elegant and complex theme within the novel, but the juxtaposition is at its most productive and yet jarring in the specific case of the resonance between descriptions of Austerlitz and those of various displaced animals. One such juxtaposition can be seen in the descriptions of the raccoon in the Nocturama and of Austerlitz in the Antwerp train station, his first appearance in the novel. The narrator first glimpses Austerlitz feverishly sketching and making notes, an activity wholly out of keeping with his surroundings in the waiting room and with the people surrounding him.

> Eine der in der *Salle des pas perdus* wartenden Personen war Austerlitz, ein damals, im siebenundsechziger Jahr, beinahe jugendlich wirkender Mann mit blondem, seltsam gewelltem Haar, wie ich es sonst nur gesehen habe an dem deutschen Helden Siegfried in Langs Nibelungenfilm. Nicht anders als bei all unseren späteren Begegnungen trug Austerlitz damals in Antewerpen schwere Wanderstiefel, eine Art Arbeitshose aus verschossenem blauem Kattun, sowie ein maßgeschneidertes, aber längst aus der Mode gekommenes Anzugsjackett, und er unterschied sich auch, abgesehen von diesem Äußeren, von den übrigen Reisenden dadurch, daß er als einziger nicht teilnahmslos vor sich hin starrte, sondern beschäftigt war mit dem Anfertigen von Aufzeichnungen und Skizzen, die offenbar in einem Bezug standen zu dem prunkvollen, meines Erachtens eher für einen Staatsakt als zum Warten auf die nächste Zugverbindung nach Paris oder Ostende gedachten Saal, in welchem wir beide saßen, denn wenn er nicht gerade etwas niederschrieb, war sein Augenmerk oft lang auf die Fensterflucht, die kannelierten Pilaster oder andere Teile und Einzelheiten der Raumkonstruktion gerichtet.[469]

In this passage we find the only description of Austerlitz that goes into any detail about his physical appearance. The narrator notes that Austerlitz always wears the same clothes (hiking boots,

---

Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 203.

Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 14–15.

outdated, but well-cut suit jacket, well-worn trousers), giving the impression that this is something of

a uniform for Austerlitz. There are several temporal hints in this description: although his age is not

specified, the phrase "beinahe jugendlich" implies that he isn't actually young, though he may appear

to be, and the visible wear in his trousers and the old-fashioned style of his suit coat suggest the

passage of time. Additionally, the suit coat is identifiably "längst aus der Mode gekommen," which

could link Austerlitz's appearance to a specific, although not specified, time in the past.

Furthermore, the description of his person (beyond his clothing) links him simultaneously to a

distant, mythological past as well as a specific cinematic moment by likening his hair to that of the

star of Fritz Lang's film *Die Niebelungen*.[470] The comparison between Austerlitz and Paul Richter,

whose blond waves were featured in the film, casts Austerlitz as a kind of epic figure, buffeted by

fate, while calling to mind the unpleasant associations that come from the Nazi's appropriation of

the myth and their own idealization of blondness. Furthermore, the connection of Austerlitz with

Siegfried implies a connection to German tradition where there is not yet any implication that he is

at all associated with Germany. Finally, the invocation of another heterotopia – the cinema – situates

Austerlitz firmly outside the spatial 'norm.'

Where this description becomes really interesting, though, is when we compare Austerlitz's

actions with those of the raccoon in the Nocturama. As we have already seen, the raccoon's

obsessive washing of the apple slice seems to the narrator to be an effort at escaping his confines.

Here, Austerlitz's distinguishing feature is also a kind of intense activity. His concentration on his

---

[470] Siegfried Kracauer describes this film as "a gloomy romance featuring legendary characters in the grip of primitive passions." The film, released in 1924, was meant by Lang as "something strictly national, something that, like the Lay of the Nibelungs itself, might be considered a true manifestation of the German mind," anticipating the ethos behind Goebbels's propaganda apparatus. A central theme in the film is the role of Fate in determining the actions and motivations of the legendary characters. Kracauer goes on to argue that the decorative images featured in *Die Nibelungen* actually inspired the set decorators responsible for Triumph of the Will: "Siegfried's theatrical trumpeters, showy steps and authoritarian human patterns reappear, extremely magnified, in the modern Nuremberg pageant." Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, ed. Leonardo Quaresima (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 92–95.

sketches and notes is only interrupted by the desire to further observe the architectural details he

attempts to document (the rows of windows and decorative, false columns). The train station, like

the raccoon's enclosure, is filled with inauthentic or incongruent features. In the Nocturama, the

raccoon crouches by an artificial stream, washing over and over an apple slice, a food item that is

wholly out of place. The question of futility is also important here. The raccoon's actions are

certainly meaningless, but we find out later that Austerlitz's architectural studies and the notes and

sketches which so absorb him also come to naught. In that context, then, perhaps both the

raccoon's and Austerlitz's actions represent a kind of deviance that would be consonant with a

heterotopia.[471]

In the same way that Austerlitz is connected to the raccoon – through futile action that has

no hope of productivity – he is also portrayed as incongruous with his surroundings in the train

station. The narrator points out the incongruence between the hall's appearance and its function,

saying it would be better suited to an act of state than the act of waiting for a train. Furthermore the

Pilaster, columns built into or applied to the surface of a wall, that hold his attention are most likely

only a decorative feature of the hall, rather than a functional load-bearing structure.[472] Other

elements of the train station also seem artificial. The narrator lingers on the curious architecture of

the station, enacting, perhaps the kinds of observations Austerlitz makes while sitting in the *Salle*:

> Jetzt aber sah ich, wie weit der unter dem Patronat des Königs Leopold II. Errichtete Bau
> über das bloß Zweckmäßige hinausreichte, und verwunderte mich über den völlig mit
> Grünspan überzogenen Negerknaben, der mit seinem Dromedar als ein Denkmal der
> afrikanischen Tier- und Eingeborenenwelt hoch droben auf einem Erkerturm zur Linken der
> Bahnhofsfassade seit einem Jahrhundert allein gegen den flandrischen Himmel steht. Als ich

---

[471] Here it is useful to think about Austerlitz's "Erinnerungsarbeit" – the shuffling, ordering, and reordering of photos
that he compulsively repeats in the Alderney Street house. This is discussed in more depth in chapter four.

[472] It is important to bear in mind that the reader's impression of Austerlitz is filtered through the narrator's gaze.
Although he does not peer at Austerlitz through a dark window, as he did to the raccoon in the Nocturama, Austerlitz is
just as much an object of the narrator's gaze as the raccoon was. Sebald's insertion of the narrator's opinion using
phrases like "meines Erachtens" in this passage reminds the reader of the presence of the narrator and destabilizes the
focus of the scene.

die von einer sechzig Meter hohen Kuppel überwölbte Halle der Centraal Station betrat, war mein erster, vieleicht durch den Tiergartenbesuch und den Anblick des Dromedars in mir ausgelöster Gedanke, daß es hier in diesem prunkfollen, damals allerdings stark heruntegekommenen Foyer in die marmornen Nischen eingelassene Käfige für Löwen und Leoparden und Aquarien für Haifische, Kraken und Krokodile geben müßte, gerade so wie man umgekehrt in manchen zoologischen Gärten mit einer kleinen Eisenbahn durch die fernsten Erdteile fahren kann.[473]

The narrator focuses here on the question of architectural function and finds that the station has gone overboard in the execution of what should primarily be a *functional* building. In addition, he conflates the train station with a zoo, imagining that the many niches inside the building are intended as or were at one point the location of various cages and aquaria. He heightens the conflation of the two spaces by drawing a parallel between the life-size trains that arrive at and depart from the station with the miniature trains one occasionally sees in a zoo. In fact, the way he describes this phenomenon is reminiscent of Foucault's description of gardens as heterotopic spaces:

> The traditional garden of the Persians was a sacred space that was supposed to unite four separate parts within its rectangle, representing the four parts of the world, as well as one space still more sacred than the others, a space that was like the navel, the centre of the world brought into the garden (it was here that the basin and jet of water were located). All the vegetation was concentrated in this zone, as if in a sort of microcosm.[474]

The four parts of the world that Foucault describes mirror the "fernste […] Erdteile" mentioned by the narrator and the train station reenacts the impulse of the traditional garden to bring together disparate parts of a landscape. This conflation of the zoo and the train station is doubled by the narrator's assertion that "der […] Wartesaal wie ein zweites Nocturama vorgekommen ist."[475] In this statement as well as the description above of the train station's niche/cages, the narrator challenges his own reliability, destabilizing the narrative. This is accomplished in the passage above by the

---

[473] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 12–13.

[474] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," 354.

[475] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 13.

phrase "vielleicht durch den Tiergartenbesuch," suggesting that the comparison simply arises from

proximity of his visit to the zoo. In the passage where he sees the waiting room as a second

Nocturama he undercuts the direct comparison of the Nocturama to the waiting room of the train

station by saying it was "eine Überblendung, die natürlich auch daher rühren mochte, daß die Sonne

sich hinter die Dächer der Stadt senkte, gerade als ich den Wartesaal betrat."[476] These interruptions

of the narration draw the reader's attention away from the narrative and toward the narrator,

reiterating his unreliability as he questions the validity of his own impressions.

The comparison of the Nocturama and the waiting room is somewhat complicated by the

colonial context in which the narrator presents his association. The imagery of the train station's

decorations features symbols of Africa's "Tier- und Eingeborenenwelt"[477] – natives and camels

displayed alongside other exotic animals. This juxtaposition unites animals and humans both as

symbols of the exotic, as well as victims of colonialism.[478] The trappings of Belgium's colonial

heritage are present in this passage to intensify the ideas of displacement and entrapment that appear

in the Nocturama and are reiterated in the descriptions of Austerlitz. While Austerlitz's experience

was not that of a native of a brutally colonized country, the themes of exile and entrapment inherent

in colonial and postcolonial experience resonate with Austerlitz's involuntary relocation and his

persistent feeling of powerlessness and loss of identity. [479]

---

[476] Ibid.

[477] Ibid.

[478] Colonies, it bears mentioning, are also mentioned by Foucault as a type of heterotopia that calls for further study. Colonialism is a frequent theme in Sebald's works, particularly in the case of *Die Ringe des Saturn*, where one of the narrative strains follows the travails of Roger Casement and Joseph Conrad is a frequently invoked figure. For more, see: Ryan, *The Novel After Theory*, 201.

[479] This involuntary relocation is also reminiscent of the impotence that accompanies imprisonment or a long stay in a hospital. One could perhaps read the experience exile as a heterotopian experience as well.

The other figures in the waiting room are associated with similar overtones of displacement, victimization, and impending extinction that we see in the description of the Nocturama and in the colonial narrative embedded in the train station's façade.

> Ähnlich wie die Tiere in dem Nocturama, unter denen es auffällig viele Zwergrassen gegeben hatte, […] schienen auch diese Reisenden mir irgendwie verkleinert, sei es wegen der außergewöhnlichen Höhe der Saaldecke, sei es wegen der dichter werdenden Düsternis, und ich nehme an, daß ich darum gestreift worden bin von dem an sich unsinnigen Gedanken, es handle sich bei ihnen um die letzten Angehörigen eines reduzierten, aus seiner Heimat ausgewiesenen oder untergegangenen Volks, um solche, die, weil nur sie von allen noch überlebten, die gleichen gramvollen Mienen trugen wie die Tiere im Zoo.[480]

As well as alluding to *ein untergegangenes Volk* and thus raising the specter of the Holocaust, this passage also characterizes the travelers present as homeless, grieving, and reduced, both in number and stature – he likens them to the *Zwergrassen* – miniature species present in the Nocturama.[481] While it may seem that this reduction in the travelers' size is a result of their (perceived) forced exile, but, in fact, the narrator ascribes their shrinkage to the size of the room and the growing darkness. Finally, it is in this context that Austerlitz is introduced with the straightforward statement "Eine der in der *Salle des pas perdus* wartenden Personen war Austerlitz,"[482] a segue which immediately identifies Austerlitz as one of the exiles.[483]

That Austerlitz's first appearance is set in the Antwerp train station seems to suggest that it is – or resembles – his 'natural environment' just as the raccoon's housing in the Nocturama represents an approximation of its natural habitat. Additionally, it aligns Austerlitz with Augé's

---

[480] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 13–14.

[481] It bears mentioning that the Belgian Congo – one of the colonies doubtlessly alluded to in this passage – was home to various pygmy peoples. The comparison of the Nocturama's *Zwergrassen* with these travelers is problematic when seen in this context.

[482] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 13.

[483] By portraying Austerlitz as a perpetual traveler, a characteristic which seems to be a direct result of his involuntary exile in Britain, Sebald comes dangerously close to falling into characterizing him as the Eternal Wanderer, an image that is charged with anti-Semitic overtones.

concept of the non-place: he is surrounded by objects that signify travel. He is among travelers waiting in a train station, obviously, but also is in possession of a backpack, pulls out a camera – the traditional equipment of tourists in the twentieth century – and seems to be permanently shod in hiking boots. All of these references to travel are also strongly consonant with Austerlitz's involuntary relocation to England, which we learn about much later, but also perhaps with his voluntary exile and compulsive travel.

