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Robert George Kohn

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The Language of Uncertainty in W.G. Sebald's Novels

Committee:

Pascale Bos, Supervisor

Sabine Hake

John Hoberman

Philip Broadbent

David Crew

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by

Robert George Kohn, B.A., M.A.

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Dedication

This dissertation would not have been possible without the amazing and generous support, both emotional and intellectual, as well as incredible patience of my lovely and kind wife, Nadine Cooper-Kohn. I would like to, therefore, dedicate this study to her as a small token of my gratitude for being at my side through it all.

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The Language of Uncertainty in W.G. Sebald's Novels

Robert George Kohn, Ph.D.

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Supervisor: Pascale R. Bos

This dissertation investigates two of W.G. Sebald's novels, *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz* as examples of a unique kind of Holocaust fiction by a non-Jewish German author. Sebald's fiction represents a radically different German depiction of the Holocaust and its effects on Jewish victims, as it deconstructs critical discourse and debates about the Holocaust in Germany, establishing an ethical approach to Jewish suffering and the idea of coming to terms with the Nazi past in the German context. Through the narrative structure, ambiguity and the language of the German narrators, what I term its *language of uncertainty*, Sebald's fiction avoids appropriating the Jewish voice as well as identifying with Jewish Holocaust victims and survivors, while giving voice to the underrepresented Jewish perspective in contemporary German literature. In addition, this dissertation examines competing discourses on representation, victimization and memory in regard to the Nazi past and views Sebald's work as a critical response to these discussions. Indeed, Sebald's fiction moves the discussion beyond the trope of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ("mastery of the past"), which has for so long dominated discussion of the Holocaust in Germany, towards a reconsideration of the victims, whose voice has been marginalized in the focus on the non-Jewish German handling of the Nazi past.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Über die Wintermonate 1990/91 arbeitete ich...an der im Vorhergehenden erzählten Geschichte Max Aurachs. Es war ein äußerst mühevolleres, oft stunden- und tagelang nicht vom Fleck kommendes und nicht selten sogar rückläufiges Unternehmen, bei dem ich fortwährend geplagt wurde von einem immer nachhaltiger sich bemerkbar machenden und mehr und mehr mich lähmenden Skrupulantismus. Dieser Skrupulantismus bezog sich sowohl auf den Gegenstand meiner Erzählung, dem ich, wie ich es auch anstellte, nicht gerecht zu werden glaubte, als auch auf die Fragwürdigkeit der Schriftstellerei überhaupt. Hunderte von Seiten hatte ich bedeckt mit meinem Bleistift- und Kugelschreiberkritzeln. Weitaus das meiste davon war durchgestrichen, verworfen oder bis zur Unleserlichkeit mit Zusätzen überschmiert. Selbst das, was ich schließlich für die >>endgültige<< Fassung retten konnte, erschien mir als ein mißratenes Stückwerk.¹

The above passage appears near the end of W.G. Sebald's second and critically acclaimed novel, *Die Ausgewanderten*. The quote, as expressed by the narrator, is representative of the careful, self-reflexive, at times uncertain and self-doubting approach to the subject of the Holocaust² by the non-Jewish German narrators of the "1968er" generation in Sebald's novels. The arduous nature of the writing, which "torment[s]"³ the narrator, is due to the degree of care taken ("Skrupulantismus") to avoid mishandling or misconstruing Aurach's story, the story of a Jewish Holocaust survivor. These concerns are not just expressed within the narratives by the narrator, but come to the fore

¹Sebald, *Ausgewanderten* 344-5, my emphasis (originally published by Eichborn in Frankfurt, 1992). For citation purposes, the German version of *Die Ausgewanderten* will be abbreviated parenthetically as (*DA*).

²The use of the word 'Holocaust', which stems from the non-Jewish (i.e., Gentile) discourse, is a problematic term for its implied meaning of a religious sacrifice or "burnt offering," as it is typically translated or understood. The underlying connotation is that the victims of the atrocities were somehow either a) willing participants, or b) a necessary "sacrifice" from the perspective of outsiders, including the – supposedly Christian – perpetrators. Throughout this study, care is taken to avoid any reference to the atrocities perpetrated especially against the Jews as in any way at fault for what befell them. Distinguishing between various identities and respecting their unique perspectives while simultaneously challenging passive acceptance of such categories is integral to and informs my analysis.

³Sebald, *Emigrants* 230.

as well in the language used in the texts. Sebald's fiction is filled with syntactical and semantic markers indicating a certain amount of ambivalence and uncertainty (e.g., "erschien mir") – a hesitation or reticence, if you will, to speak concretely from a subjective position, whether this is as the unnamed German narrator in the passage above or as one of several Jewish protagonists in this and his other texts. This "uncertainty" stands in direct contrast to the writings of Holocaust survivors, in which testimony to the *facts* of the atrocities drives their bearing witness,⁴ an act of assertiveness and defiance in the face of near total eradication. The passage thus underscores the narrator's difficulty in writing about Jewish Holocaust survivors, especially from the point of view of a non-Jewish *German*, both in terms of theme and language. It is this reticence in the representation of testimony and witness – on the part of Aurach and the narrator –, I contend, that defines and gives shape to this novel, but which also occurs in Sebald's other novels.

An important and troubling question derives from this difficulty: can a non-Jewish German write Holocaust fiction which incorporates a Jewish voice that is not authoritative and defiant, one that is not based on the *facts* of Jewish persecution? If so, what are the narrative and ethical implications of taking up this perspective? At stake in Sebald's literature and, by extension, German Holocaust discourse is whether non-Jewish Germans should write about the atrocities and how they might do so without usurping or undermining the Jewish voice in an egregiously transgressive manner. An additional consideration is the framing of these kinds of questions – much of the criticism of Sebald's literature is formulated through the lens of American Holocaust discourse, which often does not consider the very specificity of German discourse on the Nazi past.

⁴ Young, in discussing the "[l]iterary [o]rigins of [t]estimony," traces the imperative to bear witness to the Holocaust and its writing down as based on the Talmud and Torah (*Writing* 18-22).

That is to say, a critical American reading of his texts often presents a wholly different perspective from that of say a German scholar embedded in the German context, especially when the Germanness of Sebald's narrators and his audience is bracketed. Interestingly, Sebald's status as a German national voluntarily living in exile – as an emigrant himself – in Great Britain informs his positionality and, therefore, how his novels need to be read: as marginal, outside of master narratives, *other*.

I focus specifically on two of Sebald's novels, *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz*, as these works (in contradistinction to his other two novels, *Schwindel. Gefühle* and *Die Ringe des Saturn*) in terms of style, themes and structures deal almost exclusively with Jewish characters and their suffering. The tone of both books, while similar to that of *Die Ringe des Saturn*, is decidedly melancholic, due to the shattered lives and tragic deaths of the (Jewish) protagonists.⁵ Thematic continuities also link these two novels together, and, as the author has suggested, *Austerlitz* can be viewed as a sequel to *Die Ausgewanderten*.⁶ As will become clear in my analysis of these two texts, the progression implied in Sebald's comment suggests a refinement in style, one which, I contend, is a reaction to the changes in German discourse in the intervening years between the novels' publication. This is also the reason for a more extended analysis of the later novel in the current study. Their commonalities, I suggest, point to the centrality of ethical Holocaust representation for Sebald's oeuvre.

In this study I show that Sebald's unique, post-*Wende* literature needs to be read as always in dialogue with discourse in Germany on the Nazi past – including debates on

⁵Although *Die Ringe des Saturn* alludes to the Holocaust in circuitous ways, nevertheless, it does not contain any Jewish protagonists, per se. Nonetheless, the atrocities surface in an alleged – according to the text – image of corpses in a mass grave in the forest outside of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp (78-9), which has been noted in earlier research (Öhlschläger 200; Arnds 338; Barzilai 75). Patt and Fischer are hesitant to label this photo from the novel as one of actual bodies found after the liberation of the camp (Patt, Introduction 66; Fischer, "Schreiben" 35).

⁶Bigsby, "Sebald" 162.

representation, memory, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (mastery of the past)⁷ and German guilt and shame⁸ – in a manner radically different from that of most postwar non-Jewish German literature. Specifically, unique about the texts are the position, role and language of the narrators as mediators of fictional Jewish Holocaust survivor testimony. I will argue that these elements undermine and deconstruct – as opposed to model – critical discourse and debate about the Holocaust in Germany, the United States and Great Britain. I perform close readings of these novels from within a theoretical discourse on Holocaust representation, but also with respect to the cultural-historical German context in which they were published and received. This allows for an investigation of these texts as a response, implicitly, to a series of debates in Germany that argued about how to talk about, remember and come to terms with the Nazi past – especially the Holocaust – predominantly from the non-Jewish German perspective.

⁷This word is often translated as “coming to terms with the past,” but what I have written above is a literal translation from the German. *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* remains a topic of scholarly and sometimes heated public discussion in contemporary Germany. Although there is no one exclusive definition of this term, I understand it to generally refer to two ideas based on Karl Jasper’s four categories of guilt: 1) the personal encounter with one’s own guilt for acts committed during the Third Reich (moral, criminal), and 2) accepting responsibility as a nation for the crimes committed under its aegis (political) (see Jaspers). The former category is time sensitive, and does not bear directly on Sebald’s work, though his own father may certainly have been implicated as a soldier in the *Wehrmacht*; however, the latter instance suggests an ongoing and potentially unending confrontation with the Nazi past vis-à-vis memorials, commemorative events and educating future generations of Germans about the Holocaust. There is some political will to disperse with the compulsion or obligation to remember the past, in whichever incarnation that may be (e.g. Helmut Kohl’s proclamation that the postwar generation is not obligated to discharge guilt for the atrocities, his “Gnade der späten Geburt”). Thus, there is a tension between personal guilt and collective responsibility, wherein the former, having largely disappeared as Germans of the war generation have died off, has been replaced by the latter, a responsibility that is no longer grounded in experience, but instead is perceived as a “burden” to be relieved. When read against the grain, Sebald’s work, I argue, clearly breaks from “mastering” the past, underscoring, instead, the contradictory and impossible nature of the concept.

⁸Here 'guilt' (*Schuld*) is an internal acknowledgment as in the case of a crime, and 'shame' (*Scham*) is a social reaction to an external and collective 'disgrace' (*Schande*). For a more detailed differentiation between German 'guilt' and 'shame', see Aleida Assmann and Ute Frevert 88-96. Their concept of a Schamkultur, I think, is more appropriate when discussing the postwar and later generations of Germans and their confrontation with the Nazi past.

The manner in which these debates were critically received in the American context differed significantly from that of its German counterpart, which is why I argue in this study for a reconsideration of critical approaches to Sebald's novels. Through the narrative structure and the use of ambiguity (what I call its language of uncertainty⁹) Sebald's literature engages the Jewish point-of-view in Holocaust fiction from a non-Jewish German perspective.¹⁰ This is not to say, however, as earlier scholarship claims, that Sebald's work is necessarily *de facto* ethical, a means of mourning Jewish victims, or a personal exploration of his own haunted past (Ceupens, Chandler, Fuchs, Huysen, Morgan¹¹); rather, I argue that his work is a counterpoint to the very German notion of "mastering the past," i.e., overcoming historical political guilt¹² and shame, and challenges many of the more salient points of discussion regarding memory, representation and victimization in German Holocaust discourse since 1989.

The term language of uncertainty, as I use it, can best be defined as the use of narrative devices and language – such as embedded narration, reported speech, unreliable narrators, associative plot structure, subjunctive mood, and subjective language – that deconstruct and underscore the tenuousness of the narrative itself, in order to lead the reader to challenge, problematize and more critically engage with the texts as constructs and, by extension, (German) Holocaust discourse(s).¹³ This study confronts the reader

⁹I have adapted the term from Susanne L. Jones' "poetics of uncertainty." Whereas Jones connects her "poetics of uncertainty" to photography in Sebald's novels, using the text as part of a support system for the production of meaning, I exclusively analyze the textual uncertainty evoked through linguistic ambivalence and ambiguity.

¹⁰Of course, this had already occurred in the writing of Alfred Andersch (*Efrain*), but was heavily criticized for a number of reasons, including his questionable use of a Jewish protagonist.

¹¹Cosgrove, in her essay on Sebald's literary criticism of Günter Grass and Wolfgang Hildesheimer, indicates that Sebald, through melancholic discourse and writing, is trying to "claim an unclaimed experience" instead of exploring his haunted past, as Morgan has argued (Cosgrove 230-2).

¹²"Political guilt" is meant here in the spirit of Karl Jaspers' typology of guilt (*Die Schuldfrage*).

¹³For another approach that also views the reader's interaction with the texts, see Blackler.

with his/her own reading practices in order to better evaluate the dynamics of German/Jewish relations both historically and as depicted in the texts, and avoids a psychoanalytical reading of Sebald's novels that privileges a postmodern reading of history (i.e., history [Holocaust] as trauma). Nevertheless, I do not propose to reconstruct patterns of German-Jewish symbiosis as is the case in Stuart Taberner's interpretation of *Die Ausgewanderten* as nostalgic for such a loss ("Nostalgia"); rather, I view the interrelationships of the characters as part of a greater narrative strategy in which German guilt and difficulty with memory of the atrocities creates ruptures and meta-reflexive ambivalence. Moreover, this language of uncertainty connotes the difficulty of transmitting testimony of traumatic events while implying that memory is neither a complete record of the Holocaust nor can it be 'bewältigt' (mastered). Although Sebald's work addresses coming to terms with the past, it is useful to take up an approach, such as in the present study, which does not become mired in the postmodern paradox of Lyotard's "differend" but, rather, picks up Lyotard's search for an ethics of Holocaust representation.¹⁴

Sebald's work does not imply that the past can be mastered nor does it suggest an end to confronting its legacy – it, in fact, resists the popular and ambivalent term of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* while simultaneously acknowledging the Nazi past and its burden; rather, its self-reflexivity and very indeterminacy deconstruct notions of authenticity, history and truth as normalizing discourses. As such, I suggest that Sebald's work can be read as a counter-hegemonic discourse that subverts the notion of a *Schlußstrichsmentalität* (close-the-door-on-the-past attitude) – that is, the discharging of

¹⁴ See Lyotard, *Differend*.

collective responsibility through memorial practices¹⁵ –, with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* seen as an attainable goal and feasible project, by demonstrating not only the ambiguity in memory, but also its politicization at the expense of its victims.¹⁶ This is not to claim, however, that addressing the Nazi past is not worthwhile. Moreover, the shift in focus in Sebald's novels from the non-Jewish German outsider perspective to a more intimate kind of witness to Jewish protagonist-survivors' testimonies reflects the increasing importance of non-Jewish German participation in Holocaust discourse while acknowledging the need to maintain respectful distance to Jewish suffering, but also corresponds to Sebald's own ambivalent outsider position. Unlike the population of Germany in general, the 'author-in-exile'¹⁷ has gained a critical distance to the Nazi past (as opposed to being desensitized/overly inundated to it), especially insofar as it does not have the same politicizing effect in Great Britain (or the U.S.) as it does in Germany, and hence is not ever-present in German collective consciousness and memory.

¹⁵ The idea of how exactly the past is "mastered" remains itself ambivalent; building memorials, designating days of remembrance, prosecuting Holocaust denial, educating children about the Nazi past, and offering amnesty to Russian Jews after the collapse of the Soviet Union do not represent all possibilities of dealing with the past, but they are German examples. There is, however, an increasing resentment and weariness (e.g., the Walser-Bubis debate) regarding the Nazi past in contemporary Germany.

¹⁶ The trend in public "coming to terms with the past" in Germany is to utilize icons of the Holocaust (Auschwitz and other concentration camps, Babi Yar, the Warsaw ghetto uprising, and death marches) in a generalizing way, such that the Holocaust is seen to be a limited set of events and places that appear to tell the whole story of persecution and genocide. However, this iconography relativizes other victims' experiences and creates overdetermined symbols imbued with so much meaning that everything else is marginalized. Following this line of thinking, these "way stations" of the Holocaust are conducive to a more fleeting confrontation with the Nazi past and its legacy, thus allowing for such phenomena as the resurgence of anti-Semitism in contemporary Germany, despite all efforts to and claims of dealing with the past.

¹⁷ By exile, I certainly do not mean to conflate Sebald's experience with that of those expelled or who fled Germany; rather, I want to emphasize the perspective of the author, who, on several occasions, voiced misgivings about Germans and their relationship to their past, as evidenced in interviews, his scholarship and even his literature (e.g., *Luftkrieg* 48-9, *Ausgewanderten* 38). Not just for economic reasons, as J.J. Long has suggested ("Bibliographical" 14), did Sebald look for work abroad (e.g., he did not complete his advanced studies in Germany but in Switzerland).

The narrative close readings of Sebald's texts I perform reveal a pattern of increasingly sophisticated linguistic uncertainty that deconstructs common concepts, theoretical underpinnings and discourse on how German Holocaust literature should function. Maintaining a balance between ambivalence, literary invention and ethical representation, I argue that Sebald's literature adds to the discussion in Germany on coming to terms with the past by focusing, as a non-Jewish, non-Holocaust survivor, upon the largely ignored, individual Jewish victims instead of non-Jewish Germans, as well as self-reflexively questioning the idea of turning the page on the Nazi past.¹⁸ Sebald's fictional approach to the under-represented Jewish voice in Germany participates in Holocaust discourse without making the same truth claims as autobiographical writing,¹⁹ a genre that is virtually anathema to German literature on the subject, and, furthermore, his writing is not beholden to the same ethical concerns as confronting his "compatriots" (e.g., Günter Grass).²⁰ In fact, it is the conspicuous lack of the victims' voice in the postwar German literary confrontation with the Holocaust and Sebald's emphasizing of that fact that demands a reconsideration of Sebald's work as a critical rejoinder to the absence of such a perspective, especially in light of his work's focus on victims' painful stories of survival.

¹⁸To be sure, Sebald was not the first or only German author to write about Jewish victims, though his aesthetic project is, I argue, the most thorough questioning of the non-Jewish German perspective. Other authors who wrote Jewish protagonists into their novels include Gert Hofmann, Peter Härtling, and Peter Schneider.

¹⁹In Holocaust literature in general, and survivor memoirs/autobiographical non-fiction in particular, the myth of "natural language," which presumes a direct one-to-one correspondence between sign and referent, language and the material facts to which it refers, still prevails as the dominant trope. It is viewed as factual evidence of the horrors experienced by individual survivor-authors, whereas postmodern fiction is considered to "play" with or manipulate the subject of the narrative. Postmodern "play" as such is not viewed as serious, and it is the tension between this and the extremely serious subject of the Holocaust that renders postmodern fiction about the atrocities suspect at best in the German context.

²⁰ Cf. Morgan.

W.G. SEBALD: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Winfried Georg Maximilian Sebald was born during World War II (May 18, 1944) in the remote village Wertach im Allgäu in the Bavarian Alps. Sebald spent the first four years of his life without his father, a soldier in the German army, who returned home in 1947 from a French POW camp.²¹ Even after he returned, his father was only at home on weekends, working in another village as a locksmith for three years, and later rejoining the army (Bundeswehr) in the 1950s (Bigsby “Sebald” 142-3). Sebald has suggested that the silence surrounding what happened during the war and his father’s role in it fueled his interest in writing about the problematic German wartime past and its legacy for, i.e., effects upon postwar generations (142-4).²² While growing up in Wertach im Allgäu, where WWII, the Holocaust and Nazis were rarely talked about,²³ Sebald remained quite oblivious to the destruction of and caused by Germany, and he thus comments on the incomprehensibility of knowing now that, while his mother would take him around in a stroller as an infant, Jews were being deported and killed in not-too-distant lands (144). While he suggests that he has never felt personal guilt for the atrocities, Sebald mentions that his biography is part of his identity (145). Being German, then, for Sebald, meant having to deal with the legacy of the Nazi past, and that means not only *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the cultural and political sense, but also coming to terms with his own past as a young German oblivious of both the war and the suffering

²¹Homberger, “W.G. Sebald.”