This identification of Austerlitz with displaced and caged animals is complicated and expanded in the episodes at Andromeda Lodge. While he is visiting Andromeda Lodge, Austerlitz discovers a sort of pet cemetery, in which he finds a cardboard coffin labeled "Jaco, Ps. Erithacus L. Er stammte aus dem Kongo und hatte in seinem walisischen Exil, wie es auf dem ihm beigegebenen Nachruf hieß, das hohe Alter von sechsundsechzig Jahren erreicht."[484] In this epitaph, a number of facts associate Austerlitz with the exotic, exiled bird: first, upon their meeting in Prague, Věra calls Austerlitz Jaquot,[485] as was evidently her habit when Austerlitz was a child; second, the parrot's life is called his "walisische[s] Exil," which would also be an apt description of Austerlitz's childhood in Wales; third, the parrot's age at his death is approximately Austerlitz's supposed age at the time of the book's publication.[486] Furthermore, the description of the exiled parrot ends with a note on his appearance. He had a black beak, a red tail, and a "weißliches, wie man denken konnte, von tiefer Trauer gezeichnetes Gesicht."[487] These colors are present in both the German Imperial and Nazi flags. While this episode is nearly lost as a single element in a catalogue of the collections and peculiarities of Andromeda Lodge, that line, that the bird, whose name is oddly similar to the first

---

[484] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 125.

[485] Ibid., 224.

[486] This passage also contains a reference back to the Belgian colonies: Jaco came from Congo, which was, of course, a Belgian colony until 1960.

[487] Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 126.

names (Jacques, and his childhood nickname Jacquot) of the protagonist, suffered great sadness in his Welsh exile makes it stand out as a possible allegory of Austerlitz's own plight.

While these details may seem trivial, the description gains significance in the context of the other descriptions of displaced animals. For instance, a further description that links Austerlitz with displaced birds and that compares animals to humans is found in the Andromeda Lodge scenes, when the resident imported cockatoos are described as an allegorical microcosm of humanity: "Auch wie sie sich in andauernd wechselnden Gruppen zusammenrotteten und dann wieder paarweise beieinandersaßen […] war ein Spiegel der menschlichen Sozietät."[488] A fascinating association between Austerlitz and the cockatoos is established by the space the cockatoos inhabit: they live in sherry casks stacked against a wall, in which they had built their nests. Austerlitz's house is extremely sparsely furnished, but among the few items in the house are a number of Bordeaux crates, used as makeshift furniture. This fact ties him to the cockatoos at Andromeda lodge, and thus by extension to all the other caged and displaced animals in the novel.

The animal world is positioned as a mirror for human experience – and in some cases suffering – in other of Sebald's works as well. In *Die Ringe des Saturn*, animals are anthropomorphized and juxtaposed with humans in emotional upheaval more than once. An animal whose situation clearly resembles that of the narrator is introduced when the narrator encounters a captive quail on the grounds at Somerleyton:

> […] freilich bedrückte es mich, als ich nach dem Rundgang wieder ins Freie hinaustrat, in einer der größtenteils aufgelassenen Volieren eine einsame chinesische Wachtel zu sehen, die – offenbar in einem Zustand der Demenz – in einem fort am rechten Seitengitter ihres Käfigs auf und ab lief und jedesmal, bevor sie kehrtmachte, den Kopf schüttelte, als begreife sie nicht, wie sie in diese aussichtslose Lage geraten sei.[489]

---

[488] Ibid., 124.

[489] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 50.

182

The quail's pacing and confusion mirror the narrator's state of mind at the outset of his journey and, although he does not explicitly identify himself with the quail, he expresses his dismay at the sight. He empathizes with the bird.

This identification with the perceived or projected emotional state of an animal is not, however, typical of *Die Ringe des Saturn*. The most memorable appearances of animals in this book are not closely identified with the narrator and do not have such a clear correlation to his experience. Instead, they tend to present challenging or shocking juxtapositions.

Perhaps the most shocking of these is the juxtaposition of the herring fishing industry and the mounds of bodies found among the trees at Bergen-Belsen upon its liberation at the end of World War II.[490] These events – both catastrophic in their own ways – seem unrelated to one another, but are knitted together by the narrator's idiosyncratic mnemonic process. The herring fisheries and life cycle are described in a long excursion. Among other details of their lives, the narrator points out that herrings have always been favored as teaching instruments,[491] a statement that takes on ominous overtones when seen in the context of the meditations we have already seen on the dissection of the criminal in Dr. Tulp's anatomy class and the posthumous and post-exhumation experiments and display of Thomas Browne's skull. This preference developed in part due to the extreme fertility of the fish:

> Und mit einem Ausrufezeichen ist vermerkt, daß ein jedes Heringsweibchen siebzigtausend Eier ablege, die, wenn sie sich alle ungehindert vermehrten, nach einer Berechnung Buffons bald eine das zwanzigfache Volumen der Erde ausmachende Menge von Fischen ergeben würden. […] Ja es wird sogar berichtet, daß riesige Heringsschwärme von Wind und Wellen gegen die Küste getrieben und an Land geworfen wurden, wo sie über eine Strecke von

---

[490] A concise discussion of juxtapositions like these can be found in Blumenthal-Barby's article, where he sees *Die Ringe des Saturn* as an attempt at reconstructing the voices that have been silenced by history – i.e. the voices of the victims or vanquished of history, as history is always written by the victor. Drawing on Benjamin and Felman's writings on history, he sees in Sebald a critique of temporal historicism and in the narrator a radical identification with the victims of history. The narrator seems to identify with the herrings in a similar way that he identifies with Michael Hamburger and, on a larger scale, all the victims of European anti-Semitism. For more, see Blumenthal-Barby, "Holocaust and Herring."

[491] Sebald, *Die Ringe Des Saturn*, 70.

etlichen Meilen ein paar Fuß tief den Strand bedeckten. Nur zu einem geringen Teil konnten derartige Heringsernten von der Bevölkerung der anliegenden Ortschaften in Körbe und Kisten geschaufelt und eingebracht werden. Der Rest verdarb innerhalb weniger Tage und bot das erschreckende Bild einer in ihrem eigenen Überfluß erstickenden Natur.[492]

This passage accomplishes two things: it drives home the scale on which the herrings reproduce and the ease with which they frequently are caught. The use of the word *Heringsernte* – literally herring harvest – implies a less violent act than in reality is required for the normal fishing of herring and, in fact, suggests that the herrings are fruits earned by the fisherman's labors. These considerations come into play in assuaging the consciences of natural historians when faced with the enormity of the herring fishing industry, as the narrator says, "Angesichts dieser kaum vorstellbaren Mengen beruhigten sich die Naturhistoriker bei dem Gedanken, daß der Mensch bloß für einen Bruchteil der im Kreislauf des Lebens andauernd sich fortsetzenden Vernichtung Verantwortlich ist […]"[493] The need for the natural historians to calm themselves is the first intimation of trouble in the description of an industry which could lead to the complete extinction of the species if left unchecked. This half-hearted defense continues, saying that the fish cannot feel fear or pain in any meaningful way. But then, the narrator intervenes with a forceful assertion, "Doch in Wahrheit wissen wir nichts von den Gefühlen des Herrings. Wir wissen nur, daß sein inneres Gerüst aus über zweihundert verschiedenen, auf das komplizierteste zuzusammengesetzten Knorpeln und Knochen besteht […]"[494] and continues, cataloguing the many facts we do know about the herring and its death.

This long description is followed by the description of a forest and lake that reminds the narrator of the death of Major George Wyndham Le Strange, whom Sebald seems to have invented, and his bequest to a particularly loyal servant. This transition seems at first relatively unsurprising

---

[492] Ibid., 72.

[493] Ibid., 74–75.

[494] Ibid., 75.

until, upon turning the page, the reader sees a double-page photograph depicting hundreds of corpses lying in a forest. We learn that this image comes from Bergen-Belsen, the concentration camp that Le Strange was supposedly involved in liberating at the end of the war. The shock of the juxtaposition between heaps of dead herrings and the masses of dead in the Holocaust originates from the proximity of the two images in the text, but it resonates when one examines some of the language used in describing the fish. For example, herrings are called "de[r] ruhelose[…] Wanderer des Meeres,"[495] which is reminiscent of the anti-Semitic characterization of Jews as eternally wandering or homeless. In addition, after a catch the herring are loaded into "Güterwagen der Eisenbahn"[496] to be sent off for processing and sale, which is reminiscent of the cattle cars used to transport prisoners during the Holocaust. Furthermore, patches of scales floating on the surface of the water (which is a tell-tale sign of the presence of herring) sometimes look like ashes.[497] Also, describing the various experiments conducted to determine the survival potential of herring, the narrator writes "Eine solche, von unserem Wissensdrang inspirierte Prozedur ist sozusagen die äußerste Zuspitzung der Leidensgeschichte einer ständig von Katastrophen bedrohten Art."[498] This species is prone to disaster, a characterization which is not infrequently applied also to Jews. Finally, in the next sentence, the narrator says that we are all complicit in the slaughter of these fish, a statement which is reminiscent of the phenomenon of collective guilt.[499] All of these descriptions would be innocent but for their proximity to a visual depiction of the Holocaust's victims.

---

[495] Ibid., 71.

[496] Ibid.

[497] Ibid., 73.

[498] Ibid., 74.

[499] It is interesting that the narrator counts the herring's deaths by natural predator as part of this procedure of slaughter. He seems to be suggesting that humans, with their penchant for overfishing, are no more or less culpable than sea eels, dogfish, or cod.

To this constellation of heterotopias, we might add Marc Augé's notion of non-places, which he understand as "spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces."[500] Augé juxtaposes these non-places with what he defines as anthropological place, or "any space in which inscriptions of the social bond (for example, places where strict rules of residence are imposed on everyone) or collective history (for example, places of worship) can be seen."[501] Augé generally associates anthropological places with the "organically social" and non-places with "solitary contractuality."[502] The non-place is solitary and allows/compels the human inhabitant to become introspective.

The types of Augéan non-place that will be most interesting for our study of Sebald are the places of transit and travel. In addition to describing these non-places in detail, Augé draws the reader's attention to the role of texts – particularly those which provide 'instruction for use' – in shaping an individual's experience of a non-place.

One curious effect of the non-place on the individual in it is a temporary erasure of identity.[503] This enables the traveler, for instance, to indulge in "simultaneous experiences of a perpetual present and an encounter with the self."[504] This encounter with the self proceeds from the shedding of a person's "usual determinants." Augé describes this process thus:

> He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of the passenger, customer or driver. Perhaps he is still weighed down by the previous day's worries, the next

---

[500] Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, 76.

[501] Augé is cautious to note that these categories are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily extant as such. He writes that "The place/non-place pairing is an instrument for measuring the degree of sociality and symbolization of a given space." Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*. viii.

[502] Ibid., 76.

[503] cf. Ibid., 81.

[504] Ibid., 84.

day's concerns; but he is distanced from them temporarily by the environment of the moment. Subjected to a gentle form of possession, to which he surrenders himself with more or less talent or conviction, he tastes for a while – like anyone who is possessed – the passive joys of identity-loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing.

What he is confronted with, finally is an image of himself, but in truth it is a pretty strange image.[505]

This function of the non-place seems to be a recasting of Lacan's mirror stage – according to Augé, a person is able to recognize oneself through the experience of non-places. The question arises, however, whether the self that one encounters is the authentic self, if such a thing exists, or whether the non-place functions primarily as a stage for the experience of more or less elaborate role-play.

Sebald's story "Ambros Adelwarth" from *Die Ausgewanderten* depicts a series of heterotopic spaces. One could argue that a theme of this story in particular is the destruction or stripping away of identity, a process that is helped along by the emigration and subsequent sense of placelessness experienced by many of the characters. In fact, the characters about whom we learn the most in this story all suffer either a kind of restlessness or homesickness. A prime example of this pervasive sense of homelessness – and, indeed, homesickness – is the narrator's aunt Theres:

> […]bloß die Tante Theres kam noch mit einiger Regelmäßigkeit, […] weil sie zeit ihres Lebens an einem unstillbaren Heimweh litt. Drei Wochen nach ihrer jeweiligen Ankunft weinte sie noch aus Wiedersehensfreude, und bereits drei Wochen vor der Abreise weinte sie vor Trennungsschmerz. War sie länger als sechs Wochen bei uns, so gab es für sie in der Mitte ihres aufenthalts eine gewisse, meist mit Handarbeiten ausgefüllte Zeit der Beruhigung; blieb sie aber weniger lang, dann wußte man manches Mal wirklich nicht, ob sie in Tränen aufgelöst war, weil sie endlich wieder zu Hause sein durfte oder weil es ihr schon wieder vor dem Fortfahren grauste.[506]

This exaggerated homesickness is Theres's defining characteristic and serves as the background against which are contrasted the other characters' perception of place. Theres still feels bound to her

---

[505] Ibid., 83.

[506] Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 99–100.

home (as evidenced by her weekly letters to her family – "Meine Lieben daheim!"[507]) while the others move on with life, but are plagued either by an incurable restlessness or one of a variety of illnesses.[508] In fact, this story reads like a catalogue of mental and physical illness. Among others are listed eczema,[509] neuralgia,[510] premature death,[511] and "die Bantische Krankheit"[512] (a kind of anemia). In the case of Ambros Adelwarth himself, he is suspected of suffering Korsakoff's syndrome[513] and eventually is diagnosed with "schwere Melancholie im Senium," and "stupuröser Katatonie."[514] All of these illnesses seem almost to eclipse the identity of those who suffer them.

The family's restlessness is apparent in the narrator himself. He grew up assuming that he would emigrate to America and spent much of his childhood peering over an atlas at the names of towns and other landmarks that he would one day visit.[515] A scene in which he studies an atlas of

---

[507] Ibid., 101.

[508] Blumenthal-Barby points out a similar catalogue of illnesses in *Die Ringe des Saturn*: "A discourse of madness pervades *The Rings of Saturn*: The "melancholy poet" Algernon Charles Swinburne, for instance, "could no longer control his own voice and limbs. After these quasi- epileptic fits he often lay prostrate for weeks, and soon, unfitted for general society, he could bear only the company of those who were close to him" (192, 159f.). Like Swinburne, who suffers "nervous crises" (197, 163), the deportment of Major George Wyndham Le Strange "became increasingly odd" and "eccentric" (80f., 62f.): Le Strange, who had served in the tank regiment that liberated the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen, expects his housekeeper to dine with him on a daily basis, "but in absolute silence" (80, 62). The English poet FitzGerald (whose name is not quite as telling as "Le Strange") is in the throes of "the blue devil of melancholy" and troubled by a "tinnitus" (244, 205). About literature professor Stanley Kerry, an acquaintance of both Hamburger and the narrator, we learn: "Often his face would contort into a grimace, the effort bringing beads of perspiration to his brow, and the words came from him in a spasmodic, precipitate manner that betrayed severe inner turmoil" (223, 187)." Blumenthal-Barby, "Holocaust and Herring," 552–553.

[509] Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 107.

[510] Ibid., 106.

[511] Ibid.

[512] Ibid., 147.

[513] Ibid., 149.

[514] Ibid., 162.

[515] He describes his effort to emulate the American occupying forces reaching its peak when he was sixteen or seventeen "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 vorherein zum Scheitern verurteilt war." Ibid., 103.

America is preceded by the emotion of *Fernweh*.[516] Uncle Kasimir expresses a similar desire to get away when he says, of his frequent trips to the Atlantic ocean on the New Jersey coast, "I often come out here, sagte der Onkel Kasimir, it makes me feel that I am a long way away, though I never quite know from where. Ambros Adelwarth seems to embody both of these compulsions – both the desire to go home and to get away. In one scene, he seems to be pining for home[517] but soon after, he sees a ridge of mountains that remind him of home and he expresses a kind of dismay at the resemblance: "Einen furchtbaren Herzschlag lang glaube ich mich in der Schweiz oder wieder daheim . . ."[518] In this case, the ellipsis leaves both the location of home or the completion of the thought open to interpretation. In addition, the last four words plus the ellipsis are centered on a line of text, simulating a photo caption and, in fact, a photo of Ambros's journal follows immediately, but on the next page.[519] This image epitomizes the kind of falsified documents that Horstkotte notes as interventions of the author into the text. These, she argues, are explicitly meant to be read as part of the intermedial narrative.[520]

---

[516] Ibid., 155.

[517] Ibid., 188.

[518] Ibid., 193.

[519]Horstkotte comments on the way that the narrative simulates captions:
"Sebald toys with notions of documentary photography when he simulates captions in order to refer to the supposedly authentic source of many of his photographs: the protagonists' family album. For instance, the line of text underneath a photograph of "Theres, Kasimir and I" (the narrator's Aunt Fini) in *The Emigrants* is printed like a caption and therefore seems at first to authenticate the photograph's origin and its documentary status. However, the line is also the beginning of a story told by the narrator's Aunt Fini. It serves not only as a caption to the quoted image in The Emigrants, but also as both character speech (Aunt Fini's) and the photo's caption in the family album from which Fini is quoting (thus referring intertextually to an authority outside the narrative)." Horstkotte, "Photo-Text Topographies," 55.
Sebald frequently centers lines of text (sometimes only a few words) underneath or above the images in his texts, which causes the reader to pause and decide whether the text continues without interruption or whether the centered text is actually a caption separate from the narrative.

[520] Horstkotte discusses these falsified journal pages at length, pointing out the discordances between what is paraphrased in the narrative and the actual content of the pages as well as moments which allude to the fictionality of the document. For example, "the handwritten diary entry of 23 September contains the expression "Schwindelgefühle" ("Vertigo") in the penultimate line of the top paragraph: *Schwindel. Gefühle.* [sic] is the title of Sebald's first collection of stories. Clearly, this is an important intertextual reference and a strong signal of the collection's fictionality. However, the narrator omits to quote this part of the diary entry, ending instead with the preceding sentence. Only a careful deciphering of the handwritten entry in the photograph will reveal this clue to the diary's inauthenticity. […] it is the

SETTEMBRE
23 MARTEDI, ss. Cosma e D, 270-95

SETTEMBRE
24 MERCOLEDI, s. Venceslao 271-94

M. Horchten — Bayer Ottoman H.°

Haben ein Wohnhaus gefunden im Vororts-
bezirk von Eyüp. Es steht neben der alten
Dorfmoschee an der Stirnseite eines Platzes,

auf dem drei Straßen zusammenlaufen. In der
Mitte des gepflasterten Vierecks, umringt von
gestutzten . . . Platanen, ein rundes Brunnen-

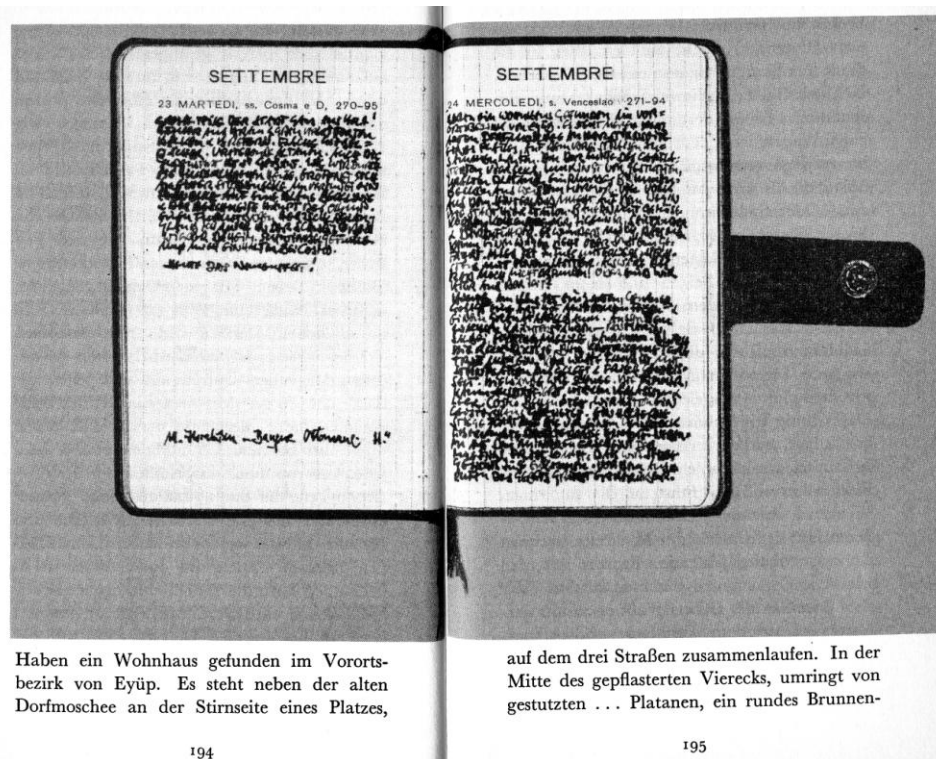194   195

FIGURE 4. Ambros Adelwarth's journal.[521]

Although the narrator outgrew the desire to emigrate, he is driven to visit his family in

America to conduct research about his great uncle Adelwarth for some unnamed purpose. Many of

the scenes in which the narrator expresses his own views rather than providing a bracketed narration

are set in spaces of travel or transport, particularly in cars, driving along various highways. These

highways are frequently marked by the absence of human life. For example, the narrator describes

the remains of the outdated chicken farming industry he sees along the road on his way to visit his

aunt Fini and uncle Kasimir in New Jersey.

---

narrator's omission of this potentially innocuous word which draws attention to its possible status as an intertextual
allusion. The contrasting of photographed and quoted text thus serves to undermine the diary's evidentiary status, which
the presentation of the diary as material object at first seemed to establish." (Ibid., 59–60.) In addition, she points out
that "A careful reader may also recognize the handwriting in the diary as that of the author Sebald, which again
undermines the naive belief in the collection's factual accuracy."[520] Sebald thus inserts himself into the narrative,
sometimes in the form of photographs, and in the case of the diary pages, the author is present through his handwriting.

[521] Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 194–195.

> Dann ging es hinaus in eine ebene Gegend, in der es, den ganzen Garden State Parkway entlang, nichts gab als Krüppelholz, verwachsenes Heidekraut und von ihren Bewohnern verlassene, teils mit Brettern vernagelte Holzhäuser, umgeben von zerfallenen Gehegen und Hütten, in denen, wie der Onkel Kasimir mir später erklärte, bis in die Nachkriegszeit hinein Millionen von Hühnern gehalten wurden, die unvorstellbare Abermillionen von Eiern legten für den Markt von New York, bis neue Methoden der Hühnerhaltung das Geschäft unrentabel machten und die Kleinhäusler samt ihrem Federvieh verschwanden.[522]

More than simply describing the area through which one drives, the narrator seems to be depicting a deserted, almost post-apocalyptic space. There is evidence that once, people did live and work in this area, but they are gone now. A similar kind of desertion is described when the narrator goes for a drive with his uncle Kasimir, who also feels a kind of restlessness.

> Nach dem Mittagessen wurde der Onkel Kasimir zusehends unruhig, ging im Zimmer herum und sagte schließlich: I have got to get out of the house!, worauf die Tante Lina, die am Geschirrwaschen war, erwiderte: What a day to go for a drive! Tatsächlich konnte man draußen meinen, es sei am Nachtwerden, so tintenschwarz und so tief hing jetzt der Himmel herab. Die Straßen waren leer. Nur selten kam uns ein anderer Wagen entgegen. Wir brauchten für die knapp zwanzig Meilen bis an den Atlantik hinunter bald eine Stunde, weil der Onkel Kasimir so langsam fuhr, wie ich auf einer freien Strecke noch nie jemanden habe fahren sehen. […] Der Onkel verlangsamte die Fahrt noch mehr und ließ sein Fenster herab. This is Toms River, sagte er, there's no one here in the winter. Im Hafen lagen dicht wie eine verängstigte Herde aneinandergedrängt Segelboote mit schepperndem Takelwerk. Auf einem *coffee shop* in Form eines Lebkuchenhäuschens hockten ein paar Möwen. Der Buyright Store, der Pizza Parlour und der Hamburger Haven waren geschlossen, und auch die Wohnhäuser waren versperrt und hatten die Läden herabgelassen. Der Wind trieb den Sand über die Fahrbahn und unter die sidewalks hinein. Die Dünen, sagte der Onkel, erobern die Stadt.[523]

This passage demonstrates both the restlessness that so many of the characters experience, but also continues the motif of driving. In one way, the persistence of this motif may be due to the association of driving with America[524] but it may also be to do with the potential of the highway to

---

[522] Ibid., 105.

[523] Ibid., 125–127.