²²What Bigsby does not elaborate on, however, is what must have been a strange and hard-to-reconcile experience of meeting his father for the first time at four years old, and then not having the opportunity to spend much time with him until he was seven. In fact, it was his grandfather who helped raise Sebald in the absence of his father.

²³ Not only did his father, a veteran of the Eastern front campaign, not discuss anything about the events with him, but the lessons learned about the Holocaust at school in the 1950s consisted of watching several films/clips about concentration camps and the freeing of the prisoners without commentary, discussion or further information (Bigsby, “Restitution” 30-31). Educating the populace in public schools did take place, though the extent to which it was planned and carried out was neither entirely systematic nor thorough. See Rathenow.

of those who had been declared “enemies” by the Nazi state and of the role his father may have played in this violence. Sebald’s relationship with his father places him clearly within the revolutionary student generation of the mid to late 1960s through the 1970s, which must have informed his decision to leave Germany.

From the age of four until he began his literary studies at the Albert-Ludwigs University in Freiburg im Breisgau, Sebald lived in nearby Sonthofen. After graduating in 1965, Sebald left West Germany to work as a lecturer (“lektor”) for four years at the University of Manchester, before becoming a lecturer in European studies at the University of East Anglia. Sebald never returned to live in Germany, and was appointed chair of German literature at East Anglia in 1987. Two years he later became the founding director of the British Center for Literary Translation.

Within the British context, Sebald was exposed to a more distanced and critical discourse on the Holocaust than was available in Germany or in the United States,²⁴ which became a part of his unique German perspective and identity (Biggsby “Sebald” 144-5). In terms of his publications, Sebald wrote academic literary criticism in English and German until publishing his first literary work, *Nach der Natur: Ein Elementargedicht* (1988), a lengthy poem about natural destruction. During the 1990s up

²⁴ The identificatory processes at work in the American Jewish community with those Holocaust survivors who emigrated or fled to the U.S. resulted in a politicization and mobilization of power and influence within American identity politics. As a persecuted minority in Europe, Jews in the U.S. enjoyed a less difficult and constrained or contaminated venue for giving voice to their suffering at the hands of Germans, among others. In the victorious and emergent superpower, i.e., the United States, criticism of Nazism and revisiting the past was more prevalent and viewed as a legitimate critical discourse, as evidenced by the development of Holocaust studies programs and centers of research.

In Great Britain, discussion and commemoration of British suffering from German air raids eclipsed discussion of the Holocaust (Jews in the U.K. were far less numerous than in the U.S.), yet critical views of Germany were more commonplace, likely due to the first-hand experience of German bombings. Today, however, critical debate about the area saturation bombing campaigns of the Allies draws parallels (from the Germans, e.g., Friedrich) to the Holocaust, which many historians and other scholars see as revisionist and misinformed (see Kettenacker; Schmitz, *Nation*). Furthermore, Britain’s role in assisting Jewish refugees (including the “Kindertransporte”), at times heatedly debated, underscores the fact that, unlike in Germany, Jewish survivors were notably present in numbers.

until his early death on December 14, 2001, Sebald published four novels in German in Germany.²⁵ In chronological order of German publication, they are *Schwindel. Gefühle* (1990), *Die Ausgewanderten* (1992), *Die Ringe des Saturn* (1995), and *Austerlitz* (2001).²⁶ His distance from Germany and self-chosen outsider position (in a former enemy state of Germany) afforded Sebald a unique perspective on German Holocaust discourse, especially since he would have less at stake but also more exposure to critical voices and German (Jewish) exiles²⁷ than a German academic at a Germany university in writing Holocaust fiction the way he did.

SEBALD'S NOVELS

It was shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall that Sebald began publishing his highly regarded German novels. His first, *Schwindel.Gefühle*, is an intricate text consisting of four overlapping narratives with both elusive as well as explicit references to well-known literary figures and works, including Stendhal and Kafka, demonstrating

²⁵The language in which authors of Holocaust literature choose to write reflects attitudes (e.g., choosing to publish in a language other than one's native German, Yiddish, etc.) and particular discourses they are engaged in (i.e., writing about the Holocaust in German has a host of issues that are not identical to those in French or English, such as Nazi euphemisms), which determine the scope and kind of knowledge available to them. As Bos convincingly demonstrates in her book, the "politics of address" stood at the center of such authors' choice to write in German (e.g., Grete Weil, Ruth Klüger) (see Bos, *German-Jewish Literature*). Although not a survivor, and thus spared such a monumental and political decision, Sebald's novels, importantly, add to a small corpus of Holocaust literature *in German*. What I want to highlight here is the audience Sebald is addressing – he was not in direct dialogue with Holocaust scholars in the U.S. or U.K., which should be taken into consideration when framing his work in a scholarly approach.

²⁶W.G. Sebald, *Schwindel. Gefühle*, Frankfurt: Eichborn, 1990; *Die Ausgewanderten*, Frankfurt: Eichborn, 1992; *Die Ringe des Saturn*, Frankfurt: Eichborn, 1995; and *Austerlitz*, Munich/Vienna: Carl Hanser, 2001. The English translations appeared out of order: *The Emigrants* (London: Harvill, 1996), *The Rings of Saturn* (London: Harvill, 1998), *Vertigo* (London: Harvill, 1999), and *Austerlitz* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2001). In this dissertation I use the following (German) editions of these novels: *Schwindel.Gefühle*, Frankfurt: Fischer, 2005; *Die Ausgewanderten*, Frankfurt: Fischer, 2006; *Die Ringe des Saturn: Eine Englische Wallfahrt*, Frankfurt: Fischer, 2004; and *Austerlitz*, Frankfurt: Fischer, 2003. In addition, they will be parenthetically cited as follows: (SG), (DA), (RS) and (AZ).

²⁷ Sebald did, in fact, meet exiles and refugees, through conversation with whom he constructed several of his characters. I elaborate on this point further in my discussion of character pastiches in Chapter Three ("Autobiography?...").

an in-depth knowledge of and postmodern play within several national literatures.²⁸ The novel focuses on an unnamed German narrator's critical reflections on the relationship between a pair of authors' works and their personal experiences in Italy, but also includes the narrator's travels to destinations in common with the authors, as well as the narrator's own return to his hometown. The novel's narrator, whose autobiographical details on occasion coincide with those of Sebald (including the narrator's return to his hometown of 'W.' in southern Bavaria²⁹ and his experiences in seeing the town in much the same condition as he had left it), speculates about Stendhal and Kafka without knowledge of their actual experiences. As such, this work already resembles one characteristic that would stand out in the later novels which I focus on: namely, narrating imagined experiences of others. In addition, the amount of intertextuality and its destabilizing effect on the narrative also contributes to his oeuvre's language of uncertainty. Finally, the novel is open-ended, with the narrative simply trailing off, much like in Sebald's subsequent novels, which is suggestive of a lack of closure or resolution.

Sebald's second novel and first commercial success, *Die Ausgewanderten*, was the first to deal explicitly with Holocaust survivors. Consisting of four chapters, each containing a narrative named after a different protagonist, the narratives are connected by the presence of the same unnamed German narrator of non-Jewish identity, who, like the main characters, is living in "exile" from his homeland. Unlike these characters, however,

²⁸To posit that Sebald's work presupposes a careful, critical and widely-read, multi-lingual reader (e.g., a literary academic) would not be an exaggeration, and yet, it is not necessary to apprehend all of the references in order to understand the texts. For a provocative study on the kind of reader implied – indeed necessitated – by Sebald's fiction, see Blackler. The sheer amount of intertextual references has been extensively researched (Pearson; Friedrichsmeyer).

²⁹The name of this town, "W.," has been referred to in the literature on Sebald as a direct reference to his hometown of Wertach im Allgäu (Bigsby, "Sebald" 140-1). However, I suggest this is too reductive of the fictional project, and forces a 1:1 correspondence between the author and the narrator, which can lead to a reading of the author's intentions (intentional fallacy) or a misappropriation and misunderstanding of the genre.

the narrator voluntarily leaves his home. The stories introduce the reader to melancholic and traumatized figures, two of whom commit suicide (Dr. Henry Selwyn and Paul Bereyter), one who seeks out oblivion via electro-shock therapy (Ambrose Adelwarth) and one who, emotionally paralyzed, cannot come to terms with the loss of his family (Max Aurach). The novel includes anecdotes told by characters – other than the protagonists – to the narrator, as well as diaries of family members, photographs and even newspaper clippings, which seem to lend an air of authenticity to the novel. The sheer intermediality and intertextuality of this novel, combined with the subject matter, propelled Sebald's work into the limelight and garnered him critical attention among German and American audiences.

Two years after the publication of *Die Ausgewanderten*, Sebald produced a highly unusual piece of what has been called “travel literature,” “travelogue,” “flâneurie,” and “peripatetic wandering,”³⁰ *Die Ringe des Saturn*. The third novel by Sebald is more of an expository “historical” work that is a retrospective travelogue of sorts. It follows the story of a hospital patient, who recounts his travels around rural England, especially to wayward, dilapidated places whose historical importance has been marginalized. The sharp contrasts drawn between their historical flourishing, present-day neglect and obscurity, underlines recurring themes in Sebald's oeuvre – the forgetfulness of history and the inevitable ravages of time. The narrator reflects on seemingly unimportant socio-economic phenomena, such as the herring and silkworm industries, which, in their disturbing historical parallels of mass destruction – e.g., the Germans used systematic procedures (“Tötungsgeschäft”) to eradicate the silkworms when they were no longer needed (RS 344-8) – leading up to WWII, evoke the Holocaust. The narrative is

³⁰See Leone; Bauer; Theisen; Zilcosky; and Summers-Bremner (312, 316).

conspicuously open-ended, as if history was and is doomed to repeat itself – history is posited as cyclical or circular, like the rings of the planet named in the title.

Sebald's last and arguably most acclaimed novel, *Austerlitz*, was published in 2001. In the novel, an unnamed German narrator, whose biography appears to coincide at times with the author's, has several incidental encounters over a period of roughly thirty years in England, Belgium and France with Jacques Austerlitz, the story's main protagonist, whose story he recounts. The narrator, whom we know little about other than his propensity for writing, is a lector at a university in England, though it is unclear what he teaches. Austerlitz, a Jew, came to England on a Kindertransport from Prague right before the start of WWII, and has been living there in exile ever since. Austerlitz, an architectural historian by training, describes architectural curiosities to the narrator and informs him of the various histories of the places where they meet. Austerlitz also tells his life story, which is complicated due to lapses of memory of a traumatic nature, and discusses his search for traces of his parents. Without ever explicitly mentioning it, the novel revolves around the Holocaust and how it impacted Austerlitz and his family – his mother, Agáta, died in Auschwitz and his father, Maximilian Aychenwald, has been missing since WWII. Austerlitz, in seeking to both recover (memory of) his childhood and his identity, suffers a nervous collapse when he is overwhelmed by the return of traumatic memory. The novel ends with Austerlitz leaving the narrator his collection of photographs and the key to his London apartment before taking his leave to find out what happened to his father, after receiving a message from a worker at the Centre de Documentation Juives Contemporanes in Paris (a Holocaust research center), indicating

his father had been interred at Gurs concentration camp at the end of 1942 in southwestern France.³¹

METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE OF ANALYSIS

Within academic circles, the Holocaust is typically researched either through a historiographical or cultural studies approach.³² As this dissertation deals with the literature of Sebald, I employ instead a literary and narratological analysis, which allows me to focus on the literariness of the texts while examining the ethics of representation from within a specific interpretive framework or *positionality*. Sebald's status as an emigrant from Germany who chose to live in England, citing a growing discomfiture with his compatriots, permits me to consider his position as an outsider who, nonetheless, was, through his literature, in dialogue with critical German discourse and cultural debates about the Nazi past in Germany. By electing this methodology instead of either a historiographical or cultural studies approach, I can better address questions of ethical representation and literary structure as reflected in Sebald's fictional works as German literature.³³

In this single author study, I briefly trace the German literary tradition and cultural context to which Sebald's texts react, and I read his novels as both an unfolding response to the question of how to depict Jewish suffering from the non-Jewish German

³¹ The Jews in the camp were deported to Auschwitz beginning in the summer of 1942, leaving uncertain Maximilian's fate, i.e., whether he was murdered in Auschwitz or not.

³²As Pascale Bos points out, however, there is now a consensus that cultural studies is the most versatile and methodologically sound approach to Holocaust studies and research (15).

³³Ernestine Schlant discusses this very issue of historiography versus literature in her introduction (3), and I agree with her reasoning, which I also employ in this study. Sebald's fiction is also in obvious dialogue with theoretical concerns regarding the representation of the "unrepresentable," some of which are to be found in a collection of essays generated by a conference at UCLA from April 26-29, 1990 on the ability of literature to represent the Holocaust. See Friedländer.

perspective in the post-Wende era and evolving attempts to do so.³⁴ I argue that Sebald's work finds itself at the intersection of autobiography and fiction,³⁵ history and memory – it is an ethical-historical brand of fiction – and, as such, it singularly constitutes the most revolutionary and comprehensive effort by a non-Jewish German author to draw attention to the substantial lack in Germany of the Jewish victims' voice(s) and of a discussion of their suffering since the end of WWII.³⁶ Furthermore, his work problematizes accepted German notions of dealing with the past.³⁷

When discussing German Holocaust fiction, such as Sebald's, outside of its context, a more nuanced German perspective is needed in the oftentimes Anglo-dominated discourse.³⁸ There is a substantial amount of related German theory and

³⁴The plethora of critical literature on how to represent the Holocaust aesthetically is too large to adequately list here. For the sake of brevity, I refer to a few of the more well-known works: Ezrahi; Friedländer; LaCapra, *Representing*; Lang; Langer; Rosenfeld, *Double and Thinking*; Schwarz; Young, *Writing and Memory's Edge*.

³⁵Kochhar-Lindgren coins the term 'novel-memoir' to denote the unique blend of autobiographical and fictional narrative characteristic of Sebald's novels (369-70). Sebald himself referred to his writing as "prose fiction." King defines Sebald's style as 'Autobiografiction' and Aliaga-Buchenau labels it as 'fictional autobiography.' I view his novels as ethical-historical fiction in order to distance it from autobiographical interpretations of his work.

³⁶ Sebald, in fact, deplored the lack of knowledge on the part of German literati about the fate of Jews persecuted in WWII, as he mentioned in his essay ("Konstruktion") about Günter Grass's *Tagesbuch einer Schnecke* (Sebald quoted in Harris 131).

³⁷To say that little has been said regarding the victims' perspective(s) in German literary Holocaust discourse would be an understatement. Couched mainly in historiography and studies written by historians, references to the victims typically involve statistics and "objective" or "factual" information about their persecution without recourse to subjective accounts, the solitary exception, to my knowledge, being the recent trend towards recording "oral history" within the past twenty-five years or so. Jewish survivor literature written in German (e.g., Nelly Sachs, Jean Améry, and Grete Weil) was underrepresented and often not well received (e.g., Paul Celan by the *Gruppe 47*). However, since German reunification, several cultural projects (e.g., Holocaust Museum and Memorial in Berlin) and works by Jewish authors have increased the voices heard, though these, too, are often fraught with public debate and controversy.

³⁸Whereas in the U.S. Holocaust studies concentrates on both historical and literary approaches, the fact that the development of Holocaust studies in Germany originated in institutions concerned with history and historiography suggests a more detached and impersonal approach to the atrocities and particularly their victims. Further, the relatively few pieces of Holocaust literature published in German as compared that published in English delimited the scope of Holocaust research on literary texts. It is, however, of little surprise when one takes into account the largely ignored Jewish voice in German Holocaust discourse; see Pascale Bos, especially her discussion of the difficulties faced by German-speaking Jews in publishing memoirs and fiction about the Holocaust (12-13).

criticism that has yet to be translated into English or even cited, but which provides critical insight into the ever-expanding field of inquiry.³⁹ Sebald's novels constitute an entirely different act of writing from that of the American or British discourses, despite the fact he lived in Great Britain: the texts accomplish something quite different from other German language texts on the Holocaust (e.g., Günter Grass's *Im Krebsgang*)⁴⁰ and, therefore, Sebald positions himself differently in relation to the German discourse.⁴¹ Sebald's work speaks neither with the Jewish nor the "perpetrator's" voice – rather, it attempts to respect the victims' humanity while simultaneously underscoring the lack of Jewish perspectives and voices in non-Jewish German literature *and* challenging the ability of German fiction about the Holocaust to serve as literary restitution. Indeed, as has been pointed out in research on the reception of his work,⁴² there is a discrepancy

³⁹There are several theoretical projects in German Holocaust research that have not yet been translated, from which I will mention a few exemplary and representative texts. In memory research, especially as it applies to cultural memory and "texts," see Erll, Gymnich and Nünning; Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*; Kai-Uwe; Weigel; Butzer; and Assmann and Frevert. In secondary literature on Sebald's work (monographs and edited volumes only), see Fuchs; Niehaus and Öhlschläger; Martin and Wintermeyer; Hutchinson; Mosbach; Öhlschläger; Schedel; Heidelberger-Leonard and Tabah; and Köpf. There are numerous articles on Sebald's literature as well, but are far too varied in their approaches to give an adequate cross-section here.

⁴⁰ Several essays have been written comparing Grass's work to Sebald's (Nolan; Taberner, "Normalization") or the latter's reading of the former (Cosgrove), but some tend to view Grass's work as more ethical for not attempting to speak through Jewish characters (Morgan; Moeller; Cosgrove 229-232 [cf. Anderson 140]), and one points out Grass's own moral and ethical problems in his approach to Jewish characters (Baer). I see in this trend of scholarship a tendency to avoid discussing German silence on the matter of Jewish suffering. If, as Grass says (quoted in Nolan 23), "he wrote about refugee suffering 'to take the subject away from the extreme right'," does it necessarily follow that writing about Jewish suffering would take it away from the Jewish victims? I would argue that it does not, but also point out that this point of view underlies the discussion of ethics in non-Jewish Holocaust literature.

⁴¹ Contrary to what some have claimed (cf. Bosmajian), I contend that Germans should write Holocaust literature, but not out of an attempt to expiate their guilt; rather, the goal should be to further the discussion of the atrocities. In fact, Bosmajian, despite his praise for Günter Grass's refusal to depict Jewish characters such as those found in Jewish survivor literature, even describes Sebald's style several years before he published his novels, saying "[t]he German writer, the child of perpetrators, who is conscious of history, cannot and should not master the past... The [creative imagination] appropriates instead for itself an ethical attitude that judges and implicates itself, it opposes precisely defined meanings that present themselves as verities, and it chooses to maintain itself as struggling, circumlocutious, tentative and unfinished" (60).

⁴² J.J. Long, "Bibliographical" 14.

between the relative popularity enjoyed by Sebald in the American and British versus continental European contexts, which, I contend, is a product of the americanization of the Holocaust and American and British readings of his work as Holocaust literature without consideration of the complexity of German discourse on the subject – that is, the discourse on perpetrators and victims. I further suggest that his work contributes to and departs significantly from the decades-old debate in the American context regarding Holocaust literature's, i.e., fiction's (in)ability to represent the atrocities in an ethically acceptable manner.⁴³ The radical narrative approach of Sebald's work – with its *language of uncertainty* – towards the ethical difficulties inherent in representing the Holocaust, I argue, opens up new ways of understanding the gap between witnessing and testimony, as understood by Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer in their insightful analysis on the subject.⁴⁴

⁴³American Holocaust literature is radically different from German Holocaust fiction, and has its own set of normative, unwritten rules and standards for representation. For example, D.M. Thomas' *The White Hotel* (New York: Viking, 1981), though a canonical work of Holocaust fiction in the United States and England, would have likely not been able to be published in Germany due to its postmodernist depiction of the Holocaust (Babi Yar massacre), which adapted text from Anatoli Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar* (Trans. David Floyd, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970) combined with erotic poetry, a transgressive work for a non-Jew. Even if it would have been publishable, the storm of criticism it would have generated in the aftermath of the broadcast of *Holocaust* would certainly have resulted in difficulties for the publisher, let alone the author. In the following chapters, I will refer to *modes of perception* in order to tease out the differing worldviews of the Anglo-American and German discourses.