[524] It may be useful to think here of *Lolita* as the long mythologized "great American novel." Nabokov is evoked throughout Sebald's works by a series of references and intimations. Perhaps the most obvious of these references appears in "Ambros Adelwarth," where Ambros explains the appearance of a man curiously capering across the clinic lawn: "dort [tauchte] ein Mann mittleren Alters auf […], de rein weißes Netz an einem Stecken vor sich hertrug und ab und zu seltsame Sprünge vollführte. Der Adelwarth-Onkel blickte starr voraus, registrierte aber nichtsdestoweniger meine Verwunderung und sagte: It's the butterfly man, you know. He comes round here quite often."Ibid., 151. It is likely that this butterfly man is, in fact, Nabokov. He lived at the narrated time in Ithaca, where this scene takes place.

act as an Augéan non-place and thus both obliterate the individual's identity and, simultaneously, to

dwell on the self. Augé describes non-places in this way:

> But non-places are the real measure of our time; one that could be quantified / with the aid
> of a few conversions between area, volume and distance – by totaling all the air, rail and
> motorway routes, the mobile cabins called 'means of transport' (aircraft, trains and road
> vehicles), the airports and railway stations, hotel chains, leisure parks, large retail outlets, and
> finally the complex skein of cable and wireless networks that mobilize extraterrestrial space
> for the purposes of a communication so peculiar that it often puts the individual in contact
> only with another image of himself.[525]

In the case of the narrator's car trip with his uncle, the car is a non-place, but also serves as the

means by which they reach another collection of non-places (represented by the deserted shops and

houses on the Jersey Shore). In fact, while the narrator's time on the Atlantic shore with his uncle is

filled with uncle Kasimir's reminiscences of Ambros Adelwarth, the narrator literally encounters an

image of himself when recalling the visit to the shore. Two years after their visit, Kasimir sends the

narrator the photo I discussed earlier, in which the figure is underexposed and the face is not

recognizable. In the context of a non-place, one could argue that it represents both an obliteration

of and encounter with the narrator. Significantly, just before taking the photo, Kasimir says "I often

come out here […] it makes me feel that I am a long way away, though I never quite know from

where." Kasimir exhibits the family's general desire to get away without knowing precisely what is

being escaped. In this context, Aunt Theres's extreme homesickness begs the question, "Why did

she not return home?"

To return to the previous passage, we recognize in the image of the dunes conquering the

town's streets the theme of natural destruction and decay that runs throughout Sebald's works. The

forces of nature are ever-present and, in this case, represent a natural process that mirrors the slow

---

Moreover, it is well known that he was an avid lepidopterist. This nod toward Nabokov draws the reader's attention to a
few motifs from *Lolita* that reappear in "Ambros Adelwarth": the presence of a bracketed narrative, the undertaking of
epic journeys by car and other modes of transport, the omnipresence of tatty tourist destinations and anonymous hotels,
the question of lost or obfuscated identity, and so forth.

[525] Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, 64.

deterioration of identity we see in Ambros himself. A remarkably similar passage can be found in the

narrator's description of the formerly-fabulous hotel *Roches Noires* in Montreux:

> Das Roches Noires hat, soviel ich herausfinden konnte, in den fünfziger oder sechziger
> Jahren seinen Betrieb eingestellt und wurde danach in Appartements aufgeteilt, von denen
> sich allerdings nur die zum Meer hin gelegenen einigermaßen losschlagen ließen. Heute ist
> das ehemals luxuriöseste Hotel der normannischen Küste nur noch eine zur Hälfte bereits in
> den Sand gesunkene monumentale Monstrosität. Die meisten Wohnungen sind seit langem
> verlassen, ihre Besitzer aus dem Leben geschieden.[526]

Here we see another deserted tourist destination beginning to sink into the sand and be erased.

Embedded in all the narrator's descriptions of tourist destinations and beach resorts are desertion

and intimations of decay. But just as important are the narrator's constant doubts about authenticity

and the intimation that every one of these hotels and resorts is, in fact, just trying to imitate

something else. An example of a hotel that calls forth these doubts is the Hotel Normandy, which

still serves an elite clientele:

> Der um mehrere Innenhöfe herum einrichtete, überdimensional sowohl asl miniaturhaft
> wirkende Fachwerkbau beherbergt allerdings nahezu ausschließlich japanische Gäste, die
> vom Hotelpersonal mit einer zwar ausgesuchten, aber zugleich, wie ich beobachten konnte,
> eiskalten, wenn nicht gar an Indignation grenzenden Höflichkeit durch das genau
> vorgegebene Tagesprogramm gelenkt werden. Tatsächlich glaubt man isich im Normancy
> weniger in einem renommierten internationalen Hotel als in einem außerhalb von Osaka
> anläßlich einer Weltausstellung eigens errichteten französischen Gastronomiepavillon, und
> mich zumindest hätte es überhaupt nicht gewundert, wenn ich, aus dem Normandy
> heraustretend, sogleich auf ein balinesisches oder alpenländisches Phantasiehotel gestoßen
> wäre. Alle drei Tage wurden die Japaner im Normandy abgelöst von einem neuen
> Kontingent ihrer Landsleute, die jeweils, wie einer der Gäste mich aufklärte, direk vom
> Flughafen Charles de Gaulle in klimatisierten Autocars nach Deauville gebracht wurden, der
> nach Las Vegas und Atlantic City dritten Station einer Globus glücksreise, die über Wien
> Budapest und Macao wieder nach Tokio zurückführte.[527]

In this description, the narrator draws attention to a number of things about the hotel itself that

situate it as a fake of a kind. First of all, the *Fachwerk* – half timber construction – architectural style

was certainly native to Switzerland, but speaks more of mountain retreats than of elegant lake-side

---

[526] Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 173–174.

[527] Ibid., 175–176.

resorts. Secondly, the scale of the hotel is disorienting, being both *überdimensional*, almost as if magnified, and *miniaturhaft*, as if built for a diorama or toy train set. It is also significant that the narrator seems to see the preponderance of Japanese hotel guests as a marker of the hotel's inauthenticity, giving the impression that the hotel was built for a world exposition. The sense of the hotel's inauthenticity and disjunction with its surroundings is underlined by its juxtaposition, in the narrator's imagination, with other incongruent and exotic destinations. Finally we learn that the Japanese guests are, in fact, on a world tour of casinos. The narrator levels a further accusation of inauthenticity at this tour as he dwells on the fact that the Japanese tourists are transported directly (in air-conditioned buses) from the airport to the casino, where they spend their time eating, drinking, and gambling. One has the impression that these tourists never leave the hotel, that they never actually come into contact with fresh air or anything like an 'authentic' experience. The narrator clearly derides this insulated form of encounter and hopes that he, perhaps, strives to avoid this kind of detached, inauthentic tourism.

In one passage in particular the narrator can be seen making contact with the outside world despite his actual insulated state. He begins by describing the experience of highway driving in America:

> Wie von selber glitt man auf der breiten Fahrbahn dahin. Die Überholvorgänge, wenn sie bei den geringen Geschwindigkeitsdifferenzen überhaupt zustande kamen, verliefen so langsam, daß man, während man Zoll für Zoll sich nach vorn schob oder zurückfiel, sozusagen zu einem Reisebekannten seines Spurnachbarn wurde. Beispielsweise befand ich mich einmal eine gute halbe Stunde in Begleitung einer Negerfamilie, deren Mitglieder mir durch verschiedene Zeichen und wiederholtes Herüberlächeln zu verstehen gaben, daß sie mich als eine Art Hausfreund bereits in ihr Herz geschlossen hatten, und als sie an der Ausfahrt nach Hurleyville in einem weiten Bogen von mir sich trennte – die Kinder machten Kasperlgesichter beim hinteren Fenster heraus –, da fühlte ich mich wirklich eine Zeitlang ziemlich allein und verlassen. Auch wurde die Umgegend jetzt zusehends leerer.[528]

---

[528] Ibid., 153–154.

Several things become apparent in this passage. First of all, the narrator is conscious of the isolation

provided by his rental car. As a result, he feels as though he is not in control, not in contact, and not

located in a coherent context. His description of the giant child who must be organizing the world

around him is evidence of the randomness of the place names he passes on the highway. It is

notable that he comments on the fact that he drives past and not through these towns. Augé

comments on this phenomenon of highways:

> Main roads no longer pass through towns, but lists of their notable features – and, indeed, a
> whole commentary – appear on big signboards nearby. In a sense, the traveller is absolved of
> the need to stop or even look. […] Motorway travel is thus doubly remarkable: it avoids, for
> functional reasons, all the principal places to which it takes us; and it makes comments on
> them.[529]

The narrator's comment that the places seem "im Nirgendwo zu liegen" underlines this curiosity of

highway travel. Finally, the narrator attempts to fight the isolation of the car by making a connection

to one of the cars he passes on the highway. His hyperbolic description of the process of passing

another car on the highway (taking in this case a half hour to pass another car) allows for the

development of a pantomimed intimacy between him and a black family. He understands that they

have accepted him as one of their own, but only through a series of gestures. It remains ambiguous,

whether the narrator read that meaning into the gestures or, more extreme yet, invented the

communion he shared with his fellow travelers. It is also interesting to consider whether the family's

race is evidence of the narrator's own effort at authenticity; in his earlier description of the American

occupying forces, black soldiers are a typically American setpiece: "Die Weiber gingen in Hosen

herum und warfen ihre lippenstiftverschmierten Zigarettenkippen einfach auf die Straße, die Männer

hatten die Füße auf dem Tisch, die Kinder ließen die Fahrräder in der Nacht im Garten liegen, und

was man von den Negern halten sollte, das wußte sowieso kein Mensch."[530] The narrator distances

---

[529] Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, 78–79.

[530] Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 102.

himself from these criticisms of the occupying forces, saying that the criticism only spurred him on in his desire to emigrate. However, it is interesting to note that of all the figures the narrator encounters, the only black ones are still very much separate from him. Perhaps this is another attempt at assimilation or authenticity that, like his attempt to emulate Hemingway, was destined to fail.

The question of travel and authenticity also arises in connection with the many travels of Ambros Adelwarth himself. Adelwarth, we learn from Aunt Fini, had something like a chameleon's skill at fitting into his environment. One key aspect of this adaptive skill was his ability to learn languages:

> […]er besaß nämlich die besondere Fähigkeit, eine Fremdsprache ohne jedes Lehrmittel innerhalb von ein, zwei Jahren anscheinend mühelos sich anzueignen, einzig und allein durch gewisse Adjustierungen, wie er mir einmal auseinandersetzte, seiner inneren Person. Neben seinem sehr schönen New Yorker Englisch hat er ein elegantes Französisch und, was mich immer am meisten verwunderte, ein äußerst gediegenes, gewiß nicht auf Gopprechts zurückgehendes Deutsch gesprochen, und darüber hinaus, so erinnerte die Tante Fini sich noch, ein durchaus nicht unebenes Japanisch […].[531]

While language certainly is not the key to an authentic travel experience, it is a barrier that most tourists do not successfully traverse. Moreover, his ability to learn – or better, to absorb – these languages is evidence of his adaptability to different cultures as well. In fact, the idea that language has to do with the adjustment of personal character, as Ambros suggested, closely links language to cultural difference; a person adept at adjusting to the one will certainly be able to adjust to the other.

These skills all seem to stem from Ambros Adelwarth's time working in hotels (from Montreux to London) before entering the employ of the Solomon family as a kind of valet and personal chaperone for the wayward son, Cosmo. At that point, Ambros became a guest at the hotels he visited, rather than an employee of them. I would argue that this change in status was deeply unsettling to Ambros, which led, in turn, to his growing alienation from himself. One telling

---

[531] Ibid., 114.

example of Adelwarth's attempts at authentic travel after this time is a photograph that is included alongside the description of his and Cosmo's trip east out of Europe to the Holy Land. Adelwarth (purportedly) is shown in 'authentic' Palestinian clothing, posing against a backdrop of clouds and trees (certainly a photographer's backdrop) and grasping a water pipe. His own shirt collar is just visible above the robes.

FIGURE 5. Ambros Adelwarth in "arabischer Kostümierung."[532]

The photograph is wholly staged and presented framed with an advertisement for the photographer and the location recorded as Jerusalem, Palestine. Although the photographer's name

---

[532] Ibid., 137.

may be native to the region, all text on the photograph is written in English, reinforcing the notion that the image was intended for a tourist – an English speaker in Palestine. This image certainly reflects the Orientalism that was stylish at that time, but also demonstrates the difficulty Ambros Adelwarth found in assimilating with this culture. Where before he was able to adapt to a new language (and culture) with ease, here he assumes the costume and the pose as directed, but the approximation necessarily fails, – a fact amusingly indicated by his visible shirt collar – but also because Ambros has so succumbed to the non-place of travel that his earlier chameleon-like ability to assimilate to a new culture has deserted him. His loss of identity as a result of the non-place of travel is made manifest in this image.

The appearance of this photo anticipates the more thorough account of Ambros and Cosmo's travels in the Orient to which the reader gains access through Ambros's diary, a document that Aunt Fini is unable to decipher, but which the narrator mysteriously has no difficulty reading: the narrator claims that "Die Entzifferung der winzigen, nicht selten zwischen mehreren Sprachen wechselnden Schrift hat nicht wenig Mühe bereitet und wäre wahrscheinlich nie von mir zuwege gebracht worden, hätten sich nicht die vor beinahe achtzig Jahren zu Papier gebrachten Zeilen sozusagen von selber aufgetan."[533] The text opens itself to the narrator by some means that he does not explain. One possible interpretation of this curious statement is that Ambros's journal entries do, in a way, open up. At the beginning of the journal (which coincided with the beginning of his journey east with Cosmo Solomon), Ambros restricts his thoughts to fragmented sentences, sensory impressions, and factual statements. For example, take this passage from one of the first entries in the diary: "Früher Morgen […], ich lange an Deck, Rückschau haltend. Die sich entfernenden Lichter der Stadt unter einem Regenschleier. Die Inseln in der Lagune wie Schatten. Mal du pays. Le

---

[533] Ibid., 188.

navigateur écrit son journal à la vue de la terre qui s'éloigne."[534] In this brief entry a number of things come to light. First of all, Ambros seems to see himself as an observer, looking back at the land they have left. His descriptions of the land, the water, and the islands they pass are short, almost telegraphic statements, devoid of emotion. And suddenly, Ambros switches into French to declare 'homesickness,' without attributing that emotion to himself or anyone else. The sentence he writes in French is a quotation from Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*. It seems clear that Ambros is thinking of himself, but he completely disassociates himself from the action. His identification with Chateaubriand as ship's pilot clarifies his position vis à vis Cosmo: he navigates, perhaps so that Cosmo does not get lost or stray too far. On the other hand, it implies that he is in control of the direction they take and that he has an overview of the itinerary. In another journal entry, Cosmo is described in similar terms, but with an entirely different effect: "Cosmo steht im Bug wie ein Lotse."[535] Identifying himself as a navigator, Ambros appears serious and contemplative while Cosmo seems to be playing make-believe. He stands in the bow of the ship and pretends to be guiding the ship. On the other hand, we learn that Ambros "ordne[t] die durcheinandergeraten Sachen."[536] At the beginning of the trip, Ambros is firmly in the position of looking after Cosmo and caring for him, almost as a babysitter.

However, the later journal entries expand into longer (complete) sentences, include personal observations, and reflections on Ambros's emotional state. An example of this is seen where Ambros describes the night spent under the stars in the mountains near Delphi, in Greece:

> Jetzt im Gebirge von Delphi die Nacht bereits sehr kühl. Haben uns vor zwei Stunden, in unsere Mäntel gehüllt, schlafen gelegt. Die Sättel dienen als Kopfpolster. Unter dem Lorbeerbaum, dessen Blätter wie Blechplättchen leise rascheln, stehen die Pferde mit

---

[534] Ibid.

[535] Ibid., 189.

[536] Ibid.

gesenktem Haupt. Über uns die Milchstraße (where the Gods pass on their way, says Cosmo) so hell, daß ich in ihrem Licht dieses aufschreiben kann. Schaue ich lotrecht in die Höhe, sehe ich den Schwan und die Kassiopeia. Es sind dieselben Sterne, die ich als Kind gesehen habe über den Alpen und später über dem Wasserhaus im Japan, über dem Stillen Ozean und draußen über dem Long Island Sound. Kaum glaube ich, daß ich derselbe Mensch und in Griechenland bin. Aber ab und zu weht der Geruch der Wacholderbäume zu uns herüber, und also ist es wohl wahr.[537]

This passage shows the entire arc of change in Ambros's writing style. The first sentences are incomplete and simply state the facts. However, his syntax changes even with the description of the horses sleeping under the laurel tree. There he uses a more complex sentence structure and begins to compose a sensory impression of the scene. In the next sentence, Ambros includes one of only a few quotations from Cosmo and continues to add to the sensory image he builds up sentence by sentence and sense by sense. The auditory sense is addressed by the sound of the laurel leaves, the visual is evoked by the starlight above the dozing men, and one can imagine the coolness of the mountain air and the feeling of laying one's head on a hard leather saddle while sleeping on the ground. Finally, Ambros relies on the herbaceous, lightly bitter smell of the juniper tree to confirm the reality of their situation which he comes to doubt in pondering the stars above. Here we see the first hint that the journey will make some sort of change in Ambros. Where before he stated the fact of homesickness without purporting to feel it himself, he now questions his own identity and loses his grasp on their location.

Ambros's evolution is also palpable in the changes we see in his relationship to Cosmo. The early journal entries seem to be peppered with observations about Cosmo, almost as if Ambros were keeping a record in order to report on Cosmo's behavior: "Cosmo sehr unruhig."[538] However, as the

---

[537] Ibid., 190.

[538] Ibid., 188.

journey progresses Cosmo takes on a position of more responsibility.[539] In another scene set in a

boat, Cosmo sits at the rudder, steering and making plans for the following days.[540] This scene, with

Cosmo literally at the helm, recalls and contrasts with the earlier scenes with Ambros guiding their

progress and Cosmo acting like a child. These subtle changes in the relationship between Ambros

and Cosmo culminate in two scenes that place Cosmo in a position of authority. The first of these is

a dream in which Ambros and Cosmo follow a blind guide through masses of crippled and ill

people, all of whom seem to come from Ambros's hometown of Gopprechts. Later in the dream,

Cosmo explains the situation to Ambros:

> Cosmo zündet die Lampe an und breitet auf dem bunten Teppich seine Landkarte aus. Er zeigt auf einen der vielen weißen Flecken und sagt: Wir sind jetzt in Jericho. Die Oase ist vier Wegstunden lang und eine Wegstunde breit und von so seltener Schönheit wie sonst vielleicht nur der paradiesische Obstwald von Damaskus – le merveilleux verger de Damas. Mit allem sind die Menschen hier versorgt. Was man auch sät, es geht sogleich auf in dem weichen, fruchtbaren Boden. Gie Gärten blühen in andauernder Pracht. [541]

Here Cosmo is the source of information and explains how their surroundings are not only beautiful

but also fertile and safe. He seems to be reassuring Ambros. Furthermore, Cosmo lights the lamp

and spreads out the map. He is portrayed as having control over information, perspective on their

location and itinerary – he spreads *his* map out to show their location, and in the dark of night, even

over light and, with it, their ability to see. In this scene, Cosmo enlightens Ambros, rather than

Ambros needing, as earlier, to take care of Cosmo.

After a few blank diary pages serve to separate the dream from reality, we see Cosmo and

Ambros on a real trek into the desert to an oasis much like the one of which Ambros dreamed. And

---

[539] Ambros also notes in a later journal entry that he had the portrait of himself in Arabic dress taken because Cosmo asked him to. Ibid., 208.

[540] cf. Ibid., 200.

[541] Ibid., 211.

after they set up camp and evening falls on that journey, Cosmo fulfills the role set forth for him in

Ambros's dream:

> Am Abend, wie wir drungen am Strand saßen, sagte Cosmo, so wie hier sei einmal das ganze Land Zoar am Südufer gewesen. Dort, wo sich jetzt bloß die Schattenrisse der gestraften Fünfstadt Gomorrha, Ruma, Sedom, Seadeh und Seboah noch abzeichneten, dort seien dereinst beu unversiegbaren Flußläufen sechs Meter hohe Oleanderbüsche gewachsen, Akazienwälder und Oescherbäume wie in Florida. Bewässerte Fruchtgärten und Melonenfelder hätten sich weithin erstreckt, und aus der Schlucht des Wadi Kerek, so habe er bei dem Entdeckungsreisenden Lynch gelesen, rauschte ein Waldstrom hernieder, dessen Tosen einzig mit dem Schrecken des Niagara zu vergleichen war.[542]

In this moment, Cosmo has assimilated the entire history of the land through which they are

traveling and Ambros looks to him for insight. Cosmo has so adapted to the environment that while

he is sleeping, a quail sleeps at his side, "als befinde sie sich an dem eigens ihr gehörigen Platz,"[543] as

if he has become a wholly congruent part of the environment. This image shows the young man so

in harmony with his environment and so at peace that it is difficult to imagine the process by which

he became so displaced and emotionally disturbed as to require institutionalization. The first signs of

Cosmo's illness appeared after their return from those travels.

> Kurz nach der Rückkehr der beiden Weltreisenden aus dem Heiligen Land, so hatte die Tante Fini sich ausgedrückt, brach in Europa der Krieg aus, und je weiter er um sich griff und je mehr das Ausmaß der Verwüstung bei uns bekannt wurde, desto weniger gelang es dem Cosmo, in dem so gut wie unveränderten amerikanischen Leben wieder Fuß zu fassen.[544]

In this passage we see Cosmo grappling with spatial displacement – he finds it difficult to reconcile

his return to America with his experiences abroad – and a kind of temporal displacement – while the

war in Europe proceeds and its damage becomes apparent, it appears as though time has stopped in

---

[542] Ibid., 213.

[543] Ibid., 214.

[544] Ibid., 138.

America. Cosmo's nervous condition is, then, encoded in both space and time, and constitutes an inability to adapt to a spatial relocation and temporal dissonance.

Returning to Foucault, we see that he distinguishes between two types of unthinkable spaces – utopias,[545] which "afford consolation" and heterotopias, which are disturbing. The disturbing destruction of syntax inherent in heterotopias of language destabilizes our mental space or location. Sebald manipulates syntax a way that destabilizes the narrative and disorients the reader. He creates a space in his texts that resembles the space Foucault describes that exists between the extremes of empiricism and madness, a space that is "a domain which, even though its role is mainly an intermediary one, is nonetheless fundamental: it is more confused, more obscure, and probably less easy to analyse."[546] This middle territory, then, is heterotopia: a territory that resists or stymies language, but does not exist wholly separate from it; a territory that challenges our sense of order and yet provides a space for the expression of that which does not fit into an everyday scheme. In one final example from "Ambros Adelwarth" the reader encounters Sebald's synthesis of the 'real' heterotopia with the linguistic or textual one:

> Der letzte Eintrag in dem Agendabüchlein meines Großonkels Adelwarth wurde am Stephanstag gemacht. Cosmo, steht da geschrieben, sei nach der Rückkehr nach Jerusalem von einem schweren Fieber befallen worden, befinde sich aber schon wieder auf dem Wege der Besserung. Außerdem vermerkte der Großonkel, daß es in den späten Nachmittagsstunden des Vortags zu schneien begonnen habe und daß er, indem er durch das Hotelfenster hinausschaute auf die weiß in der sich herniedersenkenden Dämmerung schwebende Stadt, viel an früher habe denken müssen. Die Erinnerung, fügt er in einer Nachschrift hinzu, kommt mir oft vor wie eine Art von Dummheit. Sie macht einen schweren, schwindeligen Kopf, als blickte man nicht zurück durch die Fluchten der Zeit, sondern aus großer Höhe auf die Erde hinab von einem jener Türme, die sich im Himmel verlieren.[547]

---

[545] In his later lecture, Foucault describes utopias thus: "[Utopias] are arrangements which have no real space. Arrangements which have a general relationship of direct or inverse analogy with the real space of society. They represent society itself brought to perfection, or its reverse, and in any case utopias are spaces that are by their very essence fundamentally unreal." (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," 352.)

[546] Foucault, *The Order of Things*. p. xx.

[547] Sebald, *Die Ausgewanderten*, 214.

This passage exhibits evidence of Sebald's manipulation of grammar, vacillations in narrative perspective, and nonlinear – spatialized – time, all of which destabilize the narrative. This passage is the only one in a long series of quotations from Ambros's diary that explicitly points out the change in narrative perspective. The narrator uses the passive voice ("Der Eintrag wurde gemacht."), which on the one hand strips Ambros of his agency – the narrator also uses the phrase "steht da geschrieben," which denies or obscures Ambros's authorship – and seems to imply that the diary was always already existing, like a kind of scripture. In Ambros's statement, "Die Erinnerung […] kommt mir oft vor wie eine Art von Dummheit," contains an implicit critique of linear historicity. If memory is "eine Art von Dummheit" then surely recounting it is also useless. Paradoxically, he makes this complaint in writing, at the end of his own narrative. Finally, time is spatialized in the image of the tower – rather than looking back through time, along a kind of timeline, memory compels one to peer at the whole of the past from above, to perceive it all at once. This synchronic view of the past, however, is also doomed to failure – the tower is surely an allusion to the Tower of Babel, whose completion was thwarted by the failure of language. The story problematizes language throughout – among other examples, think of Ambros's characterization as having an almost unnatural gift for learning languages and the language invented by the dwarf leading Ambros and Cosmo's tour of the church – and this final image continues to do so, uniting a criticism of time with an implicit criticism of language and encoding both of these in a final, powerful spatialized image

According to Foucault, the text is always already a potential heterotopia – it is only in text that juxtapositions and constructions like those in Sebald's narratives are thinkable. Sebald exploits this potential, using narrative devices like the chaotic list to call attention to the heterotopic nature of the text.