⁴⁴Bernard-Donals and Glejzer, *Between*. In their co-authored study on representation of the Holocaust, they define these concepts as what one perceives (witness) and what one is able to communicate about the experience(s) (testimony). The difficulty, they argue, lies in the impossibility of communicating experience as such; testimony is the consequence of a compulsion to "speak," i.e., express one's experience(s) and the recognition that s/he cannot adequately convey that which s/he experienced or witnessed. Bernard-Donals and Glejzer point out that the need to name or label the events and experiences that make up the Holocaust is an attempt to integrate into understanding the "sublime." However, I argue that this represents an attempt to normalize history and "render harmless" knowledge of this evil (*Verharmlosung*). Using Bernard-Donals and Glejzer's definitions of "witness" and "testimony" as my point of departure and following their line of reasoning through to its logical conclusion, I argue that, precisely because to bear "witness" to the disaster acknowledges the impossibility of representing the sublime through "testimony," we can only portray the Holocaust through aesthetic approximation using specific *modes of perception*.

Bernard-Donals and Glejzer's conceptualization of "redemption" complicates and problematizes notions of testimony as a panacea or therapy for Holocaust victims, and, in fact, expands the category beyond survivor-witnesses/writers. This allows for a theorizing of Holocaust literature written by those with no

Furthermore, I argue that Sebald's novels, *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz*, represent a new direction in the continuing German literary confrontation with its past without seeking closure to its contested discourse, an idea encapsulated by the German term, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Instead of moving from a melancholic, traumatic repetition to a process of mourning or "working through"⁴⁵ of traumatic memory for Jewish protagonists, which would imply an eventual resolution,⁴⁶ these novels illustrate the inherent difficulties with Jewish memory and coming to terms with the German past by placing the reader in a meta-critical position from which to view and deconstruct their

direct experience of the event. The inability to reconcile the "extremity that eludes the concept" or witnessing and testimony of the atrocities – its *sublimity* – sheds light on the paradoxical problem of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – the promise of closure –, which, I argue, Sebald's work (especially *Austerlitz*) compellingly illustrates as misdirected; that is, putting the past behind or "moving on" does not resolve issues relating to ethics and epistemology (Bernard-Donals and Glejzer 22). Instead, there are fleeting glimpses of what lies beyond language to describe, "...something quite outside the limits of the knowable that can only be indicated and only leaves a trace," which offer moments of redemption (x-xi). Thus, the attempt to *know* the unknowable, to draw comparisons between known objects and this "unknowable" (e.g. metaphor, metonymy, etc.), is, in effect, to normalize it, to generalize the particular, thereby falling prey to iconography and symbolization, which, in turn, trivializes the specificity of individual experiences, replacing them with symbolic icons such as Auschwitz. Such a process is typical in the German context, which points to the need to restore the subjectivity of the victims by deconstructing the general and refocusing, instead, on the particularity of (individual) Holocaust experience. This generalizing of the particular has a secondary effect in that it reduces survivors to a number, like the Germans did, doubly victimizing them.

Bernard-Donals and Glejzer's concept of "sublimity" differs slightly from that of Kant's formulation. In their definition of the "sublime," the epistemological gap between what is perceived and how it can be described (e.g. "witness" and "testimony") opens up the possibility for "redemption" not in the sense of allowing us to "see" or "witness" the events (viii), but, rather, "we are confronted with both the limit of knowledge and an uncanny sense of what lies beyond it" (xi). Furthermore, discussing the "disaster of the Shoah," they state:

[the Shoah] is located at the junction of the compulsion to speak and failure of speech, where the witness manages to redeem the moment (to finally see what lies beyond or behind what can be told by history), to "fall victim" to it, and leave a trace of it in language. The witness, confronted with the sublime object, is rendered both speechless and is compelled nonetheless to speak (xi).

The "moment of redemption" occurs when the witness cannot create knowledge or memory out of the event, yet "compels testimony, a narrative, of an event construed as history" (xi-xii).

⁴⁵This wording is a translation of Theodor Adorno's term "Aufarbeitung," as coined in his seminal essay, ("Aufarbeitung").

⁴⁶Several critics (Barzilai, "Exposure," Cosgrove, Duttlinger, "Traumatic," Morgan; cf. Osborne, Santner, *Creaturely*) apply Freudian models of melancholy, repression and working through to Sebald's novels. The problem of applying these models, I argue, is the conflation of victims' and non-victims' perspectives (Jewish survivor-protagonists and non-Jewish German narrators) without addressing what it means for a non-Jewish German author to write about Jewish trauma.

problematic narrators and protagonists, as well as their relationships. In short, his work moves away from German victimization and “perpetrator” narratives, issues of guilt, and memorial gestures⁴⁷ towards a genuine, ethical and empathetic attempt to understand the suffering of (Jewish) Holocaust victims by a non-Jewish German (e.g., Sebald’s narrators), the latter’s reactions to the former, and, simultaneously, self-reflexively conveys the overwhelming immensity and virtual impossibility of such an endeavor.

This study is organized into four chapters beyond this introduction: an overview of Holocaust discourse in the American and German contexts with a review of scholarship on Sebald’s literature, two subsequent chapters of close readings of Sebald’s novels (*Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz*, respectively) exploring, through careful narratological analyses, how they subvert genre expectations (Holocaust literature) and resist conventional reading practices, followed by a discussion of how these novels deal with contested German discourse (representation, victimization, and memory), and, finally, I address the implications of his work in my conclusion.

In Chapter Two, I review representative critical approaches used to date in analyzing Sebald’s work, and how these (largely) American models neither address the specificity of German issues raised, nor fully appreciate the literariness of his project – ethical and aesthetic concerns, as well as positionality are viewed, when at all, through a non-German lens. I then lay out the various debates about representation, memory and victimization in German discourse on the Nazi past, paying particular attention to critical discussion of the Holocaust memorial in Berlin, the controversy over Wolfgang

⁴⁷ In German Holocaust discourse, there still appears to be a taboo against representing Jewish suffering for reasons of inappropriate identification and voyeurism, as evidenced by Grass’s discussion of moral obligations and standards in German writing about the Holocaust (Grass, “Schreiben”). I contend that, although this is an ethically laudable position for a member of the “perpetrator” generation, this should not translate into a prohibition against addressing the fact of Jewish suffering for subsequent generations of Germans.

Koeppen's *Jakob Littners Aufzeichnungen aus einem Erdloch*,⁴⁸ and the *Opfer* (Victims), Wilkomirski and Walser-Bubis debates, in order to define specifically German issues in confronting the Holocaust. I conclude my overview with a discussion of Sebald's literature as being in critical dialogue with these contested discourses.

In Chapter Three, I briefly discuss the silence regarding the Holocaust in postwar Germany and German literature, in order to show patterns of silence and failed attempts to come to terms with the Holocaust, to which Sebald's literature critically responds. I furthermore outline the cultural production of the late 1970s to late 1980s, from the 1979 German premiere of the American television mini-series, *Holocaust*,⁴⁹ to Gert Hofmann's novel, *Veilchenfeld*.⁵⁰ After setting up the period prior to the publication of Sebald's novels, I analyze *Die Ausgewanderten* in a series of close readings, examining how competing discourses of Holocaust representation are taken up in Sebald's work, paying particular attention to victims and representation. I discuss the texts' problematization of genre, especially autobiographical and fictional Holocaust literature. Then I investigate the use of self-reflexivity and fictional devices to disrupt the reader's experience(s) of the novel. I also analyze, on the level of grammar, how uncertainty is established through the complex constellation of narrators and protagonists (instability in narrative mood and voice), thus instantiating an *ethics of representation*. Specifically, I define my use of narratological concepts and how they apply to the analysis at hand. Beginning with an exploration of narrative structure, I trace the use of multiple narrative voices through the frameworks of Gerard Genette's and Mieke Bal's theories of narratology, incorporating an analysis of the special subjunctive mood and how it further complicates narrative

⁴⁸ Wolfgang Koeppen, *Jakob Littners Aufzeichnungen aus einem Erdloch: Roman*, Frankfurt: Jüdischer Verlag, 1992.

⁴⁹ *Holocaust*. Dir. Marvin Chomsky. NBC. Titus, 16-19 April 1978. Television.

⁵⁰ Gert Hofmann, *Veilchenfeld*, Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1986.

structure. As I will show, the degree of ambivalence imparted to Sebald's narratives by way of narrative structure and voices problematizes traditional notions of how to write Holocaust literature.

In Chapter Four, I discuss trauma and memory as key components of *Austerlitz*, while emphasizing the text's departure from earlier models of representation in Sebald's work towards a new kind of witnessing. Through the high degree of subjective language and uncertainty in the texts, as well as the sophistication of his work in terms of theories of memory, I trace the problematization of the possibility of memory and closure, i.e., *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, in the face of the Holocaust. Moreover, I discuss the destabilizing effects of narrative devices, especially meta-reflexivity, on the reader.

Chapter Five encompasses a discussion of how these novels deal with contested German discourse on victimization, memory and representation related to the Nazi past. Specifically, I identify those aspects of Sebald's work that establish it as an ethical literary project. I also redress the gap I perceive in the Sebald scholarship on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, and challenge the present understanding of his literature as "Trauerarbeit."

Finally, in my conclusion, I summarize my findings and point towards possible projects or research directions implied by my work, and why I believe this to be an under-researched area needing more critical attention than heretofore has been given it.

Chapter Two: Overview and Contextualization of the Novels

Sebald's writing addresses many themes found in the documentation of and literature about the Holocaust, particularly those that deal with witnessing. The way that these topoi are handled in the Anglo⁵¹ (i.e., American and British) contexts – both popular and critical receptions – and how they differ from the continental European, i.e., German-speaking countries, deserves more critical attention in connection with Sebald's work than has heretofore been given. Whereas in the former the (im)possibility of representation is a point of entry into the discussion, in the latter the dichotomy of remembering and forgetting, guilt and innocence, and who should be remembered and memorialized form the parameters for critical dialogue about the Nazi past (i.e. *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*). Thus, memory gains an importance in German discourse that goes beyond the Anglo emphasis on depiction of the past – it is infused with ethical obligations and implications in the country responsible for committing the atrocities. In addition, without at least questioning the reasons behind the relatively successful critical reception in English-speaking countries (Sebald in translation) as compared to that in the German world, there is a very real danger of misinterpreting and framing Sebald's work within a perspective wholly other than that warranted by his experience and identity. This is not to suggest, however, that the critic should employ a strictly biographical reading of his literature. In contrast to the typical American approaches to the *particular* (personal accounts by individual Holocaust survivor-memoirists), the German emphasis on the *general* (e.g., the Holocaust as a unique event represented through a specific system of signification) frames Sebald's texts in a very different way, one which is my point of

⁵¹ Although Great Britain is included in this term, "Anglo," I refrain from incorporating this context into my analysis for reasons of simplification – there is not adequate space within the scope of this dissertation to thoroughly address both American and British nuances in Holocaust discourse.

departure (i.e., *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*). Sebald's novels, I argue, deconstruct various themes that have arisen in Holocaust discourse, which necessitates an analysis that works within this frame with its specific *modes of perception*.⁵²

Modes of perception refer to the various approaches used in interpreting literature, such as Sebald's work, but which are context-specific. The audience initially addressed by Sebald's novels (German-speaking, central European wartime and postwar generations) presupposes its own unique system of signification.⁵³ When read within Julia Kristeva's theoretical terms of the *semiotic*- (drives or "pulsions") and *symbolic* (sign and syntax) *functions as signifying modalities*, the multiplicity of meanings generated by Sebald's texts beyond the *symbolic* gain a critical component – the texts' *poetic language* (that which points beyond the signified of the signifier) is understood as a specifically German *signifying process (significance)*, one of several ongoing semiotic operations (i.e., language, discourse, literature, art) in German culture.⁵⁴ Thus, a narratological approach, one which takes into consideration the very literariness of Sebald's narratives (e.g., non-unified *subjects in process*) and how this corresponds to post-*Wende* German discourse (e.g., *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), enables me to analyze

⁵² I would like to thank Dr. Janet Swaffar for her suggestion of using this term, and especially for pointing me in the direction of Julia Kristeva's theory of semiotics.

⁵³ In other words, the processes of signification at work in the linguistic system represented by Sebald's literature reflect a German specificity but, simultaneously, allows for a comparative analysis – e.g., vis-à-vis deconstruction – of Holocaust discourse in the United States, thus attuning the reader to the particular thematic and structural differences. Such an analysis is not included in the present study, as it does not fall within the scope of my argument. What I want to indicate here is the continued need in Germany to deal with the Nazi past in a German way, but without suggesting that the *Bewältigung* of the Holocaust is the end goal. The very different perspective entertained in the Anglo contexts (outsider, victor) with respect to Jewish Holocaust victims (sympathy, morbid fascination) grants nearly unlimited authority to survivor-memoirists (there is no "other" story to be told, such as the German point of view) and shapes the ways that the Holocaust is perceived. In Germany, too much interest in and identification with Jewish survivor-memoirists could be construed as appropriative and unethical, leaving the general as the lesser problematic approach to employ.

⁵⁴ Here I refer to the terms as used by Kristeva (*Strangers; Reader*).

how exactly the texts function as a German *signifying process*.⁵⁵ In other words, the novels' *language of uncertainty* – although rooted in syntactical and other grammatical structures – posits a space enabled through the texts' *poetic language*, in which an ethics of representation is instantiated. By deconstructing the American *modes of perception* imposed upon German Holocaust literature, such as Sebald's, I demonstrate the inadequacy of such means for interpreting this literature⁵⁶ as well as for addressing the very uniquely German confrontation with its past, while, simultaneously, pointing out the failures of German concepts, e.g., *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, for dealing with this past.⁵⁷

Framed in this manner, the American reception of Sebald's work and its focus on the *particular* creates a completely different set of interpretive hermeneutics of his

⁵⁵ Sebald's work would lend itself well to an analysis strictly based on Kristeva's concept of the "subject in process," especially if the title character of *Austerlitz* were viewed as a subject whose multiplicity only unfolds in the signifying processes taking place vis-à-vis the myriad intertexts and their network of associations in the novel, as well as how these create tensions that explode the affixing of static meaning (the "symbolic") through the words themselves ("The Subject in Process," *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez, Ed. Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia UP, 1980). Such an approach, however, would require extreme care so as not to simply reify tropes of the unrepresentability of the Holocaust (etc.).

⁵⁶ The fact that, for example, the use of the special subjunctive is only ever briefly commented upon in secondary (Anglo) literature on Sebald's work – instead of analyzed as I do in this study – implies a fundamental disregard of crucial narrative devices and structure which any German would find peculiar at the least. The use of the special subjunctive, in turn, increases critical awareness in the German reader, instantiating a meta-reflexive confrontation with Sebald's texts; however, this does not preclude a quick explanation (Aliaga-Buchenau, Garloff, King, Morgan, Williams) regarding the effects produced when narrative mood and voice blend together, creating the illusion that the reader is present at the conversations between, for example in *Austerlitz*, the narrator and title character Austerlitz. What these few studies addressing such narrative idiosyncracies do not follow through on are the implications of such devices and strategies beyond an (un)ethical identification between a (non-Jewish) German and a Jew. The effects of blurring narrative mood and voice instigates a broader, *general* engagement with issues of identification but especially as regards the problem for Germans in writing about Jewish Holocaust victims – it is a larger issue than the ethical difficulty of a singular character (and author, as some argue) telling a story of Jewish suffering.

⁵⁷ The notion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, however, is a paradox, insofar as it is neither definable nor theorizable – it is, in fact, a German postmodern idea, which cannot ever achieve its end goal. Although discussion about how to come to terms with one's past is certainly nothing new, the specific connotations inherent in this German term are directly related to the Nazi past.

literature. This can be seen in the (auto)biographical readings of his work, which tend to anchor their interpretations to the facts of Sebald's biography and those people he included in his texts.⁵⁸ I contend that such narrow interpretations of his work, in point of fact, obscure the deeper significance of his literature. Sebald's texts display a pronounced engagement with specifically German debates of the 1990s on the Nazi past, many of which, although discussed and analyzed in the American context, are not incorporated into analyses of his work during this decade in which he switched from critical to literary writing.⁵⁹

The narrators and protagonists in the two novels by Sebald that I examine link multiple themes together and introduce elements of uncertainty and instability in the narratives. This *language of uncertainty*, through its disruptive and destabilizing effects, deconstructs aspects (*modes of perception*) of the Holocaust in critical and popular discourse(s). It then re-presents them in such a way so as to allow the reader to connect multiple modes that crystallize during the reading process into a critical understanding of the difficulty of attaining the Jewish perspective by a non-Jewish, non-survivor German author in the German context. Unlike ideas put forth in the Sebald scholarship regarding identity and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in his work (Long, Morgan), this approach neither assumes ontologically difficult positions to defend, nor questions the morality of the writer; rather, it investigates how the texts function in and of themselves, explores their ethics of representation, and then expands upon the implications for a German audience.

⁵⁸ An example of this is Morgan ("Sign"). By contrast, Remmler reads Sebald's literary memory work as part of the 'spatial turn' in cultural studies, instead of, as Morgan does, some form of autobiographical confrontation with Sebald's own past (134).

⁵⁹It is rather conspicuous that Sebald produced no critical literature between 1990 and his death in 2001, with the notable exception of a greatly expanded version of his 1981 essay on the Allied air war against Germany, presented as a series of lectures in 1997 (*Luftkrieg*).

To describe Sebald's literature either, as he himself claimed, as a new kind of "prose fiction," documentary- or realist fiction, is, in my opinion, not illustrative of the larger significance of his oeuvre (Biggsby, "Sebald" 153, 156). The sheer amount of metafictional commentary found throughout Sebald's novels heightens the reader's critical awareness of the texts as fictional constructs. No matter the relatively realistic mimesis of his novels, they incessantly demand a questioning stance as to their ontology and our understanding of them. As Jens Brockmeier argues,

Sebald's writing not only undermines traditional boundaries between genres and styles, it does not just play with them, offering artful riddles or puzzles, or new variations – such as a "semi-documentary," an "authentically fictionalized," or a "semi-fictional" novel. Rather, it explicitly rejects the distinction between fiction and non-fiction; it "seems to occupy an undefinable (indefinable) space vis-à-vis travel writing, history, fiction, non-fiction, and autobiography." (Pane 37)⁶⁰

Without naming it, Brockmeier describes Sebald's novels in terms of *historiographic metafiction* (Hutcheon). This term connotes a specifically historically aware and critical brand of postmodern fiction, one that deconstructs "master narratives" (e.g., East German anti-fascism and [West] German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) and rewrites history from below or from a marginalized perspective. Speaking about memory in *Austerlitz*, Brockmeier states, "the book outlines remembering as an uncertain, speculative, and ever-ongoing search," not unlike the provisional, questioning stance of historiographic metafiction vis-à-vis master narratives such as German cultural memory and history (348). At the center of Sebald's style is a resistance to closure, teleological narratives, and memory and history as stable and reliable discourses.⁶¹ What I find particularly surprising in much of the critical literature on Sebald's work is the acknowledgment of its

⁶⁰Pane cited in Brockmeier 350.

⁶¹ Huysen addresses the problem in reading Sebald as part of a typical literary history of postwar Germany and argues that such categorization (moments of historical watershed, "new beginnings," etc.) is unstable and artificial ("Rewritings").

postmodern stylistics and, at the same time, a lack of discussion of this feature, which leads to an undermining of many of the critics' own claims. In reading his novels, one cannot ignore the fragmentation, displacement (most of the novels' action is not located in Germany [!]),⁶² intertextuality, breakdown of metanarratives (in Lyotardian sense⁶³), and the juxtaposition of witness and victim, to name a few facets.

What does the fictionalizing of factual, real-world people and places signify for Sebald's novels? Taken together, the numerous factual distortions, textual and intertextual displacements, and ambivalent and manipulated photographs and images in Sebald's Holocaust fiction disrupt the reading process, deceptively appear to be true and, at the same time, sow seeds of doubt and uncertainty in the reader. The *semiotics* of the texts – not to be confused with the more surface, *symbolic* layer – reflect differing *modes of perception*, which correspond to the German context and (an implied) well-read, literary conversant German audience. Reading beyond the signs and syntax (the *symbolic*) of the novels, the specific references – intertextual and real – reveal a pattern of fictional treatments of reality, whose presence create uncertainty about the narratives themselves in a highly self-reflexive manner. Precisely this uncertainty or doubt confronts the reader with both the absence of similar stories about Jewish suffering and German attempts to discuss the Nazi past from the victims' point of view.

In this chapter, I review the scholarship on Sebald's literature and situate my argument accordingly. I then lay out competing discourses on victimization, memory and representation in post-*Wende* Germany and relevant debates in the following order: the controversy surrounding Koeppen's rewriting of a Jewish Holocaust survivor's diary, the

⁶² One study that does take into consideration the "impossibility of return" in Sebald is Garloff ("Emigrant").

⁶³ See Lyotard, *Postmodern* xxiii-xxv, 37-41.

debate about Germans as victims of the Allied bombing campaign during WWII ('Opfer' debate), and the controversial faux memoir of Benjamin Wilkomirski. As will become clear in the course of my analysis, several of these debates and controversies are interrelated and inform one another as *signifying processes* (i.e., literature and public discourse), and, in turn, affect the *modes of perception* exhibited by Sebald's novels. Further, these debates are realized and received disparately in the American and German arenas, which allows me to distinguish what is uniquely German about Sebald's literary contributions to these debates, but also how they diverge from both contexts, due to Sebald's level of remove, geographically, as a German foreign national living in England, and temporally, as both a member of the postwar generation and having left Germany prior to the radicalization of his generation during the student movement of the late 1960s. Finally, I analyze the implications of my findings in terms of Sebald's literary response(s) to the Holocaust and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

APPROACHES IN EXISTING SCHOLARSHIP TO SEBALD'S LITERATURE

In what follows, I situate my project within several, prominent thematic approaches to Sebald's literature in scholarly research on his work. These themes include memory (e.g., postmemory), trauma, "empathic unsettlement," *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, and ethics in representation. Despite how each approach contributes to understanding the depth and complexity of Sebald's literary project, they fall short in addressing the literariness of Sebald's novels as what I see to be the greatest contribution of Sebald's work: ethical representation.

Memory

Many scholars have written about memory (cultural, traumatic and postmemory) in Sebald's literature. Although it has been argued that Sebald's work exhibits qualities of

postmemory⁶⁴ in its conceptualization and portrayal of memory,⁶⁵ I argue that this represents a lack of recognition of the systematicity of ethical concerns in his literature – the prominent differentiation of victims and non-victims (i.e., Jewish and non-Jewish), not to mention generations (e.g., Austerlitz and Aurach as both 1 and 1.5 [Suleiman], unnamed narrators as 2), forecloses the possibility of trans-generational transmission of trauma.⁶⁶ Austerlitz and Aurach are survivors of trauma, one caused through separation from their parents prior to their murder in the Holocaust.

In his compelling essay about (post)memory and photography in *Die Ausgewanderten*, J.J. Long “brackets the problem of referential authenticity” in order to

⁶⁴Hirsch, *Frames*. Insisting on the actuality of trans-generational transmission of trauma – “postmemory” – Hirsch claims that media images depicting traumatic events, such as photographs, possess the capability of inducing symptoms of trauma in those who view them, especially in tandem with prior knowledge of the Holocaust and the horrors experienced. This is generally not the case in the families of survivors; rather, it is the silence between the survivor generation and their children that leads to a fantasizing or inferring of the traumatic experiences of their parents by the younger generation.

⁶⁵Cf. Anderson; Crownshaw; Baumgarten; Hirsch, “Generation”; and Long, “History.”

⁶⁶A case for the degree of Holocaust as “affect” upon the postwar generation of Germans (i.e., second-generation of the perpetrators) could be made. However, postmemory is not to be confused with witnessing the past or even the (position of the) witness him-/herself (i.e., “witness by adoption” [see Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1996]). According to Erin McGlothlin, the “second-generation” was a term coined by Alan Berger (*Children of Job: American Second-Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust*) that refers to that group of writers whose parents were either perpetrators or victims of the Holocaust (7-8). McGlothlin also cites Hirsch’s “Surviving Images” article (Hirsch 8-9) in defining postmemory: “For Hirsch the hallmarks of postmemory are the epistemological and experiential distance from the traumatic events themselves as well as the repeated attempts on the part of the second generation to bridge this divide through imagination and representation...” (McGlothlin 10). McGlothlin also labels the work she analyzes as “second-generation Holocaust literature,” under whose rubric Sebald’s work could fall due to his father’s questionable war activities (13). Moreover, she, like Sigrid Weigel, considers the children of both survivors and perpetrators as belonging to the so-called “second-generation” (14, 17-18). She also addresses the problem of sharply divided generations in using the terms “first-” and “second-generation,” which is the marginalizing of other victimized groups (i.e., children during the Shoah, the so-called “1.5 Generation” [Suleiman]). Dominick LaCapra’s “empathic unsettlement” addresses the problem of positionality (i.e., relationship to the “other”) in bearing witness to a victim of trauma (e.g., as a psycho-therapist). LaCapra defines “empathic unsettlement” as “[b]eing responsive to the traumatic experience of others, notably of victims...which should have...effects in writing which cannot be reduced to formulas or method” (*Writing* 41). The most apparent flaw with any attempt to analyze Sebald’s novels as an expression of LaCapra’s concept, however, is the lack of any positioning of the narrators vis-à-vis the traumatized protagonists (i.e., in the role of therapist for the victims) – there is no indication of the narrators’ reactions, nor do they offer any opinions about the victims’ traumatic experiences and memory.

concentrate his analysis on what the text does (118). Whereas Long sees in “any attempt to redraw the boundaries [between fact and fiction] that the author systematically effaces” an impoverishment of the novel, I examine how this ontological confusion contributes to an overall effect on the reader (e.g., instills critical awareness and scrutiny of the text as construct). Further, Long utilizes Hirsch’s concept of the “affiliative gaze,” which is problematic when viewed from a German perspective insofar as the traumatic memory of Jews becomes the postmemory of non-Jewish Germans (129). To apply postmemory in this manner is to imply a traumatized non-Jewish German narrator, whose identification with traumatized and non-traumatized individuals alike risks unethical appropriation of another’s suffering, i.e., idiopathic identification⁶⁷ (131). Similarly, Richard Crownshaw’s article evaluating photos as “ethical interventions” into postmemory in *Austerlitz* problematizes the relationship of narrative reconstruction of Austerlitz’s “highly convoluted memories” to the narrator’s text, but overlooks the underlying problem of narrative reliability, which, I argue, fundamentally changes our understanding of the texts (216). If, as Crownshaw claims, the protagonist’s memories are so convoluted, how can the narrator re-present them in the first place, and how does this affect our reading and understanding of the text itself? In fact, Crownshaw concludes his article without addressing what “ethical” is or looks like, much less how postmemory can be ethical. On the other hand, Susanne Veas-Gulani looks at Sebald’s *Luftkrieg und Literatur* as evidence for the author’s personal experiences of postmemory, tracing evidence of this through his life and work, but her insistence on Sebald’s use of photos in

⁶⁷ See Kaja Silverman, *Threshold* 18-23. Silverman distinguishes between two types of identification: heteropathic and idiopathic. The former is a non-transgressive means of projecting oneself into the subjectivity of the other that remains excorporeal, and the latter is a manner of identification in which the subjectivity of the “other” is not granted its subjectivity in and of itself and is therefore “devoured” or annihilated.

his texts as symptomatic of postmemory is to dismiss their literariness in favor of a more biographical reading.⁶⁸

Discussion of postmemory in Sebald's novels requires further scrutiny, I argue, due to the high degree of ambivalence of the texts themselves in relation to the sources of trauma; the victims' parents are absent from their lives – murdered in the Holocaust – and the photographs depicted in the texts were, for the most part,⁶⁹ “taken” by the protagonists and the narrators. The uncommented nature of the embedded images, however, prevents any direct correspondence of image to text other than an assumption on the reader's part that they originate from the Jewish protagonists. Furthermore, the actual places visited, but not their images, are what trigger traumatic recall in the victims; the narrators who witness the testimonies of said victims are not themselves traumatized – or at least, there are few indications that this could be the case.

Although Sebald's novels include photographs and other images, only one of these is explicitly indicative of violence,⁷⁰ and, excepting this one instance, the narrators are neither exposed to violent images nor, in the case of *Austerlitz*, family photographs within the narratives. In terms of other images in the texts, they are mostly of the pre-WWII era, and only indirectly or tangentially reference the horrors to come by the conspicuous absences of those photographed. Moreover, the protagonists who are of the

⁶⁸ To be entirely fair, Vees-Gulani's principal source is a long essay comprised of a series of lectures given by Sebald at a university in Zurich in 1997. Thus, it is not too surprising to take up a more biographical reading of this text, but it is more problematic to extend it to his fiction. Interestingly, Vees-Gulani (*Trauma and Guilt*) criticizes the application of trauma theory used by Cathy Caruth, whose work has been numerous cited as an authoritative source on the nature of trauma and used in reference to Sebald's work, though I prefer the more systematic approach, i.e., pathology undertaken by Ruth Leys (*Trauma*).

⁶⁹ There are several exceptions to this, including the photo allegedly taken outside of Bergen-Belsen in *Ringe des Saturn*, and the iconic photo of the three women (absent from the text) at the end of *Die Ausgewanderten*, to name a couple of examples. Obviously, this is only a fictional attribution of authorship to the characters, whereas we as readers know that Sebald has compiled – and even took some of – the photos in the novels.

⁷⁰ Sebald, *RS* 78-9.

“second generation” suffer, but not as a result of viewing images, but in their experiences of space.⁷¹

Trauma

Related to postmemory in critical readings of Sebald, the theme of trauma appears time and again. Applying trauma theory to his work, however, requires careful consideration of identity, insofar as the victims of trauma and who tells their story are concerned, and how this bears upon potentially inappropriate identification on the part of the German narrators. If, as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub suggest, creating narrative about their trauma during therapy is therapeutic for victims, what must this imply about the witness to this unfolding of traumatic narrative? The ethical stakes involved in a Jewish Holocaust survivor’s recovery of traumatic memory vis-à-vis a non-Jewish German listener risks a German re-telling, one that is already always implicated in Jewish suffering, even if only indirectly. This approach also belies a particularly American or, more broadly conceived, Anglo perspective, given that the absence of the notion of guilt for the Nazi crimes is not – but should be – taken into consideration, particularly due to its ubiquity and dominance in German discourse on the past.⁷² Andreas Huyssen, in his article about repetition and “new beginnings” in German literary history, places Sebald and his novel, *Die Ausgewanderten*, and critical essay, *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, within the

⁷¹The protagonist of *Austerlitz*, Jacques Austerlitz, who was evacuated from Prague on a *Kindertransport*, regains memory repressed through trauma when he recognizes the train station at which he originally arrived in England; Max Aurach, the main character of the last narrative in *Die Ausgewanderten*, does not view images, but, as an artist, creates them, which adds another interpretive possibility for postmemory in the novel, particularly when one considers his knowledge of his parents' deaths.

⁷²One need only think of the criticism levied against those espousing German victimization and the right to express it (e.g., *Opfer-Debatte*) as an explicitly revisionist project. The burden of guilt still plays a role in discussion of the German past in the present, evidenced further through the controversies surrounding the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, “Crimes of the Wehrmacht” exhibits, and the Walser-Bubis debate. For a theorizing of the differences between guilt and shame, and how this affected the development of Germany’s fraught relationship to its Nazi past, see Assmann and Frevort, *Geschichtsvergessenheit*.

second, i.e., postwar generation, who are affected by transgenerational transmission of trauma. Huyssen suggests that Sebald works through, in his work, the traumatic experience he never had (“reinscription of the trauma by means of quotation,” 156), and reads him as symptomatic of repetition in German discourse about the Nazi past – that there is no stable, historical, postwar literary progression –, which does not account for the significance of traumatic experiences depicted in his texts.⁷³ Katja Garloff’s important article about the role of exile and emigration in narratives of trauma in *Die Ausgewanderten* reads this novel through Giorgio Agamben⁷⁴ and his view on the impossibility of witnessing concomitant with speaking for those who cannot. Indeed, Garloff views the narrator as an emigrant-witness for the Jewish protagonists, alluding to his unique positionality, yet she does not further tease out how the narrator’s status – much like Sebald’s own – affects his perspective. Citing the displacement of all emigrant-characters in the novel (narrator included) and by invoking Agamben, Garloff analyzes what she refers to as “a series of impossible returns and missed encounters” that lead to the “possibility of literary testimony” through the distance afforded by emigration (“Emigrant” 77-9). Although a critical contribution to trauma in Sebald’s work, the essay does not consider the ethical implications of the “gap” between descendants of victims and perpetrators, though she concludes by acknowledging – on the example of the novel’s final passage – “that literary testimony is just as questionable as it is necessary.”⁷⁵

The most extensive study on both trauma and memory in Sebald’s novels is Anne Fuchs’ *Die Schmerzenspuren der Geschichte*. Employing a more historiographical

⁷³ That is to say, Huyssen does not address the fact that a “witness by imagination” such as Sebald is ethically problematic in of itself.

⁷⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, New York: Zone Books, 1999.

⁷⁵ To quote Garloff, “But this is not, as [Ernestine] Schlant argues, because he restores a voice to the voiceless, but because he accepts the the gap between the speechless and speaking – and between the descendants of victims and of perpetrators – as the irrevocable condition of [Sebald’s] own literature” (88).

approach while addressing recent trauma theory and Sebald's writings on the "natural history of destruction," Fuchs places Sebald in the role of a cultural historian not unlike Walter Benjamin. The "kompensatorisches Gedächtnis"⁷⁶ that she discusses in the title figure of *Austerlitz* and its similarities to postmemory are not as convincing in light of the protagonist's status as a survivor and not a member of a subsequent generation, as well as the difficulty in treating the author as affected by postmemory (as I critiqued in the preceding section on memory). Fuchs does connect the mediated nature of Austerlitz's traumatic history to the narrative instance to the identification of the narrator with the protagonist, but she does not discuss the implications for the reader (32). Although Fuchs's analysis is extensive and illuminating in terms of cultural memory, self-reflexivity and intertextuality ("Vernetzungsaesthetik") – what she refers to as Sebald's "Ethik der Erinnerung" –, it only briefly reflects upon the problem of empathy, identification and the role of the narrators in Sebald's work (32-5).

Certainly there are many other critical works that address the use of trauma in Sebald's work, but they tend to follow Freudian (e.g., melancholia), psychoanalytical and postmemory approaches, which do not question the ethical problem of a non-Jewish German exhibiting signs of affect as a result of interacting with Jewish survivors. This displacement of trauma onto the German narrator needs to be viewed as a fundamental problem of the narrator – whether or not the characters exhibit classic characteristics of trauma and traumatic memory or are able to testify to those experiences still does not rehabilitate reading Jewish suffering through a German lens or filter. Precisely this complicity on the part of the reader, as implied in such approaches, is very problematic in the German context. As I show in my analysis of Sebald's novels, their constructedness

⁷⁶ Fuchs 47-8.

disallows for anything less than a questioning of the entire literary enterprise, which instantiates a dialectic between open-endedness and closure, resistant to a final settling of the Nazi past's legacy in contemporary Germany.

Empathic Unsettlement

Some scholars have elaborated on the distanced relationship of the novel's narrator to the protagonist as evoking Dominick LaCapra's notion of "empathic unsettlement" while others have concerned themselves with speech reported by the narrator.⁷⁷ LaCapra defines "empathic unsettlement" as "[b]eing responsive to the traumatic experience of others, notably of victims...which should have...effects in writing which cannot be reduced to formulas or method."⁷⁸ I would argue that, in the case of Sebald's literature, fluctuations in narrative levels and voice problematize the imposition of LaCapra's model on his work. In addition, LaCapra's term implies a relationship in which an exchange occurs, though it is rather difficult to locate the response(s) of the unnamed narrator of Austerlitz; there are no conversations per se; rather, there are monologues given by Austerlitz with occasional narration by the narrator about his travels, etc.

Since "empathic unsettlement" requires that a person (analyst/listener) is in direct contact with the victim of trauma, the reader cannot be said to experience "empathic

⁷⁷Long, "Disziplin"; Fuchs; and Aliaga-Buchenau.

⁷⁸LaCapra, *Writing* 41. In his most recent book, LaCapra sets the parameters for what 'empathic unsettlement' does and does not entail (*Limits* 65-6). LaCapra is careful to note that the "secondary witness," be it a therapist, psychologist or other type of listener, to the victim's testimony regarding his/her traumatic experience(s) must be careful not to identify him-/herself with the victim. That is, s/he must maintain the boundary of the experience of the "other" (the victim) – the listener realizes the experiences and their affect on him/her are not his/her own. To contextualize his usage of this term further, LaCapra concerns himself with the subject-object relationship, potential for unethical identification and secondary traumatization in the therapist/patient interaction.

unsettlement.” Rather, s/he can feel empathy towards the suffering of the Jewish survivor-protagonists, but also realizes that the protagonists’ experiences are not his or her own. Certainly, there is an emotional response on the part of the reader, which is activated through the knowledge that the protagonists are Jewish Holocaust survivors. However, a respectful and critical distance is instantiated between the reader and protagonists vis-à-vis the unnamed German narrators, whose problematic identification with the protagonists precludes an ethical response to their testimony. On the other hand, the reader experiences – through the novels’ language of uncertainty – what Kaja Silverman termed “heteropathic identification,”⁷⁹ which is an acknowledgment that the experiences of the “other” are not one’s own (Silverman quoted in LaCapra, *Writing* 40).

LaCapra also states that “empathic unsettlement poses a barrier to closure in discourse and places in jeopardy harmonizing or spiritually uplifting accounts of extreme events from which we attempt to derive reassurance or a benefit,” which, however, is an issue of the American context (*Writing* 42). To this point, I concede that Sebald’s work does bear resemblance to “empathic unsettlement,” but requires a slightly differentiated approach, one that takes into consideration the use of self-reflexivity – among other literary strategies – and the author’s positionality in interpreting his work.⁸⁰

⁷⁹I would like to thank my dissertation advisor, Dr. Pascale Bos, for pointing out this term to me, the definition for which I found in an article by Victoria Elmwood, which refers to Kaja Silverman quoted in Marianne Hirsch (“Projected”). Silverman coins this term to mean “feeling and suffering with another” in connection with second generation Holocaust survivors (i.e., children of Holocaust survivors), but warns of the potential of “appropriative identification” (Silverman quoted in Hirsch, “Projected” 9,17). It is this “appropriative identification” that makes me disinclined to apply Silverman’s concept to Sebald’s literature.

⁸⁰Sebald notes in his collection of essays on Austrian literature, that “[d]ie Beschreibung des Unglücks schließt in sich die Möglichkeit zu seiner Überwindung ein” (“the description of misfortune includes in it the possibility of its overcoming,” my trans.) (*Unglücks* 12). The melancholic tone of Sebald’s work certainly forecloses the possibility of a transcendental or “redemptive” reading of his texts.