Prospects for Further Research

Gernot Böhme argues for the reinstatement of a physicality that goes beyond the mere physical body and restores a kind of physical experience that is "radically porous."[549] This kind of physicality is more readily visible in the distinction between the German terms *Körper* and *Leib*. The difference, as Kate Rigby notes, is that

> [*Körper*] refers to the body as physical object: this is the body you "have"; the body you "use" to type with, for instance; the body that contains the kind of heart that you "take" to the cardiologist when it is ailing. [*Leib*] is something altogether different: it is the body that, ineluctably, you "are"; the body that aches when you have typed too long; the body that incorporates the kind of heart that "skips a beat" when you catch sight of your lover. Unlike your *Körper*, your *Leib* lacks clear physical boundaries, expanding and contracting by turns, flowing out into the circumambient space, mingling with other entities, or recoiling in the face of something frightening or repugnant.[550]

It seems, then, that the experience of *Leiblichkeit* which Böhme advocates unites, in a way, the human subject with the object of her corporeal body. He argues in favor of an understanding of the environment that acknowledges not only physical necessities, but also the emotional-physical response to it. Böhme distinguishes between two other terms: *wahrnehmen* and *empfinden*. The former relates primarily to sensory perception while the latter refers to the union of sensory perception and

---

[548] W. G. Sebald, *Nach Der Natur: Ein Elementargedicht* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1995), 77.

[549] This kind of corporeality is also prominent in theories advanced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Hermann Schmitz. Böhme expands on Schmitz's analysis of corporeality. See Kate Rigby, "Gernot Böhme's Ecological Aesthetics of Atmosphere," in *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, ed. Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 142.

[550] Ibid.

emotional response. "Gegenüber dem traditionellen Begriff von Sinnlichkeit als Konstatieren von Daten ist in die volle Sinnlichkeit das Affektive, die Emotionalität und das Imaginative aufzunehmen. Das primäre Thema von Sinnlichkeit sind nicht die Dinge, die man wahrnimmt, sondern das, was man empfindet: die Atmosphären."[551] These atmospheres are present in "real" or lived space, but also in all forms of art, including literature.[552]

In lived space, humans are most likely to experience one of two types of atmospheres, "ingression," which we perceive when entering a space that has an atmosphere distinctly different from the one in the adjacent or preceding space, or "discrepancy," which is the perception of an atmosphere that contradicts or clashes with our mood. In art, especially in literature, Böhme claims that, although atmosphere can be described or partially evoked, it actually draws attention to its own insufficiency: "While providing training in those extratextual experiences of atmosphere that it cannot fully mediate, literature serves also to remind us of the role of words, and the complex and mobile networks of intertextual connotation they activate, in inflecting those states of feeling engendered by our physical encounters with other people, things, and places."[553]

A distinctive feature of Böhme's theory is his suggestion that the environment pushes back against the person experiencing it. Through the porousness of the human body, the environment not only affects the person who experiences it, but also takes on a kind of agency.[554] This conception

---

[551] Böhme, *Atmosphäre*, 15.

[552] It should be noted that Böhme draws on Benjamin's concept of *Aura* and Hermann Schmitz's idea of *Atmosphäre* in his development of the concept of atmosphere, but only insofar as Benjamin describes *Aura* as a spatial experience: "Und zwar ist die Aura offenbar etwas räumlich Ergossenes, fast so etwas wie ein Hauch ode rein Dunst – eben eine Atmosphäre. Benjamin sagt, daß man die Aura „atmet". Dieses Atmen heißt also, daß man sie leiblich aufnimmt, sie in die leibliche Ökonomie von Spannung und Schwellung eingehen läßt, daß man sich von dieser Atmosphäre durchwehen läßt." Ibid., 27.

[553] See Rigby, "Gernot Böhme's Ecological Aesthetics of Atmosphere," 149–150.

[554] This theory could also be of interest in the context of the urban and domestic spaces which were the subject of chapters three and four, respectively.

distinguishes Böhme's understanding of experienced environment form a more conventional

conception that preserves the distinction between the human subject and the environment as object.

Böhme also recognizes the state of the environment in the present day. He sees the problem

of the ailing environment as the catalyst that brings humans back in touch with our *Leiblichkeit*:

> Was wir das Umweltproblem nennen, ist primär ein Problem der menschlichen Leiblichkeit. Es wird überhaupt nur drängend, weil wir letztlich die Veränderungen, die wir in der äußeren Natur anrichten, am eigenen Leib spüren. Natürlich gibt es auch ein wohlwollendes Interesse für die Natur als solche, aber sie ist ein brennendes Problem bis in die Politik hinein wegen des menschlichen Leidens, wegen Krankheit und Tod oder einfach deswegen geworden, weil man sich nicht wohlfühlt in dieser Welt. Durch das Umweltproblem sind wir in neuer Weise auf unsere Leiblichkeit gestoßen.[555]

Here Böhme illustrates the physical and psychological impact of the environment on humans. He

does not focus on ways in which we could preserve the environment or halt its destruction, but

instead, examines it from a phenomenological perspective, foregrounding the interactive relationship

between human beings and their surroundings. As Kate Rigby points out, Böhme preserves a

positive attitude in the face of the present dire ecological situation:

> If the impact of industrial societies on other-than-human nature is rendering our planetary home increasingly uncongenial to human life, while the encroachment of technology on our own nature as bodily beings challenges our very sense of what it is to be human, then the onus is on us to figure out what kind of a "nature" we actually want to inhabit collectively and to embody individually.[556]

Sebald's approach to this question is less sanguine, however. Concern about the destruction of the

environment in the ecological sense is a thread that runs through all of Sebald's works.

Let us return to the example of the herrings from *Die Ringe des Saturn*. In chapter five of this

dissertation, I discussed the way in which the juxtaposition of the image of the *Heringsernte* with that

of the Holocaust victims estranges the reader, creating a heterotopic moment in the text. Others

---

[555] Böhme, *Atmosphäre*, 14.

[556] Rigby, "Gernot Böhme's Ecological Aesthetics of Atmosphere," 140.

have read this juxtaposition as a criticism of historiography.[557] Summers-Bremner, for example, reads

this same moment in the text as a reversal of the traditional environmental gaze – instead of the

human regarding the environment, the human becomes the object of the environment's gaze.[558]

Gregory-Guider reads the herrings as simply another item in a list of natural disasters, into which are

inscribed a litany of human catastrophes, genocides, and "spatio-temporal disturbances that

propagate forward and backward through time, rupturing the surface of the present."[559] The startling

effect of juxtaposing mass murder with overfishing (like the episode depicting the process of

extracting silk from silk-worm cocoons and other related passages in *Die Ringe des Saturn*) makes a

forceful statement about human responsibility for the demise of the natural environment. Anne

Fuchs recognizes the environmentalist critique inherent in this image, writing:

> Although the passage cited above does not explicitly refer to the Holocaust, it is clear that
> Sebald, like Adorno and Horkheimer before him, makes a connection between European
> rationalism and the emergence of a biopolitics that made Auschwitz possible. This critique
> of modern biopolitics becomes a central issue in Chapter 3 of *Die Ringe des Saturn*, where
> Sebald reflects on the near extinction of the herring as an example of the Cartesian
> devaluation of non-human forms of life. Sebald's daring juxtaposition of the story of the
> herring and the corpses of Buchenwald underlines the common denominator of both stories
> of destruction: a cold and objectified biopolitics which disregards the value of life by means
> of a reductive interpretation of nature.[560]

Fuchs reads Sebald's juxtaposition of the herring fishery and Buchenwald as a result of similar

biopolitics. By juxtaposing human genocide with the near-extinction of a species, she suggests,

Sebald criticizes the reductive objectification that allows humans to rationalize both kinds of

---

[557] See Blumenthal-Barby, "Holocaust and Herring."

[558] See Eluned Summers-Bremner, "Reading, Walking, Mourning: W. G. Sebald's Peripatetic Fictions," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 34, no. 3 (October 1, 2004): 310.

[559] Christopher C. Gregory-Guider, "The 'Sixth Emigrant': Traveling Places in the Works of W. G. Sebald," *Contemporary Literature* 46, no. 3 (October 1, 2005): 435.

[560] Anne Fuchs, "W. G. Sebald's Painters: The Function of Fine Art in His Prose Works," *The Modern Language Review* 101, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 173.

industrialized destruction of nature.[561] This objectification seems to allow humans a kind of free rein in exploiting or selectively destroying nature, a notion which comes under fire in Murphy's reading of Bakhtin's idea of "Answerability." In *Art and Answerability*, Bakhtin writes, "I have to answer with my own life for what I have experienced and understood in art. … It is not only mutual answerability that art and life must assume, but also mutual liability to blame."[562] Read in the context of the environmental crisis, this bidirectional accountability and liability implies a breaking-down of the subject-object dichotomy and suggests that humans live in a kind of unity with the environment that is reminiscent of Böhme's porous *Leiblichkeit*. Bakhtin introduces the notion of "transgredience," the idea that an author "must take up a position outside himself, must experience himself on a plane that is different from the one on which we actually experience our own life. … He must become another in relation to himself."[563] This radical objectification of the self has the effect of mitigating the author's tendency toward ventriloquism or the well-intentioned objectification necessary when one tries to "'speak for nature' or to let nature speak through oneself as an author."[564] One could read Sebald's unnamed first-person narrator in *Die Ringe des Saturn* as just such an attempt at creating an alter ego in order to avoid putting words in nature's mouth.

Although it precedes his other creative writing, Sebald's book-length poem *Nach der Natur* may be the clearest expression of Sebald's apocalyptic environmental thinking (although it precedes

---

[561] Cohoon's reading of Luce Irigaray draws a parallel between Irigaray's understanding of sexual difference and this kind of objectification of nature. He acknowledges that Irigaray's focus was never the environment, but claims that she makes the connection between the oppression of women and the "degradation of the earth" and that her "proposal for creating a 'positive becoming' of femininity is predicated upon her reinterpretation of both nature and its relation to culture." Christopher Cohoon, "The Ecological Irigaray?" in *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, ed. Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 206–207.

[562] Quoted in Patrick D. Murphy, "Dialoguing with Bakhtin over Our Ethical Responsibility to Anothers," in *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, ed. Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 155.

[563] Bakhtin, quoted in ibid., 156.

[564] Ibid.

the other texts discussed in this dissertation) and indictment of human disregard for the value of

nature. In this poem, the reader can recognize Sebald's refusal to adhere to traditional genre

distinctions. *Nach der Natur* is subtitled "Ein Elementargedicht," which may call to mind a poem that

deals with the four elements of nature – earth, air, fire, and water – but when examining the

contents of the book, the reader notes only three sections and no clear correspondence to three of

the elements.[565] This work is also composed of images and allusions that closely resemble the

networks of meaning and allusion that characterize much of Sebald's other work, particularly *Die

Ringe des Saturn*. In the final section of the poem, however, Sebald's dense allusiveness and

sometimes obscure meanings gain some clarity and seem to comprise an indictment of industry and

a call to action on behalf of the environment. In section IV of "Die dunckle Nacht fahrt aus,"

Sebald returns to Manchester, describing in great detail the destruction wrought upon the city by

industry. The text depicts Manchester as a bleak post-industrial ruin:

> […] Ein halbes
> Leben ist es nun her, daß ich,
> nach meinem Aufbruch aus der Provinz,
> dort ankam und Wohnung bezog
> zwischen den Ruinen aus dem letzten
> Jahrhundert. Viel bin ich damals
> Über die brachen elysäischen
> Felder gegangen und habe das Werk
> der Zerstörung bestaunt, die schwarzen
> Mühlen und Schiffahrtskanäle,
> die aufgelassenen Viadukte
> und Lagerhäuser, die Abermillionen
> von Ziegeln, die Spuren des Rauchs,
> des Teers und der Schwefelsäure,
> bin lange gestanden an den Ufern
> des Irk und des Irwell, jener
> jetzt toten mythischen Flüsse,
> die schillernd zu besseren Zeiten
> geleuchtet haben azurblau,
> karminrot und giftig grün,

---

[565] The second section "Und blieb ich am äussersten Meer" can clearly be read as dealing with water, but the other two
sections ("Wie der Schnee auf den Alpen" and "Die dunckle Nacht fahrt aus") remain ambiguous.

spiegelnd in ihrem Glanz
die Baumwollwolken, die weißen,
in die aufgegangen war ohne ein Wort
der Atem ganzer Legionen von Menschen.
Und das Wasser führte sie abwärts
mit dem Salz und der Asche
durch das Marschland hinaus
auf die See. Es bahnen die stillen
Mutationen den Weg in die Zukunft.[566]

This passage illustrates the force with which Sebald insists on industry's role in the death of nature –
not a controversial position in 1995, when the poem was written – but one that also shows an
unexpected subtlety in characterizing the city of Manchester. The city, hailed by British Prime
Minister Disraeli as "die wundervollste Stadt der Neuzeit […] / ein himmlisches Jerusalem, / dessen
Bedeutung allein die Philosophie / zu ermessen vermöge. […]"[567] is now dead, devoid of the
bustling crowds that previously manned the numerous factories in the city.[568] The unnatural colors
that used to be present in the now-dead rivers of Manchester "azurblau, karminrot und giftig grün"
are an image of Manchester's memory of better times. This characterization of the colorful water
seems at first to be genuinely nostalgic, but becomes sinister in the lines that follow. The salt and
ashes that the water carried toward the sea are clearly signs of the staggering pollution caused when
the factories dumped their by-products into the water. Beautiful as it may have appeared, the
colorful water was also a sign of pollution. A metatextual feature of the book enhances this
ambiguity of tone with *azurblau* – azure blue seems to be a reference to Mallarmé and other
Symbolist poets as well as perhaps to the blue flower of Romanticism – appearing as the last word
on the page, preceding *karminrot* und *giftig grün*. Before turning the page, the reader has the
impression that the rivers were, in fact, beautiful in the time before the factories closed down. The

[566] Sebald, *Nach Der Natur*, 83–84.