Vergangenheitsbewältigung

Several critics thematize the German notion of “mastering the (Nazi) past” as the main focus or goal of Sebald’s literature. While I agree that this concept informs his work to a large degree, I contend that it works against the notion of closure implicit in the term. In her dissertation, Katra Byram takes a historical perspective in examining the notions of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and ethics, citing the linguistic and discursive structures available to narrator and his motivations in telling the story. Byram sees trauma as the founding aspect of the narrator’s and protagonist’s relationship, and reads, rightly so, the prevalence of discussion of the Nazi past in 1990s Germany as determining the structure of Sebald’s texts to a degree. However, I disagree with her interpretation of the narrator in *Austerlitz* as exhibiting symptoms of a trauma originating in the Holocaust and displacing the trauma through a “narrative fetishism,” and thus unable to come to terms with it (197-8). Without saying so explicitly, Byram’s study presumes the legibility of postmemory for inscribing trauma on an individual who did not experience the trauma first-hand (190-2). Although the novel appears to corroborate this kind of reading, it is too straight-forward in a sense, particularly in light of the high degree of meta- and self-reflexivity I find to be in the text. In addition, Byram reads the incredible feat of reproducing the conversations between the narrator and Austerlitz as somehow alleviated through the occasional expression of self-doubt as to whether or not the recollection is accurate (200-2). How is it then possible for the narrator to reproduce, verbatim, hundreds if not thousands of lines on subjects the narrator knows little about? This blind spot does not, however, detract from a very persuasive argument for German traumatization in the novel.

Ethics

Several critics do mention – and some explore – questions of ethics in Sebald’s work, yet none of the scholarship explicitly investigates the ethical consequences of his literature’s aesthetics, especially in terms of its meta-reflexivity, relying instead on unsupported or unexplained characterizations to this end. Stuart Taberner, with a very perceptive comment about Sebald’s positionality as an “outsider” in the Anglo scholarship, shows why it is important to consider Sebald and his work as specifically German and in dialogue with German discourse about the past, which is also a major point of differentiation in this dissertation (181-3). Sebald, according to Taberner, is not above or beyond the debates of contemporary Germany (“transcendant”), and his work gives voice to nostalgia for the German-Jewish symbiosis of the past. Though convincing in his argument about the latter point, Taberner’s claim that the narrator of *Austerlitz* forecloses identification with the Jewish survivor-protagonist and preserves his testimony much like an archive or archivist, does not adequately demonstrate how declarative markers in and of themselves denote an ethical narrative component – missing also is the fact of said testimony’s transmission despite what would be a superhuman feat of eidetic memory and its recall (198). In another essay, Garloff reads *Austerlitz* through the frame of trauma in order to discover how a non-Jewish German narrator can speak for a Jewish Holocaust survivor (“Task” 158). She shows how, through the use of photographs, “visual immediacy,” i.e., memory is neither an indicator of authenticity nor more truthful than narrative memory (164). Whereas Garloff views the narrator’s seemingly traumatic symptoms during his visit to Fort Breendonk as indicative of his victimhood and complicity in past violence, I suggest that this invokes postmemory, given that the narrator, contrary to what Garloff suggests, was not old enough during the Third Reich to experience fascism in a traumatic way (160). Furthermore, Garloff sees in the

relationship between the narrator and Austerlitz a model of how traumatic memory functions, is transmitted and who is granted the authority to tell the story, its “moments of symbolic investiture” (166-9). By contrast, my study does not view the protagonist as a figure independent of the narrator, but rather as only existing as a contingent part of the narrative – in other words, Austerlitz’s existence is contingent upon the reliability of the narrator. At no point, in fact, does Garloff come back to the problem of ethics (speaking for the Jewish victim) that she suggests in the beginning of her essay, despite her discussion of the narrator as textual device (distancing, mediation, authority versus authenticity) and literary character (therapist, condition for instantiation of the story).

Deane Blackler’s monograph on the disobedient and inquisitive reader of Sebald’s literature is compelling and represents the most extensive contemplation of ethics in the narrative instance in his work. Whereas Blackler explores the effects of triggering contingent associations and, thereby, deeper meanings about Sebald’s four novels in the reader, the present analysis examines the effects on the reading process in ontological terms – that is, the shattering of the mimetic world and sharp return to the world of the reader, i.e., outside of the novel. Blackler’s investigations preface, as has been done elsewhere (Friedrichsmeyer), the multiple meanings and interpretations implied in the novels, and she views the reader as a kind of “traveling companion.”⁸¹ I do agree with her assessment, however, that “Sebald also establishes a narrative that gives postmodern literary discourse pause to reconsider fiction, and its poetic potential, as art, offering truth” (27). In fact, it is this postmodern literariness that is so essential to my reading of Sebald against the grain of (auto)biographical readings.

⁸¹ Prager, Brad. “Rev. of *Reading W. G. Sebald: Adventure and Disobedience*, by Deane Blackler. *H-Net*. Humanities and Social Sciences Online, Apr. 2009. Web. 18 Sept. 2011. < <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=23930>>.

In a refreshing approach to ethics in Sebald's literature, Ana-Isabel Aliaga-Buchenau examines *Die Ausgewanderten* in terms of presence and absence of the narrator in this "fictional autobiography" – the occasional disappearance of the narrator from the narrative structure, the absence of the Holocaust as subject matter, and the lack of the narrator's own background and story of emigration. Useful to my own analysis, Aliaga-Buchenau discusses the use of subjunctive, speech indicators ("sagte er"), translation and the narrator's own doubting of his ability to tell the emigrants' stories in order to question the reliability of the narrator; his strong presence undermines authenticity and destabilizes the narrative (144-8). In fact, her discussion of the disappearance of the narrator's voice and the illusion of immediacy of the emigrants grants their stories authenticity, yet does not reflect upon the effects on the reader in terms of narrative rupture (148-52). This essay does not address the implications of the ethical difficulties inherent in such a representation, but, importantly, it does point to the unreliable nature of memory in Sebald's texts, one of the main points of departure in the current study.

A slightly different approach is that of Lilian Furst in her treatment of Sebald's "realism" in *Die Ausgewanderten*. Invoking the realist devices of photography, real place names and time, she convincingly demonstrates the novel's undercutting of realistic representations, which forms the basis of a general atmosphere of uncertainty. This is, moreover, increased through the uncertainty that a myriad of extensive descriptions of associatively or contingently connected objects and places, "details that pose a tough challenge to readers' capacity to process, let alone to accommodate them in the totality by means of interpretation," which draws the readers' attention to the constructedness of the text in tandem with its photos (225). Much as Garloff (above) describes the use of embedded narrative and admittal on the part of the protagonists as regards their ability to

remember, so too does Furst see in this a destabilization of the narrative. Although the suggestion of uncertainty as a principal manifestation of realist narrative strategies and devices is thought-provoking, it does not take the next logical step in ascertaining the implications that the “fake” photo central to the text – and her argument – provokes. Are we, as readers, supposed to more critically and skeptically engage with Sebald’s text?

Peter Morgan offers yet another look at ethics in a comparison of Günter Grass’s and Sebald’s work. Morgan sees in Grass’s treatment of Jewish characters and their painful stories a morality of representation (right or authority) by refusing to tell those stories himself, resulting in his ethics of representation (appropriateness of narrative stance or voice) (197). Interestingly, in taking up the logic of Morgan’s argument, we would have to assume that there are German-speaking Jews who can tell their stories of survival in the German context, but who, in fact, have been marginalized and thwarted in their attempts to do so. This blind spot in the argument makes it seem perfectly fine to castigate Sebald for attempting to include Jews in his literary conversation – and criticize others for their lack thereof – while valorizing a policy of non-intervention on the part of non-Jewish Germans.

Anne Fuchs also addresses the ethics inherent in Sebald’s prose. Specifically, her “ethics of memory” (*Ethik der Erinnerung*) draws upon LaCapra’s “empathic unsettlement” as an appropriate means of recognizing the suffering of the “other” without succumbing to identification with him or her. Her reading of LaCapra and discussion of the positionality of the listener sets up an ethical approach to reading Sebald; however, in her reading of the narrators of these novels, oddly enough, she does not expand her critique to include the reader, who is also implicated in the processes of identification and empathy so important to Fuchs’s analysis.

Perhaps closest in proximity to my thesis in the scholarship on Sebald is Jan Ceuppens investigation of “an ethics of representation” in *Die Ausgewanderten*. Ceuppens examines the distance generated by the novel’s narrative structure, as well as the ethical implications of this for reading, imagination and identification. Invoking Emmanuel Lévinas and Jacques Derrida, Ceuppens shows how the discourse of ethics is impacted by representation, particularly in terms of mimeticist and deconstructionist approaches, and how this can be applied to Sebald’s self-reflexive novel (i.e., meta-critical about writing and depiction). Unfortunately, the essay does not reach a conclusion in terms of what the actual ethical implications are, but instead asserts that texts are both “readable” and “unreadable,” resulting in an “undecidability”⁸² leading to the realization that the author cannot do justice to the story of the “other” (262). As I show in the next section, multiple discourses should be taken into consideration when reading German Holocaust fiction – such as Sebald’s – in order to avoid a reductionist and loosely contextualized view of specifically German difficulties in writing about the Nazi past.

⁸² Similarly, LaCapra, in his reading of Benjamin Wilkomirski’s faux memoir (*Fragments*), states that to read *Fragments* as “undecidable with respect to its status as fiction or memoir” is “unacceptable” (LaCapra quoted in Morris, “Postmemory” 298-9, 305 [footnote 22], my emphasis). Morris sees the identity of the “writing subject,” i.e., Wilkomirski (a “fraud... about whom we cannot be so certain”) as qualitatively and morally different from a writing subject “who is what he is” (298-9). This distinction – Morris cites here Berel Lang’s argument for a “moral foundation” from which to distinguish between fact and fiction in Holocaust writing (*Holocaust Representation*) – is part of a larger debate, which I cannot address adequately in this limited space (305 [footnote 23]). Nonetheless, it raises two critical points related to Holocaust fiction and ethics worthy of mention in the present study. First, the line between Holocaust memoirs and fiction is, according to Lang, a moral and not an aesthetic one, which, however, fails to take into consideration the literary qualities and value of both – Wilkomirski’s faux memoir was initially well-received by both the German- and English-speaking public and critics for its moving and “authentic” story of survival. Certainly, to claim to be a Jewish Holocaust survivor when one knows s/he is not is morally questionable; however, the case of Wilkomirski is not so clear cut, as shown in the scholarship (Mächler). Second, because Sebald’s novels problematize fact (i.e., memoir and autobiography) and fiction – they are read, problematically, as a conflation of the two, and include fictional autobiography (diaries) and autobiographical fiction (biographical details of the narrators *appear* to coincide with those of the author) – does not mean that they are of lesser literary value or must remain ambivalent, i.e., without a clear ethical thrust. The larger question is whether Holocaust fiction is ethical and morally tenable when viewed in terms of authority and identity: Is the non-Jewish author sanctioned – and, if yes, by whom – to blend facts about the Holocaust with fiction *and* remain ambivalent or “undecided”?

**REUNIFICATION, MEMORY DEBATES AND VICTIMIZATION:
*VERGANGENHEITSBEWÄLTIGUNG?***

The years 1989-1990 marked a period of historical upheaval and geopolitical change in Europe.⁸³ In Germany, the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification instigated a new wave of quasi-nationalism: the restoration of a common German identity and healing of historical “wounds” were not without their problematic assumptions. Many Germans interpreted the division of Germany after WWII as punishment for starting a war of wide-scale destruction, and, therefore, perceived German reunification as a sign that their punishment was at an end – they had atoned for the sins of their rapacious past. On the other hand, there was a concern that reunification would lead to a repeating of the mistakes of the past.⁸⁴ Precisely in its formulation of guilt and atonement, the idea of the end to punishment implied a policy of forgiving-and-forgetting or *Schlußstrich* (final stroke). Indeed, most of the early to mid-1990s discourse on the past attended to specifically non-Jewish German perspectives about the Nazi and GDR pasts, which made it very difficult for Jewish voices to be heard.⁸⁵

The reunification of Germany required a lot of transitioning, both politically and economically, and led to a more future-oriented perspective that did not dwell overly long

⁸³The collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Block transformed the political map of Europe through the opening of borders, the establishment of many new nation-states and the rekindling of previously suppressed ethnic and religious conflicts, such as in the Balkans. The previously long-standing division of Eastern and Western Europe due to the Cold War evaporated, yet the process of forging new political and economic ties between the former enemy blocks has been a lengthy one.

⁸⁴Jens Jessen quotes Günter Grass (*Deutscher Lastenausgleich: Wider das dumpfe Einheitsgebot*, Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990) in an article (“Leichtfertig,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 39, 15 February 1990, 33), as cited in Assmann and Frevert 1999 (62, 299), who mentions Joschka Fischer as holding the same opinion as Grass: “Der deutsche Einheitsstaat, der einmal zu Auschwitz geführt hat, muss für immer verhindert werden, denn er werde wieder zu Auschwitz führen.”

⁸⁵In 1990, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir criticized the rise in Neo-Nazism as a sign that Germans were neglecting their duty to remember the Holocaust. Shamir called on the GDR to publicly acknowledge its shared responsibility for the Nazi past, which it did in April 1990 (Fischer and Lorenz 274).

on the past – at least initially.⁸⁶ This tension, between moving on from the past – *Schlußstrich* – and preserving memory of the past in the present, defined much of the 1990s, during which Sebald wrote his novels and which, moreover, is particularly problematized in his work. However, a distinction here needs to be made between what *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* means, considered from various perspectives.

The notion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is neither well defined in terms of what it actually looks like nor how one accomplishes it. In the German context it can be interpreted as mourning for victims (including memorializing the past), integrating the Nazi past into national identity and memory, eradicating traces of Nazism (e.g., anti-Semitism) in contemporary Germany, moving forward and not dwelling on the past, and making amends or restitution to those persecuted and victimized during the Third Reich. Implicit in the concept is a resolution of tension about and, effectively, closing the door on the past (*Schlußstrich*). These ideas about how to “come to terms with the past” have changed over the past sixty-seven years and differ according to positionality and various identities, such as non-Jewish and Jewish, perpetrator and victim, West- and East German, those persecuted for religious/ethnic versus political ideology, victims of the war (e.g., POWs) and Allied saturation bombing, historians/intellectuals and laypersons, and the political left and right,⁸⁷ which inform how the past is viewed and how to work through it. In reunified Germany, then, the conflicting ideas of what working through the

⁸⁶The jubilation of new-found freedoms for many former citizens of the GDR, was balanced, I suggest, by the wholesale writing-off of East German history, memory and way of life as largely irrelevant. In 1989, similar to 1949 when the two German states were established, there was a push to put the past behind and start anew – a tabula rasa not unlike the earlier *Stunde Null* of 1945. Also, as was the case in the 1950s and again in the 1990s, normalization and the focus on German suffering and memory obscured the victimization of Jews and other groups persecuted during the Third Reich. This also had the effect of relegating the persistence of anti-Semitism and other aspects of Nazism that yet lingered in Germany to the background while concentrating more on German-German identity.

⁸⁷This list is not meant to be exhaustive, considering that there many other possibilities and combinations that I have not mentioned here.

past entails resulted in several heatedly contested debates, giving evidence to the ambivalence of this concept's meaning.

The political reorientation of the former GDR presupposed a rewriting of the Nazi past in accordance with the West German perspective – the Nazi past had been relegated to the FRG as the successor state of Nazi Germany by the GDR through its lack of incorporation into the GDR's "master narrative," and thus, not worked through.⁸⁸ For example, sites of memory for the GDR were reconceptualized to fit the West German narrative about the past, including concentration camps and memorials which, up to that point, had been dedicated to the memory of anti-fascist resistance fighters, obscuring the identities of all others persecuted by the Nazi regime. However, the resentment generated by former West Germany's "hijacking" of the reunification process, I argue, complicated the situation. Even one of the most famous West German novelists, Günter Grass, protested the manner in which the West German "annexation" of the former GDR took place.⁸⁹ Former East Germans were confronted with the collapse and dismissal of their way of life, and had to come to terms not only with their own victimization, i.e., oppression through the tyranny of a dictatorship, but also that induced by former West Germany,⁹⁰ which found expression in works such as Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt* and Thomas Hettche's *Nox*, respectively.⁹¹

⁸⁸For a good comparison of the "master narratives" of competing national memories during the postwar period, see Herf.

⁸⁹Grass criticized the "Anschluss" of the GDR by the FRG in an article in *Die Zeit* ("Kurze Rede eines vaterlandslosen Gesellen," *Die Zeit* 9 February 1990: 7) and also in his recently published diary of that time period (*Unterwegs von Deutschland nach Deutschland - Tagebuch 1990*, Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), and argued instead for a confederation of the two states on the basis of a Kulturunion. See also *Deutscher Lastenausgleich: Wider das dumpfe Einheitsgebot. Reden und Gespräche*, Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990. A somewhat later novel by Grass, *Ein weites Feld*, reflected critically on the events following the fall of the Berlin Wall up to German reunification, as well as the erosion of identity, history and memory.

⁹⁰For example, the Treuhandanstalt and the privatization of much of the GDR economy from 1990-94 (some 8,000 formerly state-controlled firms were reorganized and sold to mostly Western entrepreneurs) was perceived to be "selling-out" former East Germans who lost their jobs in the transition to capitalism. Also, the systematic renaming of streets in East Berlin and the condemnation and eventual demolition of

The entire post-reunification German cultural and political atmosphere was heavily inflected by Germany's problematic relationship to its past in terms of identity (perpetrators and victims), differing generational experiences and (Nazi) cultural legacies (e.g., anti-Semitism), the latter of which was depicted in Grass's *Im Krebsgang*. A trend in historiography in the early 1990s was to compare the two "dictatorships" of Germany – that of the SED, i.e., GDR and that of the Third Reich – and discuss the *doppelte Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (double mastery of the past).⁹² This problematic comparison relativized – much like conservative historians in the Historikerstreit⁹³ – the uniqueness of the Holocaust and, moreover, implied that the two forms of government were similar incarnations of totalitarianism, which ignored the genocidal aspect of the Nazi regime (!). The fact that it was largely a product of historians' work – a fact that distinguishes the German context from that of the United States – casts a shadow, I contend, over later, conservative stances on debates about the Nazi past in the 1990s.

the *Palast der Republik* met with stiff opposition and criticism, as these acts were viewed as symbolic of Western cultural imperialism by leftists/socialists in the former GD.

⁹¹East Germans thus saw themselves as doubly victimized, which, I contend, contributed to the competing discourse on victimization in the Berlin Republic (Wolf; Hettche). Wolf was criticized for not criticizing the authoritarian regime of the GDR, but which, in my opinion, is problematic considering it was written at a time (1979) that Stasi surveillance was ubiquitous (she was watched until the fall of the Berlin Wall despite her favored position as a recognized writer) and such writing would be treasonous (she was also a firm believer in the project of socialism). On November 26, 1989, Wolf, Stefan Heym and other GDR citizens gathered to make an appeal for the continuation of a socialist state ("Für unser Land"), the alternative being:

[...]dass, veranlasst durch starke ökonomische Zwänge und durch unzumutbare Bedingungen, an die einflußreiche Kreise aus Wirtschaft und Politik in der Bundesrepublik ihre Hilfe für die DDR knüpfen, ein Ausverkauf unserer materiellen und moralischen Werte beginnt...

(<<http://www.ddr89.de/ddr89/texte/land.html>>)

On the other hand, Hettche, a West German author, specifically addresses the night of the fall of the Berlin Wall not as a happy occasion (i.e., victory of the West over the East), but, rather, as a painful opening of a scar. His novel characterizes the city as feminine, uses corporeal metaphors to impart the psychical and physical violence of November 9, 1989, and employs sado-masochistic imagery to underscore the "violent sex act" of reunification in his bleak postmodern novel (Gerstenberger, "Bodies" 136-9).

⁹²For an overview of historiographical approaches and what this term implies, see Faulenbach.

⁹³ For overviews of this extremely important academic debate, see Evans; Augstein; and Maier.