[567] Ibid., 83.

[568] Think here of the description of Manchester from the *Die Ausgewanderten*. This passage is discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

211

evidence of pollution in the description that follows, however, reminds the reader that the death of the river was not due to the closure of the factories, but rather was caused by the factories.

Images like this one occur frequently throughout this section of the poem. Section VII features "phosphoreszierende" cities,[569] "glosende Werke der Industrie," "rauchfahnen," and so forth, as well as the "das Murmeln / der millionenfach sich vermehrenden Muscheln, /Asseln und Egel."[570] The last of this list is a paradoxical image of the effects of pollution – while one typically thinks of death and diminution of numbers as the natural effects of pollution, species like these mollusks, isopods, and leeches thrive in polluted water due to the smaller number of predators and changes in the ph level of the water. Section II also contains the phrase "eine lautlose Katastrophe,"[571] which possibly refers to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, which she described as a "'Fable for Tomorrow' of a 'town in the heart of America' that awakes to a birdless, budless spring."[572] Lawrence Buell calls this book the first work in the tradition of what he calls 'Toxic Discourse,' which the result of "Disenchantment from the illusion of the green oasis" and "is accompanied or precipitated by totalizing images of a world without refuge from toxic penetration."[573] Toxic discourse struggles against the "ecological holism" that has been the focus of earlier ecocriticism. The study of toxic discourse

> holds that belief in the availability of such a holism by such means is chimerical and divisive. Yet it recognizes both the rhetorical appeal and the benefit to human and planetary welfare of the ideal of a purified physical environment as an end in itself, thereby recognizing physical environment's nonreducibility to ideological artifact or socioeconomic counter. Its

---

[569] These phosphorescent cities are also reminiscent of the "phosphorescent" fish described in *Die Ringe des Saturn*.

[570] Sebald, *Nach Der Natur*, 96–97.

[571] Ibid., 77.

[572] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 35.

[573] Ibid., 38.

impetus is both to reinforce the deromanticization and to urge the expansion of "nature" as an operative category.[574]

I would argue that Sebald's *Nach der Natur* is a key work of toxic discourse, deromanticizing the natural landscape, stripping the post-industrial city of nostalgia, and offering a new model for looking at polluted nature. As such it presents Sebald's view of what the world will resemble literally "after nature." Viewed retrospectively, we can see that the poem may provide a lexicon for reading other images of industry and nature in Sebald's subsequent works. The themes of destruction and decay have appeared throughout and the undercurrent of environmental catastrophe can be felt in all of Sebald's texts. There is much more to say on this topic and this is one theme that Sebald scholarship will inevitably have to address. Buell's argument that ecocriticism must take into account the "full range of historic landscapes, landscape genres, and environmental(ist) discourses"[575] is certainly true of Sebald scholarship as well. In Sebald, we must remember that, although the environment – both natural and man-made or cultivated – can be read as landscape, a concept that emphasizes the subject-object dichotomy, we must also be prepared to do away with that division and attempt to take a position outside of our own subjectivity.

Athough Sebald's environmentalist opinions have not been central to my study of the built environment in Sebald, they do have important resonances with my suggested reading of *Nach der Natur* as a kind of "toxic discourse." The ways in which the environment "pushes back" against the human subject, to speak with Böhme, is reminiscent of kinds of agency I have shown in the built environment. In *Die Ringe des Saturn*, the labyrinth and the heath exert a strong impact on the narrator, confounding him but, eventually, providing perspective on and a model for understanding his own state of mind. In *Austerlitz*, the train station and streets of Terezín are highly "atmospheric"

---

[574] Ibid., 45.

[575] Ibid., 8.

in Böhme's sense of the term and have a palpable effect on Austerlitz, enabling him to access previously hidden memories. Domestic spaces, on the other hand, clearly push back against the characters who inhabit them, helping or hindering the process of identity creation. This is especially clear in the example of the house in Bala that Austerlitz lived in as a child. Austerlitz recognizes the power of the domestic environment to impact his emotional state and, in turn, he pushes back against it in his Alderney Street house in order to clear space for his memory work. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I discussed the alienating or disturbing effect exerted by heterotopian spaces on the characters experiencing them. Perhaps more importantly, though, I demonstrated the way in which Sebald recognized the heterotopian potential of his own text, creating a textual "environment" that pushes back against the reader, reinforcing the meaning of its content, but also drawing attention to the textual structures it deploys to create meaning. These built environments work in concert to accomplish two goals. First, they serve as the medium in which history and memory are encoded and experienced. Second, and perhaps more importantly, this encoding of history and memory in the built environment constitutes a spatialized critique of traditional linear narrative. By creating postmodern textual environments, whether urban, domestic, faux-pastoral, or heterotopian, that unite disparate times and spaces, Sebald's texts underscore the limitations of traditional linear narrative and demonstrates the need for innovative narrative in untangling and portraying complex, sometimes contradictory layers of history.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adler, H. G. *Panorama. Roman in Zehn Bildern.* Olten: Walter, 1968.

Alexander, Catherine. "The Garden as Occasional Domestic Space." *Signs* 27, no. 3 (March 1, 2002): 857–871.

Amery, Carl. "The Great Blind Spot." In *The Culture of German Environmentalism: Anxieties, Visions, Realities*, edited by Axel Goodbody, 125–128. New York: Berghahn Books, 2002.

Appleton, Jay. *The Experience of Landscape.* Rev. Chichester: Wiley, 1996.

Arnold, Catharine. *Necropolis: London and Its Dead.* London; New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006.

Augé, Marc. *Non-lieux: Introduction à Une Anthropologie De La Surmodernité.* Librairie Du XXe Siècle. Paris: Seuil, 1992.

———. *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity.* London; New York: Verso, 2008.

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.

Barnes, Trevor J. "Placing Ideas: Genius Loci, Heterotopia and Geography's Quantitative Revolution." *Progress in Human Geography* 28, no. 5 (October 2004): 565–595.

Bateson, Gregory. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind.* San Francisco: Chandler Pub. Co., 1972.

Benn, Gottfried. "Gehirne." In *Sämtliche Werke Bd. 3. Prosa. - 1*, 29–34. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987.

Blackbourn, David. *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany.* 1st American. New York, N.Y.: Norton, 2006.

Blumenthal-Barby, Martin. "Holocaust and Herring: The Resuscitation of the Silenced in W.G. Sebald's The Rings of Saturn." *Monatshefte* 103, no. 4 (2011): 537–558.

Böhme, Gernot. *Atmosphäre: Essays Zur Neuen Ästhetik.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995.

———. *Für Eine Ökologische Naturästhetik.* 1. Aufl. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989.

Borges, Jorge Luis. *El Libro De Los Seres Imaginarios.* Buenos Aires: Editorial Kier, 1967.

———. *The Book of Imaginary Beings.* Translated by Norman Thomas di Giovanni. [1st] ed. New York: Dutton, 1969.

Broadbent, Philip. "Generational Shifts: Representing Post-Wende Berlin." *New German Critique*, no. 104 (July 1, 2008): 139–169.

Brunner, Maria E. "Gesteigerte Formen Der Wahrnehmung in Schwindel Gefühle. (German)." *Amsterdamer Beiträge Zur Neueren Germanistik* 72, no. 1 (December 2009): 475–492.

Bruzelius, Margaret. "Adventure, Imprisonment, and Melancholy: Heart of Darkness and Die Ringe Des Saturn." In *The Undiscover'd Country: W.G. Sebald and the Poetics of Travel*, edited by Markus Zisselsberger, 247–273. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2010.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

———. *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2001.

Bunting, Madeleine. *The Model Occupation: The Channel Islands Under German Rule, 1940-1945*. Hammersmith, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995.

Caws, Mary Ann, and Jane Augustine, eds. "From Topos to Anthropoid: The City as Character in Twentieth-Century Texts." In *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film*, 73–86. New York: Gordon and Breach, 1991.

Caws, Mary Ann. *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film*. New York: Gordon and Breach, 1991.

Cheselden, William. "An Account of Some Observations Made by a Young Gentleman, Who Was Born Blind, or Lost His Sight so Early, That He Had No Remembrance of Ever Having Seen, and Was Couch'd Between 13 and 14 Years of Age." *Philosophical Transactions: Giving Some Accompt of the Present Undertakings, Studies and Labours of the Ingenious in Many Considerable Parts of the World* 34.

Cixous, Hélène. "Attacks of the Castle." In *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, edited by Neal Leach, 303–309. London; New York: Routledge, 1997.

Clarke, John M. *The Brookwood Necropolis Railway*. Oxford: Oakwood, 1995.

Clifford, Derek Plint. *A History of Garden Design*. Rev. New York: Praeger, 1966.

Cohoon, Christopher. "The Ecological Irigaray?" In *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, edited by Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby, 206–214. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011.

Craft, Christopher. "Come See About Me: Enchantment of the Double in The Picture of Dorian Gray." *Representations* 91, no. 1 (2005): 109–136.

Cruickshank, Charles Greig. *The German Occupation of the Channel Islands*. London; New York: Published for the Trustees of the Imperial War Museum by Oxford University Press, 1975.

Dudley, Joseph M. "Being and Non-Being: The Other and Heterotopia in Hamletmachine." *Modern Drama* 35, no. 4 (December 1992): 562–570.

Eckart, Gabriele. "Against 'Cartesian Rigidity': W.G. Sebald's Reception of Borges", December 2009.

Eshel, Amir. "Against the Power of Time: The Poetics of Suspension in W. G. Sebald's 'Austerlitz'." *New German Critique*, no. 88 (January 1, 2003): 71–96.

Everett, Wendy E., and Axel Goodbody, eds. *Revisiting Space: Space and Place in European Cinema*. New Studies in European Cinema, 1661-0261 2. Oxford: P. Lang, 2005.

Faris, Wendy B. "The Labyrinth as Sign." In *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film*, edited by Mary Ann Caws, 33–41. New York: Gordon and Breach, 1991.

Fischer, Gerhard. "Schreiben Ex Patria: W.G. Sebald Und Die Konstruktion Einer Literarischen Identität." In *W. G. Sebald: Schreiben Ex Patria, Expatriate Writing*, 27–44. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009.

Fisher, Jaimey, and Barbara Caroline Mennel, eds. *Spatial Turns: Space, Place, and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture*. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2010.

Foucault, Michel. "Des Espaces Autres." In *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, 5:46–49. Paris: Groupe Moniteur, 1984.

———. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

———. *Les Mots Et Les Choses; Une Archéologie Des Sciences Humaines*. Bibliothèque Des Sciences Humaines. Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

———. *Naissance De La Clinique; Une Archéologie Du Regard Médical*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1963.

———. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias." In *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, edited by Neal Leach, 350–356. London; New York: Routledge, 1997.

———. *Surveiller Et Punir: Naissance De La Prison*. Bibliothèque Des Histoires. Paris: Gallimard, 1975.

———. *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

———. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

Fuchs, Anne. "W. G. Sebald's Painters: The Function of Fine Art in His Prose Works." *The Modern Language Review* 101, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 167–183.

Fuller, David, and William Blake. *William Blake: Selected Poetry and Prose*. Longman Annotated Texts. Harlow, England: Longman, 2000.

Gander, Ann. *Top Hats and Servants' Tales: A Century of Life on Somerleyton Estate*. Wenhaston: Holm Oak, 1998.

Garloff, Katja. "Kafka's Crypt: W. G. Sebald and the Melancholy of Modern German Jewish Culture." *Germanic Review* 82, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 123–140.

Gersdorf, Catrin, and Sylvia Mayer, eds. *Natur, Kultur, Text: Beiträge Zu Ökologie Und Literaturwissenschaft*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2005.

Gerstenberger, Katharina. "Historical Space: Daniel Kehlmann's Die Vermessung Der Welt [Measuring the World, 2005]." In *Spatial Turns Space, Place, and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture*, edited by Jaimey Fisher and Barbara Caroline Mennel, 103–120. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2010.

Goodbody, Axel. *Literatur Und Ökologie*. Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1998.

Goodbody, Axel, and Kate Rigby, eds. *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011.

Goodbody, Axel, and Berbeli Wanning, eds. *Wasser, Kultur, Ökologie: Beiträge Zum Wandel Im Umgang Mit Dem Wasser Und Zu Seiner Literarischen Imagination*. Göttingen: V & R unipress, 2008.

Goodbody, Axel, ed. *The Culture of German Environmentalism: Anxieties, Visions, Realities*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2002.

Grass, Günter. *Die Blechtrommel*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997.

Gray, Richard T. "From Grids to Vanishing Points: W. G. Sebald's Critique of Visual-Representational Orders in Die Ringe Des Saturn.", October 2009.

———. "Writing at the Roche Limit: Order and Entropy in W. G. Sebald's Die Ringe Des Saturn." *German Quarterly* 83, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 38–57.

Gregory-Guider, Christopher C. "The 'Sixth Emigrant': Traveling Places in the Works of W. G. Sebald." *Contemporary Literature* 46, no. 3 (October 1, 2005): 422–449.

Gsoels-Lorensen, Jutta. "'Un Drame Interdit D'accès': Remembrance and the Prohibited Past in Barbara Honigmann's Generational Texts." *The German Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (July 1, 2007): 369–390.

Hall, S. C., and Llewellynn Frederick William Jewitt. *The Stately Homes of England*. New York: A.W. Lovering.

Haque, Kamaal. "From the Desert to the City and Back: Nomads and the Spaces of Goethe's West-östlicher Divan [West-Eastern Divan, 1819/1827]." In *Spatial Turns Space, Place, and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture*, edited by Jaimey Fisher and Barbara Caroline Mennel, 275–300. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2010.

Harbison, Robert. *Eccentric Spaces*. Boston: D.R. Godine, 1988.

Hetherington, Kevin. "Foucault, the Museum and the Diagram." *Sociological Review* 59, no. 3 (2011): 457–475.

von Hofmannsthal, Hugo. "Ein Brief." In *Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben: Prosa II*, 7–22. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1951.

Horstkotte, Silke. "Photo-Text Topographies: Photography and the Representation of Space in W. G. Sebald and Monika Maron." *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (April 1, 2008): 49–78.

Hunt, Irmgard Elsner. "Chaos in Der Endphase. Ökoliteratur Von Volker Braun Und Günter Grass." In *Literatur Und Ökologie*, edited by Axel Goodbody, 243–256. Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1998.

Hutchinson, Ben. "The Shadow of Resistance: W. G. Sebald and the Frankfurt School", December 2011.

———. *W.G. Sebald -- Die Dialektische Imagination*. Quellen Und Forschungen Zur Literatur- Und Kulturgeschichte ; 59. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009.

Huyssen, Andreas. "Modernist Miniatures: Literary Snapshots of Urban Spaces." *PMLA* 122 (January 2007): 27–42.

———. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Cultural Memory in the Present. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Hyams, Edward. *Capability Brown and Humphry Repton*. London: Dent, 1971.

Isernhagen, Hartwig. "Die Bewußtseinskrise Der Moderne Und Die Erfahrung Der Stadt Als Labyrinth." In *Die Stadt in Der Literatur*, edited by Cord Meckseper and Elisabeth Schraut, 81–104. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983.

Jackson, Alan Arthur. *London's Termini*. Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1969.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.

Jarosinski, Eric. "Urban Mediations: The Theoretical Space of Siegfried Kracauer's Ginster." In *Spatial Turns Space, Place, and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture*, edited by Jaimey Fisher and Barbara Caroline Mennel, 171–188. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2010.

Johannsen, Anja K. "'The Contrarieties That Are in Our Yearnings': Allegorical, Nostalgic and Transcendent Spaces in the Work of W. G. Sebald." *Journal of European Studies* 41, no. 3/4 (December 2011): 377–393.

Johannsen, Anja. *Kisten, Krypten, Labyrinthe: Raumfigurationen in Der Gegenwartsliteratur: W.G. Sebald, Anne Duden, Herta Müller*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008.

Kafka, Franz. *Gesammelte Werke: Erzählungen*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1983.

King, Peter. *The Channel Islands War, 1940-1945*. London: R. Hale, 1991.

Klebes, Martin. "Infinite Journey: From Kafka to Sebald." In *W.G. Sebald: A Critical Companion*, edited by J.J. Long and Anne Whitehead, 123–139. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

———. "No Exile: Crossing the Border with Sebald and Améry." In *W. G. Sebald: Schreiben Ex Patria, Expatriate Writing*, edited by Gerhard Fischer, 73–90. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009.

Kochhar-Lindgren, Gray. "Charcoal: The Phantom Traces of W.G. Sebald's Novel-Memoirs." *Monatshefte* 94, no. 3 (October 1, 2002): 368–380.

Kracauer, Siegfried. *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. Edited by Leonardo Quaresima. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Lethen, Helmut. "Sebalds Raster. Überlegungen Zur Ontologischen Unruhe in Sebalds Die Ringe Des Saturn." In *W.G. Sebald: Politische Archäologie Und Melancholische Bastelei*, edited by Michael Niehaus and Claudia Öhlschläger, 13–30. Berlin: E. Schmidt, 2006.

Lynch, Kevin. *The Image of the City*. Cambridge [Mass.]: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1960.

Malkmus, Bernhard. "Ökologie Als Blinder Fleck Der Kultur- Und Literaturtheorie." In *Natur, Kultur, Text: Beiträge Zu Ökologie Und Literaturwissenschaft*, edited by Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer, 53–78. Heidelberg: Winter, 2005.

Matthews, W. H. *Mazes and Labyrinths: A General Account of Their History and Developments*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1922.

Meeks, Carroll Louis Vanderslice. *The Railroad Station: An Architectural History*. Yale Historical Publications. History of Art, 11. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956.

Meerzon, Yana. "The Ideal City: Heterotopia or Panopticon? On Joseph Brodsky's Play 'Marbles' and Its Fictional Spaces." *Modern Drama* 50, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 184–209.

Morgan, Peter. "The Sign of Saturn: Melancholy, Homelessness and Apocalypse in W.G. Sebald's Prose Narratives." *German Life & Letters* 58, no. 1 (January 2005): 75–92.

Murphy, Patrick D. "Dialoguing with Bakhtin over Our Ethical Responsibility to Anothers." In *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, edited by Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby, 155–167. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011.

Nabokov, Vladimir. *The Annotated Lolita*. Edited by Alfred Appel. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

Niehaus, Michael, and Claudia Öhlschläger, eds. *W.G. Sebald: Politische Archäologie Und Melancholische Bastelei*. Berlin: E. Schmidt, 2006.

Pennick, Nigel. *Mazes and Labyrinths*. London: R. Hale, 1990.

Pope, Alexander. *Ethic Epistles, Satires, &c. With the Author's Notes. Written by Mr. Pope.* London: printed for the Company, 1735.

Preston, Peter, and Paul Simpson-Housley. "Introduction: Writing the City." In *Writing the City: Eden, Babylon, and the New Jerusalem*, 1–14. London; New York: Routledge, 1994.

Pugliese, Joseph. "Crisis Heterotopias and Border Zones of the Dead." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 23, no. 5 (October 2009): 663–679.

Repton, Humphry. "H. Repton Having for Many Years (merely as an Amusement) Studied the Picturesque Effect Resulting from the Art of Laying Out Ground, Has Lately Been Advised by Many Respectable Friends ... to Enlarge His Plan, and Pursue Professionally His Skill in Landscape-gardening. ..." London?, 1789. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. http://find.galegroup.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&contentSet=ECCOArticles&type=multipage&tabID=T001&prodId=ECCO&docId=CW111730157&source=gale&userGroupName=camb55135&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE.

———. "Sketches and Hints on Landscape Gardening. Collected from Designs and Observations Now in the Possession of the Different Noblemen and Gentlemen, for Whose Use They Were Originally Made. The Whole Tending to Establish Fixed Principles in the Art of Laying Out Ground. By H. Repton, Esq." London, 1794. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. http://find.galegroup.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&contentSet=ECCOArticles&type=multipage&tabID=T001&prodId=ECCO&docId=CW108478891&source=gale&userGroupName=camb55135&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE.

Ridgway, Christopher. *William Andrews Nesfield: Victorian Landscape Architect*. York: Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies, 1996.

Rigby, Kate. "Gernot Böhme's Ecological Aesthetics of Atmosphere." In *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, edited by Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby, 139–152. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011.

Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Die Aufzeichnungen Des Malte Laurids Brigge: Kommentierte Ausgabe*. Universal-Bibliothek. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1997.

Riordan, Colin, ed. *Green Thought in German Culture: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997.

Robertson, Ritchie. "W. G. Sebald as a Critic of Austrian Literature." *Journal of European Studies* 41, no. 3/4 (December 2011): 305–322.

Ryan, Judith. "'Lines of Flight': History and Territory in The Rings of Saturn", December 2009.

———. *The Novel After Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

Saindon, Brent Allen. "A Doubled Heterotopia: Shifting Spatial and Visual Symbolism in the Jewish Museum Berlin's Development." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98, no. 1 (February 2012): 24–48.

Scarry, Elaine. "On Vivacity: The Difference Between Daydreaming and Imagining-Under-Authorial-Instruction." *Representations*, no. 52 (October 1, 1995): 1–26.

Schade, Silke. "Rewriting Home and Migration: Spatiality in the Narratives of Emine Sevgi Özdamar." In *Spatial Turns Space, Place, and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture*, edited by Jaimey Fisher and Barbara Caroline Mennel, 275–300. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2010.

Sebald, W. G. *Austerlitz*. München: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003.

———. *Die Ausgewanderten: Vier Lange Erzählungen*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994.

———. *Die Ringe Des Saturn: Eine Englische Wallfahrt*. 8. Aufl. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl., 2004.

———. *Nach Der Natur: Ein Elementargedicht*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1995.

———. *The Rings of Saturn*. Translated by Michael Hulse. New York: New Directions, 1999.

Sheppard, Richard. "W. G. Sebald's Reception of Alfred Döblin." In *Alfred Döblin: Paradigms of Modernism*, edited by Steffan Davies and Ernest Schonfield, 350–376. Publications (University of London. Institute of Germanic Studies) 95. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009.

Shulevitz, Judith. "Book Review - Panorama - By H. G. Adler.Translated by Peter Filkins." *The New York Times*, January 28, 2011, sec. Books / Sunday Book Review. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/30/books/review/Shulevitz-t.html.

Simons, Oliver. *Raumgeschichten: Topographien Der Moderne in Philosophie, Wissenschaft Und Literatur*. München: Fink, 2007.

Sopher, David E. "The Landscape of Home: Myth, Experience, Social Meaning." In *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, edited by Donald W Meinig, 129–149. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979.

Spitzer, Leo. "La Enumeración Caótica En La Poesía Moderna." In *Lingüística e Historia Literaria*, 247–300. 2nd ed. Madrid: Gredos, 1961.

Stroud, Dorothy. *Capability Brown*. London: Faber and Faber, 1984.

Summers-Bremner, Eluned. "Reading, Walking, Mourning: W. G. Sebald's Peripatetic Fictions." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 34, no. 3 (October 1, 2004): 304–334.

Tate, Dennis. "The Sectre of the Apocalypse in the Work of Franz Fühmann." In *Literatur Und Ökologie*, edited by Axel Goodbody, 257–270. Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1998.

Theisen, Bianca. "A Natural History of Destruction: W.G. Sebald's 'The Rings of Saturn'." *MLN* 121, no. 3 (April 1, 2006): 563–581.

Thomas, Christopher. *London's Archaeological Secrets: A World City Revealed*. New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the Museum of London Archaeology Service, 2003.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977.

Turner, Roger. *Capability Brown and the Eighteenth Century English Landscape*. New York: Rizzoli, 1985.

Urbach, Henry. "Writing Architectural Heterotopia." *Journal of Architecture* 3, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 347–354.

Vaughan, Adrian. *Samuel Morton Peto: A Victorian Entrepreneur*. Hersham: Ian Allan, 2009.

Wenner, Barbara Britton. *Prospect and Refuge in the Landscape of Jane Austen*. Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006.

Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1973.

Wintermeyer, Ingo. "... Kaum Eine Scherzensspur Hinterlassen ... '? Luftkrieg, Literatur Und Der 'Cordon Sanitaire." In *Verschiebebahnhöfe Der Erinnerung : Zum Werk W.G. Sebalds*, edited by Sigurd Martin and Ingo Wintermeyer, 137–162. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007.

Wylie, John. "A Single Day's Walking: Narrating Self and Landscape on the South West Coast Path." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30, no. 2. New Series (June 1, 2005): 234–247.

Zilcosky, John. "Lost and Found: Disorientation, Nostalgia, and Holocaust Melodrama in Sebald's 'Austerlitz'." *MLN* 121, no. 3 (April 1, 2006): 679–698.