The Nazi past, its victims, memory and representation remained flashpoints of debate and critical discussion among politicians, historians, writers and the public at large, erupting in further controversies centered on Wolfgang Koeppen's novel (republished in 1992) based on a Jewish Holocaust survivor's diary, the Holocaust memorial in Berlin (1988-2005), the "Crimes of the Wehrmacht" exhibits (1995-9), Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996), Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (1999), Wilkomirski's faux memoir (1995) and the Walser-Bubis debate (1998), but also reflected in the literature of the period.⁹⁴

The debates of this post-reunification period, I suggest, represent a convergence of competing discourses on representation, victimization and memory, in which literature and scholarly research played formative roles. The questions of who was allowed to claim status as a victim, who bore guilt for what, whose memory was to be preserved and how all were to be represented catalyzed the debates of the 1990s. Public debate about German and Jewish memory of the Nazi past has often been inconsistent in its emphases on perpetrators and victims, even going so far as to suggest that emphasis on German suffering is important for a German working through of the past, even in the absence of sufficient foregrounding of its causes.⁹⁵

In 1990s Germany, the discourse on victimization (who and how to remember) was contested,⁹⁶ particularly in the debate on the Holocaust memorial in central Berlin in

⁹⁴See Heer and Naumann (based on the exhibits produced by the Institut für Sozialforschung); Goldhagen; and Sebald, *Luftkrieg*.

⁹⁵Literature and films about German suffering (Dieter Forte's *Der Junge mit den blutigen Schuhen* [1995], Jörg Friedrich's *Der Brand* [2002], and Kai Wessel's television mini-series *Die Flucht* [2007]) have, at times, circumscribed the events which led to the bombing of German cities and the forced expulsions of Germans from eastern provinces. See Braese, "Bombenkrieg"; Hage; Kettenacker; Greiner; Naumann, "Bombenkrieg"; and Burgdorff and Habbe.

⁹⁶This discourse on victimization has its roots in the early years of the FRG, and is not a product of reunification; rather, the persistence of identification by Germans of themselves as victims of Hitler, the Nazis (fascists), the Soviets and the Allies is still an unresolved issue for many Germans.

1993. German chancellor Kohl pushed, albeit three years after reunification, to re-dedicate the Neue Wache from “Mahnmahl für die Opfer des Faschismus und Militarismus” to “[d]en Opfern von Krieg und Gewaltherrschaft” (“the victims of war and tyranny”) as a catch-all category for a central memorial for reunified Germany.⁹⁷ Kohl’s idea of what the Neue Wache memorial meant was problematic: “Die Erinnerung an den Tod von Millionen unschuldiger Menschen mahnt jeden einzelnen von uns, immer und überall aktiv für unsere freiheitliche Demokratie einzutreten.”⁹⁸ The idea that millions of “innocents” – ostensibly referring, albeit somewhat ambiguously, to the Holocaust – should serve as a reminder to be democratic seems crass, if not outright offensive from the Jewish perspective – the “millions of dead” and not murdered, is, I argue, a self-exculpatory reflex, one which obscures the root cause of the atrocities. The ambivalence of victims and perpetrators in the memorial’s inscription and symbolism (a *pieta* with its specifically Christian allegory) provoked outcries for its problematic grouping victims of the Holocaust, Hitler and totalitarianism.⁹⁹ In stark contrast to the

⁹⁷In 1931 the Neue Wache – originally designed as a guardhouse – was dedicated as a war memorial to those German soldiers who died in WWI (*Ehrenmal für die Gefallenen des Ersten Weltkrieges*). In the GDR, it was rebuilt and re-purposed as a memorial to the victims of fascism and militarism (*Mahnmahl für die Opfer des Faschismus und Militarismus*), as a site of anti-Western resistance. Kohl’s re-dedication of the site as the *Zentrale Gedenkstätte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland für die Opfer von Krieg und Gewaltherrschaft* negated the specific identities of who died and under what circumstances, raising the question of a revisionist view of German history by viewing Holocaust victims as victims of “war and tyranny” instead of as victims of a specific and intended program enacted by the Nazi regime and made possible through popular support and participation – or, at least, an unwillingness to stop the genocide. For a collection of critical views regarding the Neue Wache memorial, see Stölzl.

⁹⁸Helmut Kohl, *Einweihungsrede*, 14 November 1993.

⁹⁹Only after criticism about the mixing together of Holocaust victims and German soldiers were additional placards installed that references all victims of the Third Reich, excerpted from Weizsäcker’s speech in May 1985. This gesture intended to unify memory of victims of both halves of formerly divided Germany, but which in fact provoked a response large enough to reinvigorate discussion of and increase support for a separate memorial dedicated to Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Helmut Kohl’s push for a renewed memorial addressing all victims of “war and tyranny” at the Neue Wache in central Berlin is discussed in terms of victims’ identities and the desire to have a common memorial for the new Berlin Republic in an article by Henry Pickford (“Conflict and Commemoration: Two Berlin Memorials,” *Modernism/Modernity*, 12.1 (2005): 133-73), and is the point of departure for the renewed calls in 1993 to take up the Holocaust memorial project once more.

criticism leveled at this kind of generalizing the particularity of the victims, the subordination of specific identity in American Holocaust discourse to humanity in general (i.e., crimes against humanity) is a typical approach – as a paradoxical means to instrumentalize the atrocities for political purposes (e.g., as an argument for intervention in other genocides) while maintaining Jewish “ownership” of the discourse¹⁰⁰ –, albeit not one without its difficulties. After all, if the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s place of prominence on the National Mall in Washington D.C. is any indicator as to what degree the americanization of the Holocaust has taken place (Magid), the assimilation of Jewish suffering into cultural memory and a national narrative obscures the multiplicity of victims and effectively delimits discussion of suffering in World War II in Europe to the U.S., its allies and Jews. This rhetorical maneuver fails to account for millions of others persecuted under the Nazi regime, clearly demarcating the difference in historical understanding of these events between the U.S. and Germany.

The debate on the Holocaust memorial in Berlin indicated to what degree the population, not just of the former East but also in the West – was ambivalent. Because much of the discussion about the atrocities was absent from East German cultural practices and memory, it was difficult for many former East Germans to accept symbolic gestures made on behalf of all Germans for crimes, which lay outside the purview of the official East German master narrative and for which they felt little to no responsibility for whatsoever. There was also discussion of the hierarchy of victimization – that is, who should have a memorial built for them and whether it was appropriate that the Jewish victims were the only ones emphasized.¹⁰¹ Detractors of a central memorial, including the

¹⁰⁰ Shaul Magid, “The ‘American’ Holocaust and the American Jewish Dilemma,” *Jewcy*. Nextbook Inc., 10 March 2009. Web. 28 January 2011. <http://www.jewcy.com/arts-and-culture/american_holocaust_and_american_jewish_dilemma>.

¹⁰¹ Since completion of the memorial, memorials for homosexuals and Roma and Sinti have been installed in Tierpark in Berlin in 2008 and 2010, respectively.

authors Günter Grass,¹⁰² who believed it would not accomplish its stated goal, and Martin Walser, who perceived its presence as a monument to German disgrace, spoke out against it.¹⁰³

Much of the discussion surrounding the Holocaust memorial dealt with “coming to terms with the past,” but mostly from a non-Jewish German perspective in service to widespread resentment over “die Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will.”¹⁰⁴ Even though the memorial committee was headed by a Jewish intellectual,¹⁰⁵ and the design was that

¹⁰²Günter Grass originally supported the project and fund-raising for it (Perspektive Berlin [later called *Förderkreis zur Errichtung eines Denkmals für die ermordeten Juden Europas*,]), along with Willy Brandt, Christa Wolf and many others (Åhr 289). However, Grass later changed his mind, as can be seen in an open appeal to stop construction of the memorial on the part of Grass and many others. See “Baustopp: Appell zum Holocaust-Mahnmal,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 5 February 1998.

¹⁰³The German word used in the case of the Holocaust memorial (Denkmal) implies an occasion/object for thinking about or contemplating, but not, I argue, for symbolizing only one particular view, which may have contributed to Walser's and others' denunciations of the memorial.

¹⁰⁴The name of Ernst Nolte's 1986 article that instigated the *Historikerstreit*, I refer to the common public perception in Germany – especially as espoused by postwar and later generations of Germans – that the Nazi past represents an undue burden hindering a future-oriented outlook for Germany. This sentiment is problematic but does inform much of the opposition to the past and future construction of memorials in Germany. The postwar and subsequent generations seemed inclined to try to move on from the Nazi past – what I call a *Schlußstrichsmentalität* (close-the-door-on-the-past attitude), since it was not perceived by them to be their burden of guilt. As stated by German chancellor Helmut Kohl in a speech on January 24, 1984, before the Israeli Knesset marking the fortieth anniversary of the end of WWII, he and others of his generation were spared having to deal with the Nazi past, i.e., come to grips with the Jewish perspective and Jewish suffering, due to the “Gnade der späten Geburt.” The “mercy of [a] belated birth” did not spare the postwar generations from having to symbolically and publicly atone for and remember the Holocaust. The 1968ers were convinced that rejecting the *Tätergeneration* and their values en masse and, moreover, combating this through anti-fascist and anti-capitalist ideology (Marxism, Neo-Marxism), would lead to a freer and more democratic Germany. However, the 1968ers, for the most part, did not critically engage with their own implication in the Nazi past through the influence of their parents' generation, whose values, norms and culture had an impact on the younger generation. In other words, the turn away from the older generation did not equate to a “working through” of the Nazi past; problems such as anti-Semitism were de facto ignored instead of problematized and dealt with in a thorough manner. In a famous speech given at an award ceremony, the author, Martin Walser (*Erfahrungen*), bemoaned the apparent inability of leftist intellectuals to let go of the past, putting Walser in line with Kohl and Germans sharing this sentiment.

¹⁰⁵As a Jewish-American Holocaust scholar with expertise on such memorials, James Young was invited to head the jury which would decide the winner of the design competitions. For his account of the history of the conceptualization and construction of the memorial, see Young (*Memory's Edge* 184-223).

of a Jewish architect,¹⁰⁶ the loss of individual Jewish voices, which the Holocaust radically silenced, was still an afterthought. I read Sebald's novels as both a counterpoint to the Holocaust memorial debate and resistant to the concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ("coming to terms with the past") – a more thorough *Schlußstrich* that implies some form of attainable closure – and, furthermore, it contests notions of what German memory is (i.e., how the past is remembered, memorialized, etc.) while simultaneously alluding to what it should focus more on: Jewish suffering and memory.¹⁰⁷

REPRESENTATION OF THE HOLOCAUST IN GERMAN DISCOURSE

Although there were many debates and controversies that affected Germany's confrontation with its past, of utmost importance to the study at hand are four significant cultural-political events, which affect German *modes of perception*. The debates about the Holocaust memorial in Berlin and the Opfer-Debatte (victims debate) addressed notions of identity in terms of who was to be remembered.¹⁰⁸ The controversy surrounding the faux Holocaust memoir by Benjamin Wilkomirski underscored problematic assumptions regarding memory and representation of the atrocities. Finally, the Walser-Bubis debate extended the discussion of public memorialization practices versus individual working-through of the Nazi past, and whether the Holocaust should be

¹⁰⁶The issue of how to represent the Holocaust framed the discussions surrounding the design competitions for the memorial, and even the winning architect, Peter Eisenman, was ambivalent regarding how, specifically, the memorial should be understood. See Åhr 283-6, 296.

¹⁰⁷In *Austerlitz*, for example, the protagonist reflects upon the trend in the 1990s of building memorials as a means of "coming to terms with the past," including ruminations on architectural history and architecture's ephemeral cultural meaning despite its physical resilience and presence. This is demonstrated through his discussion of the Palace of Justice in Brussels, Fort Breendonk, and his obsession with train stations' architecture.

¹⁰⁸The intermittent focus on Holocaust victims since the end of WWII, which I discuss in Chapter Three, informs my analysis of this period precisely because it demonstrates a tension between the shifting emphasis on German victimization and suffering and that inflicted by Germans.

a permanent part of German identity or is an instrumentalization of Germany's shame. Each of these debates contributed to the creation of a particular cultural-political climate in Germany, in which competing discourses on representation, victimization/identity and memory mark critical junctures in Holocaust discourse without resolving tensions between Germans and their victims. It is in this contentious atmosphere that Sebald published his work.

To speak of the Holocaust and its representation is to engage in a debate that has developed between historians, writers and literary scholars over the second half of the twentieth century and continues up to the present day, albeit with differing outcomes and implications in the American and German contexts. How does one go about representing the past, especially one so unique, incomprehensible and resistant to portrayal? Despite the large amount of debate and discussion of the merits and shortcomings of fictional treatments of the Holocaust,¹⁰⁹ particularly in the American context, there is still considerable antipathy towards and ambivalence about the possibility of such

¹⁰⁹See Young, *Writing*; and Lang. Because Sebald's literature – the focus of my analysis – is regarded as postmodern, I would like to point to both sides of the argument as to whether (postmodern) fiction is capable of being serious literature (Hutcheon) or fails as a literary endeavor (Jameson). Further, it needs to be mentioned that the European reception of postmodernism is somewhat different from that of American critics. As opposed to American criticism (i.e., Jameson), postmodernism in Germany is not just “playful” in its application to literature – it is critical. See for example the reception of *Roman eines Schicksallosen* (*Fateless*) by Imre Kertész, including Jan Philipp Reemtsma, “Überleben als erzwungenes Einverständnis: Gedanken bei der Lektüre von Imre Kertész' „Roman eines Schicksallosen“,” *Warum Hagen Jung-Ortlieb erschlug: Unzeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod*, Munich: Beck, 2003, 220–249; Tanje Rudtke, “Eine Kuriose Geschichte': Die Pikara Perspektive im Holocaustroman am Beispiel Von Imre Kertesz' Roman eines Schicksallosen,” *Arcadia* 36.1 (2001): 46-57; Éva Tökei “Europakritik und Alterität: Das Beispiel von Imre Kertész' Roman eines Schicksallosen,” Eds. Jean-Marie Valentin, et al. *'Germanistik im Konflikt der Kulturen', Band 12: Europadiskurse in der deutschen Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft; Deutsch-jüdische Kulturdialoge/-konflikte*, Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2007 115-20; and Magnus Klaue, “Geraubte Zeugenschaft: Täter- und Opferdiskurse in der Holocaust-Literatur – mit besonderem Blick auf Kertész' „Roman eines Schicksallosen“ und Hilsenraths „Der Nazi & der Friseur“,” *Deutschlandwunder: Wunsch und Wahn in der postnazistischen Kultur*, ed. Kittkritik, Mainz: Ventil, 2007.

representation.¹¹⁰ Prior to the emergence of Holocaust studies within the field of cultural studies in the 1980s in the United States, most research was historical and archival. The field of Holocaust studies (cultural as opposed to historical¹¹¹) developed in part out of the debate on how to represent – and whether or not this is possible – and preserve memory of the atrocities committed during World War II, focusing particularly on recording, documenting and seeking to understand them. However, these emphases are context-specific – this is an American approach, which does not fit the nuances of the German context.¹¹² Initially enmeshed in identity politics in the United States, the Holocaust has been both sacralized (i.e., sanctity of survivor testimony as “the truth”) and, oddly, universalized (e.g., the Holocaust as an opportunity for learning lessons about

¹¹⁰See especially Horowitz 1997. Lea Fridman argues that the discussion of representation and the “unrepresentability” of the Holocaust detracts from a potentially more productive discourse about Holocaust writing.

¹¹¹Development of the field of cultural Holocaust studies in the U.S. essentially began in the 1980s and has expanded rapidly up to the present. Among the earliest studies on Holocaust literature (in English) are: Langer; Alvin Rosenfeld, *Double*; Ezrahi; and Bilik. In other languages (notably French and Dutch), other works on the Holocaust were produced prior to 1980 (e.g., Bier). Historians, on the other hand, have studied the atrocities as early as the 1950s-1960s in Germany (e.g., Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich [est. 1949]) and in the U.S. Notable works include Reitlinger's *The Final Solution: The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945*; Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*; Wolfgang Scheffler's *Judenverfolgung im Dritten Reich, 1933-1945*; Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (although not a historian, Arendt's stature as a prominent philosopher and her work is sufficient to warrant her inclusion in this list), and Léon Poliakov's *Harvest of Hate: The Nazi Program for the Destruction of the Jews of Europe* (originally published in French, Poliakov's book is just an example of the international nature of early research on the Holocaust). A documentary account of the liberation of the Treblinka death camp by a Soviet war correspondent, Vasilii S. Grossman, was used as evidence in the Nuremberg Trials after WWII.

It is interesting to note that most of the Holocaust studies centers are located in the United States, which welcome scholars across the disciplines. In Germany, there are several informational centers housed at concentration camp memorial sites, and a major center of study at the Fritz Bauer Institute for Holocaust Studies (Studien- und Dokumentationszentrum zur Geschichte und Wirkung des Holocaust [Study and Documentation Center for History and Impact of the Holocaust] in Frankfurt [am Main]). The trend of situating Holocaust research mainly in historical institutes and exclusively in the social sciences (as opposed to the humanities) is telling regarding the approaches employed by German scholars.

¹¹² Here I refer to the notion of the “Americanization of the Holocaust,” as discussed by several American scholars, including Alvin Rosenfeld (“The Americanization of the Holocaust,” *American Jewish Identity Politics*, ed. Deborah Dash Moore, Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2008, 45-82) and Peter Novick (*The Holocaust in American Life*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999).

human suffering and genocide to incite political action), which effectively limits who and how one can discuss or depict the subject matter.

By contrast, German scholars face a more contested memory discourse as to who was responsible and bears guilt for the atrocities, whose memory takes precedence over others, and who is allowed to claim victim status – in the U.S. discussion of victims is limited, for the most part, to Jews,¹¹³ whereas in Germany Jews, Roma, Sinti, homosexuals, those persecuted for political and religious beliefs, Germans and German prisoners of war vie for recognition. In other words, direct victims of the Nazi regime – as their declared “enemies” – and victims of the war unleashed by the Nazis compete for acknowledgement. Yet memory alone, I argue, cannot reveal the truth about the Holocaust, but it can lead to a particular truth about one individual’s experience of it. To put it differently, survivor accounts offer one way of viewing the atrocities, but they are constrained by a highly subjective personal hermeneutics of the disaster, which does not address the specifically German public’s dilemma in confronting their “collective responsibility.”¹¹⁴

As Hayden White has radically demonstrated, all forms of writing are narratives or narrative in nature, subject to narrative constraints (e.g., “emplotment”), which include subjective bias – that is, the writer imparts meaning to the (hi)story s/he writes. The text (or history, i.e., the event itself) does not signify itself independent from the writer, which implies there is no pure objectivity in writing.¹¹⁵ Another perspective, espoused by James

¹¹³ This is not to claim that all possible representations, i.e., discussions, monuments and museums (and their exhibits, e.g., the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum) are univocally concerned with Jews only; rather, as I cannot possibly attest to all of the above, I speak in terms of the *majority* of such representations.

¹¹⁴ See Jaspers, especially his differentiation between “collective guilt” and “collective responsibility.”

¹¹⁵ See White. Although historians attempt to write in an objective mode or manner, there is a mimetic aspect to this kind of narrative. Especially in the wake of the *Historikerstreit* (1986-7), German historiographic practices and writing were called into question for their biases, which were framed in terms of historical revisionism and relativism. See also Maier.

Young, explores the specific types of texts written about the Holocaust, and considers how interpretations of these texts has a direct correlation to our understanding of “not just “the facts” of the Holocaust but also their “poetic” – i.e., narrative – configuration, and how particular representations may have guided writers in both their interpretations of events and their worldly responses to them.”¹¹⁶ It seems to me that the question of representing the Holocaust in German literature is less about the ability of any one genre or style of writing to convey truth than authority based upon proximity to the atrocities (i.e., sacralization) – whether as an eyewitness or through archived material written by those involved.¹¹⁷ This, then, is my point of departure: the literariness of Sebald’s work and its function are often circumscribed in its American reception in favor of (auto)biographical readings and analyses of how well the narratives fit theoretical models of memory, melancholy, trauma, psychoanalysis, intermediality and photography, history, architecture and space. As I show in my close readings of his texts, the literary aspects of Sebald’s novels need to be placed in the forefront of critical scrutiny, in order to explore what, specifically, they do as literary constructs.

Koeppen Controversy

One particular controversy that demonstrates the sacralization, if you will, of eyewitness testimony is that of Wolfgang Koeppen’s literary rendition of a Jewish Holocaust survivor’s diary.¹¹⁸ The work, *Aufzeichnungen aus einem Erdloch*, published under the name Jakob Littner but ghost written by Koeppen in 1948, is replete with

¹¹⁶ Young, *Writing* 4.

¹¹⁷ In a recent study, which I only discovered immediately prior to completion of this project, Ruth Franklin takes up a similar argument in revisiting the merits of Holocaust fiction, but not, as in my study, focusing only on German fiction, i.e., Sebald.

¹¹⁸ Jakob Littner [Wolfgang Koeppen], *Aufzeichnungen aus einem Erdloch*, Munich: Kluger, 1948. In 1947, Koeppen's friend, Herbert Kluger, owner of a small publishing house, contracted Koeppen to prepare a diary by a Jewish Holocaust survivor for publication as literature.

liberties he took with the original text, including inventing sections, adding his own literary aesthetic, and dramatizing parts to increase tension.¹¹⁹

Shortly after its 1992 republication by the highly respected Suhrkamp (Jüdischer) Verlag, with whom Koeppen had worked since the 1950s, his problematic relationship to the Jewish survivor's (Jakob Littner's) wartime diaries was discovered.¹²⁰ Koeppen was listed as the author and Jakob Littner, whose name was incorporated into the title of the 1992 re-release, as a pseudonym. Koeppen wrote in his 1991 foreword to the reprinting: "Ich...schrieb die Leidensgeschichte eines deutschen Juden. Da wurde es meine Geschichte."¹²¹ He did not dispute that the story came from a German Jew, but denied that Littner (the name in the title!) was his name and that a manuscript, after which he modeled the text, existed. Not problematic in 1948 due to its reflection of popular sentiment about Germans as victims of the Nazis and Hitler, as well as the scant attention it received,¹²² it became controversial only after Reinhard Zachau published his research in 1999.¹²³ Ruth Klüger, denounced the novel's disingenuous "Jewish" perspective as

¹¹⁹Koeppen, Jakob. See Zachau. In his essay, Zachau compares excerpts from the original Littner text (*Mein Weg durch die Nacht*) to that of Koeppen's, pointing to a fairly faithful rendering of Littner's story, but it was not without problematic, i.e., apologetic overtones and other inconsistencies, which launched a debate in the early 2000s. Koeppen equips the narrator, Littner, with an almost profound sense of compassion for everyone involved in WWII, including the perpetrators (!). Unwilling to pass judgment, Koeppen's narrator – ostensibly Jakob Littner, though with many artistic liberties taken (i.e., fictionalized) – defers to divine justice regarding the perpetrators, claiming that he (the narrator) is unable to find an appropriate punishment for the crimes committed, i.e., the Holocaust (Zachau 117).

¹²⁰Heidsieck 289-90; Görtz cited in Basker 907. In 1985 a reprinting of the "novel" by a different publisher may have prompted the action taken by Suhrkamp to have it banned.

¹²¹Wolfgang Koeppen, "Vorwort," *Jakob Littners Aufzeichnungen aus einem Erdloch: Roman*, Frankfurt: Jüdischer Verlag, 1992.

¹²²Of Koeppen's edited literary version (i.e., co-option) of Jakob Littner's diary, "only 1,200 were sold in five years" (Lorenz, "Littner" 249).

¹²³Koeppen's changes to the original diary (the basis of Littner's later manuscript) demonstrated an unethical appropriation of a Jewish voice for apologetic purposes. These changes resulted in the instrumentalization of a Jewish survivor's testimony, exculpating Germans as a whole from the atrocities committed in their name by depicting them as victims of Hitler. Zachau systematically demonstrates the ways in which Koeppen's changes detract from Littner's original message, and, in fact, reflect Koeppen's own position – instead of that of a Jewish survivor (125-30). David Basker suggests that, "from the modification of names and the omission of certain key events that Koeppen's version was, at the very least,

nothing less than “lies,” and pointed out Koeppen’s depiction of Jews as sharing the burden of guilt for what transpired and generalizing about the perpetrators is a revisionist project.¹²⁴

Two conclusions can be drawn from this controversy. First, the initial commercial failure of the novel in its first printing in 1948, when compared to the publicity surrounding it in the 1990s, demonstrates a heightened awareness on the part of critics and increased interest in the broader German reading public for things Jewish after the *Wende* than in the immediate postwar period.¹²⁵ This suggests not only that there was little interest on the part of non-Jewish Germans in hearing about Jewish suffering in the years immediately following WWII in Germany, but also that the views espoused by Koeppen through the figure of Littner in *Aufzeichnungen* coincided with prevailing public sentiment on German (as opposed to Jewish) suffering in the late 1940s and early to mid-1990s – it was not controversial. Second, although the issue of historical revisionism in Koeppen’s book found resonance in the discourse on victims in the early 1990s, he was only criticized for not having adequately prefaced his “editorial” changes, and not for having appropriated voice of a Jewish Holocaust survivor. Thus, despite the tendentious appropriation of Jewish voices in Koeppen (and Andersch) and the refusal of

a free adaptation of any material Littner may have supplied” (“Author” 907). Furthermore, he points out the similarities between the experiences of Littner (as written by Koeppen) and Koeppen's own biography, suggesting a morally untenable stance in Koeppen's dehistoricization and mythologizing of the roots of and responsibility for the crimes committed during the Third Reich. For further and more in-depth analyses, see: Denneler; and Ward.

¹²⁴Klüger, a renowned Germanist, writer and Holocaust survivor, whose own seminal memoir (*weiter leben*) was published shortly before Koeppen’s text and received with great success in Germany, argues that the difference in how a book about a Jewish survivor's experiences during WWII and a fictional work about a Jewish survivor are received by an audience is drastic, due to the authenticity attributed by the reader to language in Holocaust memoirs/non-fiction, as opposed to literature's fictional language (“Zeugensprache” 175-7). This problem of authenticity resurfaced in the case of Wilkomirski's faux memoir, which I explore below in greater depth.

¹²⁵Yet the well-known Jewish critic, Marcel Reich-Ranitzki, in his initial review of the book (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 February 1992), was positive in his critique (Reich-Ranitzki cited in Heidsieck 290).

such literary strategy by, notably, Günter Grass,¹²⁶ there remains a tacit or passive acceptance of Germans writing fiction with Jewish characters in ethically questionable ways – not as some kind of blasphemy, but when it fosters revisionism. Indeed, the focus of German critical reception of Koeppen’s novel is its literariness, in contrast to the American emphasis on the transgression of writing fiction based on a Holocaust memoir.¹²⁷ As is becoming clear in this study, the American treatment of Holocaust literature is not conducive to explicating the value of Sebald’s work as a German attempt to aesthetically and ethically approach Jewish suffering.

‘Opfer’ Debate

Similar to Koeppen, Sebald’s work also met with criticism, the nature of which, I suggest, indicates a misapprehension of Sebald’s literary project. His 1997 series of lectures about literature on the WWII Allied bombing campaign at a university in Switzerland was published in 1999 as *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, which played a central role in the Opfer-Debatte (victims debate).¹²⁸ Sebald focuses on the alleged lack of an adequate postwar Germany literary response to suffering inflicted on Germans by the Allied bombing campaign, and lays out a literary approach to representing catastrophic and traumatic events, e.g., the air war.¹²⁹ With the appearance of his book, Sebald was

¹²⁶ For a discussion of Grass’s comments regarding writing about Jews, see Baer, Bosmajian, Cosgrove, Morgan, Moeller, Nolan and Cosgrove.

¹²⁷ See Ruth Franklin, “The Ghost Writer: Wolfgang Koeppen,” *A Thousand Darknenses: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction*, New York: Oxford UP, 2010.

¹²⁸ Sebald, *Luftkrieg*. A book which intensified the “Opfer-Debatte” is Jörg Friedrich’s *Der Brand*. See also Niven; Kettenacker; and Schmitz, Terms.

¹²⁹ Sebald discusses the “few” works written by Germans about the Allied bombing campaign, which, however, has been shown to be uninformed (Hage 119-23). In an argument suggestive of the Mitscherlich’s *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, he characterizes the “lack” of German literary depictions of the bombing as a failure on the part of the early postwar literati (see Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich). Furthermore, he links this silence to the inability to adequately come to terms with the Holocaust. In this work, Sebald demonstrates his critical, aesthetic, moral and ethical concerns in the depiction of atrocities and suffering.

immediately criticized for his misrepresentation of history and for falling into the trap of equating German suffering – the Allied bombing of German cities – with that of the victims of the Holocaust.¹³⁰ *Luftkrieg und Literatur* allegedly broke a taboo,¹³¹ whereby it was regarded as problematic to discuss the horrors experienced by Germans, due to the revisionist potential in claims made about German victimization in light of the Holocaust.¹³² This discussion was had, instead, among families and friends who suffered, but mostly within the private sphere, although several novels about the air war were published during that time.¹³³ As Bill Niven has shown, however, this taboo was a fabrication.¹³⁴ Critics were also quick to point to historical inaccuracies in Sebald's book, and their claims and ensuing discussion failed, in my opinion, to convincingly establish evidence of a popular postwar reception of literature on the air war.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ For a good overview of the criticism levied for and against Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, see Hage. An interesting synergy is pointed out in an article by Isabel Capeloa Gil between the *Historikerstreit*, Goldhagen debate and "Opfer Debatte" (327).

¹³¹ The alleged taboo – which, in fact, did not exist – was a carryover from the 1940s and 1950s when speaking of Allied saturation bombing was discouraged in public discourse due to its potentially negative depiction of the West during the Cold War. This taboo in Germany appeared to acquire legitimacy with the Eichmann and Frankfurt-Auschwitz trials of the 1960s, but also during the 1970s and the turn towards inner subjectivity ("New Subjectivity" or "Neue Innerlichkeit") in German literature.

¹³² In the period of the economic boom of the 1950s (*Wirtschaftswunder*), Sebald contends, most West Germans were less concerned with remembering the past than with rebuilding. This is also part of Schlant's argument about the silence surrounding the Holocaust in West Germany in the 1950s.

The 1990s and early 2000s saw the revival of discussion related to bombings and civilian casualties in connection with both Persian Gulf Wars, which resulted in many anti-war protests stemming from German memories of Allied saturation bombing. For a convincing argument on this topic, see Huyssen ("Legacies"). In this article, Huyssen renders explicit the connections made by the German peace movement to victims of bombings in Serbia and Baghdad, a troubling practice which equates disparate types of victims, while leaving out the fact of Germany's war of aggression that prompted the Allied bombings.

¹³³ These are the novels that critics cited to counter Sebald's notion of a literary repression of Allied bombing, written by Hermann Kasack, Hans Erich Nossack, Arno Schmidt, and Peter de Mendelssohn.

¹³⁴ See Niven, *Germans*.

¹³⁵ The sales of the much-discussed novels of the 1950s (Nossack, Ledig, Kluge) were among the most successful, but still only generated sales in the tens of thousands (Nossack's *Der Untergang* estimated to have sold 75,000 copies by Marcus Czerwionka), which seems underrepresentative of the millions of people affected by the Allied bombings (Czerwionka (282) cited in Denham's review of Nossack's *Der Untergang*).

I contend, however, that *Luftkrieg und Literatur* predominantly concerned itself with fictional representation of horrors and atrocities, especially in wake of civilian casualties from Allied bombing of Iraq and the passing away of many eyewitnesses to the Holocaust¹³⁶; a new form of addressing the Holocaust was needed. Many of Sebald's critics initially missed, I argue, the greater significance of the book, which in fact lies in its attempts to formulate an ethical mode of representing traumatic events, one which goes beyond – indeed, completes – eyewitness testimony of the Holocaust (“durch das, was sich erschließt unter einem synoptischen, künstlichen Blick”).¹³⁷ By ethical, I mean avoiding usurpation of the victims' voice(s) (e.g., for ameliorating German responsibility and guilt), clearly distinguishing between victims and bystanders and perpetrators, not over-identifying with the victims, and avoiding a voyeuristic gaze directed at their suffering. Ironically, the value of fiction in the portrayal of Jewish suffering and tales of survival were discussed by German critics after Zachau's criticism of Koeppen's Littner adaptation.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, Sebald's postulation of a new literary approach was not entirely consistent with his actual literary efforts. Indeed, the fictionalization ‘from above’ is certainly anathema to his subsequent novel, *Austerlitz*, which dwells on the up close and personal perspectives offered by the Jewish Holocaust survivor-protagonist and

¹³⁶There is a fear – among Jews, particularly in the American but also in the Israeli context – that, with the dying off of witnesses, knowledge of the atrocities will atrophy and/or disappear. I suggest that this is unjustified, because there is already a significant corpus of video and written testimony that has been preserved through institutions such as the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation and Yad Vashem, and, moreover, the amount of scholarship on various aspects of the Holocaust has steadily increased since the 1980s. Indeed, the explosion of work on memory since reunification in 1990 has made it difficult for public discussion to move beyond the Holocaust.

¹³⁷Sebald, *Luftkrieg* 33. There were a few critics who did look at Sebald's book as representing his own aesthetic agenda. See especially Presner (cf. Morgan, “Ethics”).

¹³⁸Franklin, *Thousand*.

the German narrator, although, as I argue, in narratological terms (i.e., narrative mood), Sebald's work does gain perspective and distance.¹³⁹

Furthermore, I suggest that the publication of Sebald's final novel, *Austerlitz*, should be read as a continuation of ethical literary attempts to represent trauma and memory, as embodied in his earlier novel, *Die Ausgewanderten* and in *Lufkrieg und Literatur*. The manner of indirect, peripheral ("synoptic, artificial") representation put forth in *Lufkrieg und Literatur* was re-appropriated from German (Allied bombing) to Jewish (Holocaust) suffering in *Austerlitz*, but on a more personal level and in connection with an important literary debate about a faux Holocaust memoir.

Wilkomirski Debate

In 1998, a Holocaust "memoir" published by Benjamin Wilkomirski (a.k.a. Bruno Grosjean/Dössekker) three years earlier erupted in controversy.¹⁴⁰ The powerful style and voice of the five-year-old protagonist (Wilkomirski as an alleged survivor-author) who witnesses the brutality of deportations and life in the concentration camps, and, as such offers a less nuanced child's perspective and therefore a supposedly more direct relation of the atrocities. The book has parallels to *Austerlitz* stylistically and in terms of content, and was praised and awarded several prizes, thus making the later findings of Daniel

¹³⁹ In the novels cited in *Lufkrieg und Literatur* (and its later, revised version), the narrative perspectives are on the level of the first-person narrative: in Hans Erich Nossack's *Der Untergang*, described as memoir, testimonial, report, story and documentary fiction, the account is presumably from Nossack; in Hermann Kasack's *Die Stadt hinter dem Strom*, the fictional narrator attempts to chronicle what he sees in an increasingly alien city; in Alexander Kluge's diary-based recounting of the bombing of his hometown, *Der Luftangriff auf Halberstadt am 8. April 1945*, written thirty years after the destruction of Halberstadt, the autobiographical narrator weaves together memory and prose (Scott Denham, "Review"). The focus on first-person narratives is striking as it directly contradicts the form of representation he is espousing (!).

¹⁴⁰ Wilkomirski, *Fragments*. The work was initially very positively received as authentic Holocaust literature by critics, having even been published by the Jüdischer Verlag, a subsidiary of the highly respected publisher Suhrkamp in Germany, but the "memoir" stirred up controversy in both Germany and the United States, when the Swiss journalist, Daniel Ganzfried, first called attention to inconsistencies in the allegedly autobiographical work. This led to a series of investigations as to whether the book was faked.

Ganzfried problematic in their implications – that the experience of trauma due to the Holocaust can be faked or fictionalized and appear authentic to critics, as well as Holocaust survivors themselves.¹⁴¹ The backlash against the faux memoir and Wilkomirski's continued speaking engagements, in which he insisted on his identity as a Holocaust survivor, was so severe in the American context that it was nothing short of categorical rejection and moral abhorrence and indignation. This, of course, speaks to the sacrosanct nature of Holocaust literature, i.e., memoirs as testimony, not to be disputed or questioned, partly due to fear of Holocaust denial.

Sebald's final novel problematizes memory, while acknowledging the power of fictional representation, and, in fact, incorporates meta-fictional/-reflexive strategies that are indicative of a targeted response to Wilkomirski's novel. The fact that the German reception of *Fragments* was more concerned with the book's literary qualities – as opposed to the American critics' condemnations on account of biographical (in)authenticity – suggests that the meta-critical components of Sebald's novels need to be understood as a reaction to both contexts. On the one hand, the American sacralization of survivor memoirs as *the historical truth* of the events of the Holocaust informs the manner in which Holocaust fiction – much less *German* Holocaust fiction – is interpreted; Sebald's novels play with this in their tendency to present fictional constructs as seemingly real people, places and things. On the other hand, Sebald's unique position as an outsider of sorts with respect to living extra-territorially in Great Britain, affords him the critical distance necessary to not only appreciate and enter into dialogue with

¹⁴¹ The debate surrounding Wilkomirski dealt with several issues. In the case of the ethical treatment of the Holocaust, respect for the dead and survivors, including their testimony as privileged voices of resistance and memory, acknowledging and upholding the demarcated victim and perpetrator statuses (i.e., not claiming to be a victim when one is a perpetrator or outsider to the victim identity), not over-identifying with the victims, and avoiding a voyeuristic interest in the suffering of and violence committed against the victims, are critical. Also, authenticity is tied intrinsically to representation, and does not need to be based on lived, historical experience, I suggest, in order to convey an authentic encounter with the Holocaust.

literary representations of the Holocaust, but also provides him the opportunity to assess and critique these apparently unbiased – but, as I will show, implicated and compromised with relation to German–Jewish relations – perspectives, favoring instead a more nuanced and ethical literary constellation. It is my contention that the discussion surrounding the Wilkomirski case demonstrated not only the continued sensitivity to authenticity and historical accuracy (i.e., concern about Holocaust denial), but it also confirmed the ability of fiction to powerfully portray the Holocaust and its effects on its victims in a convincing manner, which signaled a break from more traditional survivor literature of the Holocaust, and demanded a new approach to Holocaust fiction in the German-speaking world.¹⁴²

Wilkomirski's instance of false memory has generated much discussion regarding whether it is actually possible to believe fantastical, purely imagined memories to the point that they enter into one's personal narrative history of themselves and become part of their identity.¹⁴³ There is also the possibility, as supported by the consistency of Wilkomirski's writing with that of a traumatized individual – confirmed by

¹⁴² Certainly the fact that many readers, including critics, believed the work to be an authentic example of Holocaust literature raises questions as to what is required to instill authenticity into such a text (i.e., representation), whether autobiographical works of survivors in fact possess an intrinsic quality of or access to truth that allows them to bear witness to the events themselves, and even the revisionist question as to whether the Holocaust took place. Although the idea of Holocaust denial based on Wilkomirski's book as "evidence" is completely absurd, the fictional status of Wilkomirski's book does testify to the ability of fiction to convey meaning in a similar manner to memoirs, diaries and other autobiographical texts – in other words, like testimony, Holocaust fiction can represent truths about the Holocaust, even if it is not bearing actual witness to the atrocities.

¹⁴³ For a further investigation into the workings of memory in this case and similar appropriations of Holocaust memory, see Schacter and especially Franklin (215-234). In a letter to the editor of the *New Yorker* (1999) regarding "The Memory Thief" by Philip Gourevitch, Mark Pendergrast (*Victims of Memory: Incest Accusations and Shattered Lives*, Hinesburg, VT: Upper Access, 1995) suggests that Wilkomirski's exaggerated emotional outpourings in public are contrary to typical response in victims of trauma, and cites this as further evidence that Wilkomirski was not traumatized at all. Although not a psychologist (he's a journalist/ independent scholar), his book on recovered memories was positively reviewed by Daniel Schacter (Harvard professor of psychology, cited above in this study).

psychologists, Holocaust survivors and others –, that Wilkomirski was in fact a survivor of trauma, which would account for the authentic feel of his text.¹⁴⁴

In German literature, there are a couple of works that parallel aspects of Wilkomirski's *Fragments* and deserve revisiting, particularly in how they resemble Sebald's novels and yet have not been translated.¹⁴⁵ Martin Walser's *Ein springender Brunnen* (1998) has a five-year-old protagonist, whose family's life in a small town during the Third Reich is depicted with no reference to the consequences of the Nazi period, i.e., the Final Solution. The semi-autobiographical main character, a German boy, experiences his family life through a naïve lens sans a hindsight perspective, which provoked criticism of the work as naïve and revisionist, especially when read as an autobiographical piece of fiction. In a similar novel, Gert Hofmann's *Veilchenfeld* (1986), the main point-of-view is expressed through the young son of a Nazi party member, Hans, who describes in a naïve manner the persecution in the mid-1930s of the old Jewish professor and protagonist of the novel, Veilchenfeld. Here, the voice of the Jewish protagonist, which problematizes and lays bare the actions of the local community against the Jewish protagonist, is mediated by a non-Jewish German. Whereas in Walser's novel, an attempt is made at what it was like for a child to experience Nazi Germany, in Hofmann's novel the shifting narrative perspective allows for insight into the motivations of the other characters through irony. The latter novel more closely resembles the techniques employed by Wilkomirski in depicting what would have been traumatic experiences, though Sebald's novels, as I will show in the following chapters, are similar to all three works in their own way.

¹⁴⁴Fischer and Lorenz 303-4.

¹⁴⁵ The fact that these works have not been translated into English, especially in the case of such a prominent writer as Walser, I suggest, points to a lack of interest in the Anglo contexts for fiction dealing with Jewish suffering – in other words, Holocaust memoirs are the dominant genre for learning about the Holocaust and Jewish suffering in the English-speaking literary world.

Facing Sebald in the 1990s were several issues regarding representation of the Holocaust in both the American and German contexts.¹⁴⁶ First, as a non-Jewish German, his authority to write literature on the Holocaust was questionable, according to American critics, other non-Jewish German authors (e.g., Günter Grass) and Jewish Holocaust survivors. Second, the gap between witness and testimony (experience and knowledge) was still insurmountable for many survivors due to the traumatic nature of their experiences,¹⁴⁷ yet this led to a sacralization of survivor testimony and suspicion by both Jews and critics towards any non-Jewish attempts to aestheticize such experiences *in the American context*.¹⁴⁸ Third, the idea of fictionalizing about the Holocaust struck a nerve due to potential denial of the atrocities¹⁴⁹; something that occurred especially after German reunification, fueled in no small part by a number of former East Germans, whose cultural memory of WWII (*signifying process*) excluded the genocide in favor of

¹⁴⁶ Although not specifically addressing American critics, Sebald would have been aware of the reception of important Holocaust filmic and literary works (e.g., *Schindler's List*, *Maus*) and criticism of their representational choices. In addition, although a scholarly work, the reception of Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, which argued that a historical and specifically German eliminationist anti-Semitism resulted in the ability of "ordinary Germans" to carry out the atrocities of the Holocaust, in the United States and in Germany indicate to what extent German critics and historians sided with American perspectives on the Holocaust. Certainly, the reasons for this intersection of ideas about the causes of the Holocaust vary by context and have their own interpretive consequences. The praise of Goldhagen's work (but also that of Spielberg) – though contested in the so-called "Goldhagen debate" – as well as his near-celebrity status in Germany,

¹⁴⁷ Psychoanalysis and psychotherapy as approaches to this epistemological dilemma with survivors' traumas were explored by various scholars of differing disciplines, including Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Dominick LaCapra, Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer, to name a few. Groundbreaking for its visual immediacy of symptoms of trauma in survivors testifying to their experiences is Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), though of course this film was not without its own biases and agenda.

¹⁴⁸ Peter Morgan subscribes to this convention insofar as he holds Grass's work above that of Sebald's because the former did not attempt to write from the Jewish perspective ("Ethics"). I disagree with this assessment, and think that Morgan reads Sebald too autobiographically, conflating the author's intentions and opinions with what his texts, in fact, accomplish.

¹⁴⁹ The infamous libel lawsuit of 1996, in which historian David Irving brought allegations of libel against Deborah Lipstadt, a Holocaust scholar, followed indictments against Irving by Italy, Germany and Austria for Holocaust denial. The very public trial in England and its media coverage assured that this theme would be in the minds of anyone who wrote fiction related to the Holocaust, and, in this case, I argue, Sebald, who lived in England.

an ideological confrontation with fascism, i.e., capitalism. Fourth, around this time, Holocaust scholarship on the possibility of its aesthetic representation increased exponentially, particularly in American discourse. There was significant discussion regarding whether it was considered impossible to re-present the atrocities (e.g., Friedländer, White, Zipes, Agamben), but that was not to deny the importance of, for example, literary attempts to confront the horrors suffered by so many, and, indeed, newer theories of representation and memory were developed in both the German and American contexts.¹⁵⁰ However, besides the very few Jewish-German and Jewish-Austrian Holocaust survivors who wrote memoirs that were successfully published in Germany and Austria (Bos), there remained a substantial lag in cultural production compared to that of the United States. Whereas in the U.S. the physical and cultural distance to the Holocaust may have led to a more tacit acceptance or at least tolerance of (postmodern) Holocaust fiction as a legitimate form of Holocaust literature, in Germany this distance was very minimal, and, thus, made it more difficult to write in a playful or subversive mode that would not be lambasted and/or condemned for being insensitive and disrespectful to the victims, or even anti-Semitic. Furthermore, the history of anti-Semitic discourse in Germany set it apart from the American context, in particular the U.S., and ensured that Holocaust literature, i.e., fiction would be carefully scrutinized for any latent or underlying anti-Semitic tendencies and/or depictions.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰The postmodern turn in literature but also literary criticism challenged traditional understandings of the “text,” and presented ethical issues in the incorporation of the Holocaust into postmodern fiction. For some examples, see Friedländer. Also, the applications of several models of memory to Sebald’s work, as I have shown, do not fit without significant problems and difficulties. This is why I choose to use new terms to describe the protagonists’ stories and the gulf of witnessing them and their experiences (language of uncertainty and medial witness).

¹⁵¹One need only look at the Walser-Bubis debate, or, indeed, Walser’s novels (e.g., *Ein springender Brunnen*), to see how particular modes of representation could be considered to possess anti-Semitic undertones. In the case of *Ein springender Brunnen*, Walser was criticized for not including Auschwitz in his novel, which I find to be an unusual complaint for post-reunification German literature. Ironically, the

CRITICAL RESPONSE

I read Sebald's fiction as a critical response to (alleged) failed German postwar literary attempts to come to terms with the Nazi past, as well as post-reunification debates in Germany on how to represent and remember the Holocaust. Sebald explicitly calls attention to the shortcomings of postwar German literature:

...most of the literary texts that had been written in Germany in the 1950s and 1960s about the Fascist years were dismal failures, marked largely by tactlessness and by very dubious moral positions, as regards the representation of Jewish lives.¹⁵²

Sebald, who, as I mentioned earlier, was born in 1944 and therefore was not morally compromised by the war, was shaped by it nonetheless. His choice to move to Great Britain can be read as difficulty for him in identifying with fellow Germans of the war, i.e., 'perpetrator' generation, but also the successor generation of rebellious students. Thus, it is no surprise that his literature challenges postwar German literary practices regarding the representation of Jews and the Holocaust. The controversies involving several non-Jewish German authors, including Sebald and Martin Walser, as well as public discussions and debates about the Holocaust, helped to create an intricate cultural-political atmosphere, which framed Holocaust discourse in Germany. Walser, who wrote a novel (*Ein springender Brunnen*, 1998) using a child's naïve narrative perspective – not

anti-Semitic tropes leveled at Daniel Goldhagen (an American Jewish scholar) by German historians just prior to the Walser-Bubis debate did not raise much ire or result in significant discussion.

¹⁵²Biggsby, "Sebald" 161. In another interview, Sebald reiterates his position on problematic postwar German literature:

In the history of postwar German writing, for the first 15 or 20 years, people avoided mentioning political persecution - the incarceration and systematic extermination of whole peoples and groups in society. Then from 1965 this became a preoccupation of writers - not always in an acceptable form. So I knew that writing about the subject, particularly for people of German origin, is fraught with dangers and difficulties. Tactless lapses, moral and aesthetic, can easily be committed.

See Sebald, "Last Word," and "Recovered memories." In the latter interview, Sebald criticizes Heinrich Böll's and Alfred Andersch's attempts to address the Nazi past as "tactless," citing that their "moral presumption is insufferable."

unlike Wilkomirski's narrator in *Bruchstücke (Fragments)* – and attempted to defend his stylistic choices in the novel against claims of historical whitewashing and anti-Semitism by critics such as Ignatz Bubis and Marcel Reich-Ranicki,¹⁵³ indicated to what degree memory of the Nazi past and Germans' relation to it was *and still is* an unavoidable topic.

In the Walser-Bubis debate, Walser suggested a more individualized confrontation with the past (“wegsehen wollen”¹⁵⁴), one that does not instrumentalize the Nazi legacy for the perpetuation of national disgrace and self-flagellation, among other things (*Erfahrungen*). While I do not agree with Walser's assessment – i.e., that leftist intellectuals appeal to Germans' sense of moral responsibility for the Holocaust by instrumentalizing the atrocities to suit their arguments (“Moralkeule”) – I do find his notion of a personal approach to the past embodied in Sebald's work. That is to say, Sebald's novels provide an opportunity for critical reflection in engaging with Jewish suffering, including the reader's evaluation of his/her own reactions to the text. In contrast to other novels, such as those of Günter Grass, which challenge normative views of the non-Jewish German past (e.g., *Im Krebsgang* [2002]) and have generated widespread public discussion, due also in part to the author's very engaged, public persona, Sebald's novels, especially *Austerlitz* (2001), move towards the stories of Jewish characters in, as Bigsby has claimed, an “act of restitution” (“Restitution”).

Instead of trying to show sympathy for, sympathize (i.e., pity or feel sorry for) or identify with (Jewish) Holocaust victims, Sebald's literature invites readers to critically consider their position with regards to the Jewish protagonists and guides them towards

¹⁵³ Countering claims of latent anti-Semitism and “spiritual arson” after his prize acceptance speech (*Erfahrungen*), Walser responded to Reich-Ranicki with his 2002 novel, *Tod eines Kritikers* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp), a thinly veiled attack on the Jewish critic criticized for anti-Semitic clichés.

¹⁵⁴ This is the phrasing Ignatz Bubis uses in his critical rejoinder to Walser's comments about the forced (“nichtvergessendürfen”) public recognition of Germany's disgrace or shame (“Schande”) (Schirmmacher 111).

an empathic understanding and approach to the victims through its ethics of representation. Through its language of uncertainty, Sebald's work consistently disrupts the reader's reading of the text(s) and his/her horizon of expectations, in order that s/he may become aware of moments of inappropriate identification with and sympathy for the Jewish protagonist(s). His novels, I suggest, are less concerned with showing how it "really was" for a particular individual (like in the case of Holocaust memoirs) than with generating understanding – vis-à-vis his work's ethics of representation – regarding the extent of the suffering inflicted upon the victims. This is not to argue that Sebald's novels possess a voyeuristic gaze directed at Jewish suffering; rather, I contend that the gap between experience and knowledge (of that experience) portrayed in his work underscores the continued lack of understanding about Jewish suffering on the part of non-Jewish Germans in contemporary Germany. Despite all of the discussion about *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, memory and memorial practices, widespread empathy for and understanding of the victims eludes the average German – that is, there is still resistance to a thorough confrontation with the Nazi past, one that does not take as its point of departure how Germans were themselves victimized (i.e., displacement of guilt).

In the wake of German-Jewish attempts to address German audiences in the 1980s (Bos's "the politics of address"),¹⁵⁵ Sebald's work marks the first systematic, *ethical* attempt by a non-Jewish German to not only continue to work through the Nazi past, but also to do so in a manner that is respectful of the victims of the atrocities. I term this approach "ethical" as it consistently refrains from "heteropathic identification" – specifically, the positioning of a non-victim in the role of or speaking with the voice of

¹⁵⁵In her extensive study of this very point as regards the German-speaking Jewish authors Grete Weil and Ruth Klüger, Pascale Bos shows how these authors intervened in German discourse on the Holocaust, leading to some of the first critical engagements with Jewish voices in the language of the perpetrators (Bos).

the victim – with Jewish Holocaust victims. Despite the use of what I call its language of uncertainty, Sebald’s fiction actually results, at times, in the blurring of distinctions between German and Jewish identities. This German Holocaust fiction attempts to maintain distance (through meta-reflexivity and deconstruction) to and empathy for – not appropriation of – the victims; however, it falls somewhat short of the mark in terms of identification with the victims, as evidenced by the merging of narrative levels (mood), so as to elevate the reader to the precarious position as a vicarious witness to Jewish suffering. Nonetheless, Sebald’s novels, especially in terms of ethics of representation, are of great importance for contemporary German Holocaust fiction, despite their imperfection and failings.

The difficulty in representing the unrepresentable (the Holocaust), which is a common theme in American Holocaust studies, is problematized through the deconstruction of representation itself in the novels by way of the narrative structure. First, the novels engage Jewish memory by acknowledging the inability to rescue or difficulty in preserving it, for reasons of trauma and the transmission of testimony (i.e., the epistemology of witness and testimony); the novels do not serve any compensatory memory function.¹⁵⁶ Second, the narrators listen – but do not speak – to Jews, who struggle with remembering and telling their story, and also have no access to the inner thoughts of the Jewish protagonists, thereby avoiding the violation of the victims’ subjectivity. This stands in direct contrast to Koeppen’s Littner text, which, as the author claimed, became “his” story; the narrator of Sebald’s *Austerlitz* never attempts to “own” the story of Jewish suffering, rather, he makes every attempt to demonstrate the extreme difficulty in representing the story of a Jewish survivor-protagonist as a non-Jewish

¹⁵⁶This is not to be construed as subscribing to the “sacralization” of the Holocaust as a “founding trauma” or “sacralized center of a civil religion” (Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001, 23, 27-8).

German. Third, the critical and self-reflexive calling into question its own project as potentially problematic through what I refer to as its language of uncertainty foregrounds the very fact that a non-Jewish German (Sebald), through his non-Jewish German narrator, is portraying Jews, Jewish suffering, memory and testimony, pointing towards historiographic metafiction (Hutcheon) as an ethical model of writing about the Holocaust. Fourth, without this critical self-reflexivity, distance and uncertainty or ambiguity, the novels could be read, in the German context, as attempting to speak for instead of about Jewish survivors (cf. Byram) – in other words, it would be considered revisionist or apologetic.

Chapter Three: Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten*

CONTEXTUALIZING SEBALD'S NOVELS

Silence about the Holocaust in Postwar Germany

Up until the Eichmann (1961) and Frankfurt Auschwitz trials (1963-5), a relative silence regarding Jewish experiences of the Holocaust, their suffering and memory pervaded German literature.¹⁵⁷ Jewish authors generally met with resistance by publishers and critics from the immediate postwar years to as late as the 1980s, inasmuch as they found it exceedingly difficult to publish literature about the Holocaust – there appeared to be little to no audience for such work.¹⁵⁸ Yet despite the relative silence of the postwar period, I argue that several authors of that period were also influential in Sebald's writing.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, moments of consciousness-raising regarding the Holocaust

¹⁵⁷Ernestine Schlant, in her study on West German literature, argues that silence about the Nazi past and especially the Holocaust manifested itself in the use of language by German writers. This "silence" developed out of the political and cultural discourse in postwar Germany about WWII, both of which reflected a reticence about war crimes, collective guilt, traumatic experience, and the past in general. By analyzing what was not said and how this was expressed in literature, Schlant makes a convincing case for a pervasive and unspoken avoidance of discussing or coming to terms with the atrocities perpetrated in the name of the German people. Schlant, nevertheless, does not appear to take into consideration the silence of these writers regarding their varied and sordid pasts. To my knowledge there have not been any studies that have linked their pasts and literature together in order to evaluate the extent to which their work may be viewed as potentially compromised.

There were several exceptions to this silence, including the work of Paul Celan, Jean Améry and Nelly Sachs (see my earlier footnote [37]).

¹⁵⁸As Schlant points out, very few writers during the first postwar decade wrote about concentration camps, and certainly not about the Holocaust itself (Schlant 21-25). Citing Heinrich Böll's *Wo warst Du, Adam?* (1951), Schlant notes that the two Jewish characters in the novel are flatly portrayed, and their fate at an extermination camp is only implied but not explicitly depicted. Furthermore, the ambivalence in guilt for their murder is not equal to acknowledgment of responsibility – much less atonement – for the crimes (31-36). However, as Richard Dove points out in his article, some literary restitution was occurring despite its lack of thematization in 1950s literature. In her study, Bos exposes not only the lack of a public forum for Jewish writers to express themselves regarding the Holocaust in Austria and Germany, but also describes the pioneering creation of such a space for addressing these non-Jewish audiences through literature.

¹⁵⁹Here I refer to Alfred Andersch, Peter Weiss and Thomas Bernhard, whom I return to later in this chapter insofar as their work influenced the writing of *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz*.

offered a counterpoint to the silence, though these usually were quickly forgotten or subsumed under the discourse of non-Jewish German experiences of the past and their memory and suffering, which had an impact on discussion about the Nazi past in the 1980s-90s. The cyclical pattern of Germans discussing German suffering and memory, followed by brief interludes of acknowledgment of the crimes perpetrated by Germans during the Nazi years, and then refocusing on a specifically German dealing with the past, set the stage for later attempts by Germans to turn the page on the horrors of the Nazi past. This sporadic ebb and flow of interest in and concern with the Jewish experience of suffering is still observable in contemporary Germany, and is indicative of both a continued ambivalence regarding the victims of the Nazi regime and the national legacy of guilt.

The persecution and extermination of European Jewry was largely excluded in the cultural production of both East and West Germany in the 1940s and 1950s.¹⁶⁰ Discourse on German victimization detracted from discussion of the atrocities during the first few years after the war.¹⁶¹ After the division of Germany, policy on restitution expanded to

¹⁶⁰The Allies did produce a short documentary film about the conditions of the concentration camps and their inmates in 1945, which was mandated by the occupiers to be seen by all Germans in the western zones (*Die Todesmühlen*). For a more thorough discussion of the American film and its later British version (*Memory of the Camps*, 1984) and its reception, see Kay Gladstone, "Separate Intentions: The Allied Screening of Concentration Camp Documentaries in Defeated Germany in 1945-46: Death Mills and Memory of the Camps," *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television since 1933*, ed. Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman, London: Wallflower, 2005, 50-64. France and Russia also produced their own films, which they exhibited in their own occupation zones. For descriptions of the various premieres, see Roß, "Re-education-Filme." I also refer to German public reactions to to Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog* and the *Diary of Anne Frank*, though these reactions and discussions surrounding these works and events were ephemeral. In addition, several literary works made reference to Jews and their persecution (Böll; Koeppen; Andersch, Sansibar), including those of Nelly Sachs and Paul Celan, though the latter two, as Jews, were ostracized by the literary establishment and found significant resistance to publishing their works.

¹⁶¹Germans felt victimized by the Nazi regime, which led to a juxtaposition of the perpetrators with the victims and a relative silence regarding the latter. Moreover, the identity of the "victims" underwent a metamorphosis to eventually include non-persecuted Germans who felt betrayed and, hence, victimized by Hitler and the Nazi regime. By "victims" I refer to political enemies of the Nazi regime, refugees of the Allied bombing of German cities, and Germans forced to leave their homes as victims of the Soviet army's

include all “victims of fascism” in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), which leveled differences between those politically and racially persecuted, ethnic Germans who were displaced as a result of territory loss (including ethnic Germans expelled from eastern provinces [Ostvertriebene]), Jewish-Germans and other “displaced persons,” and German prisoners of war.¹⁶²

Beginning with the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961, whose worldwide radio and television broadcast reached many in West Germany, public awareness of the scope of Nazi persecution of the Jews, the so-called “Final Solution,” was undeniable. Two years later, the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt (1963-5) revealed the appalling inhumanity of the German SS, concentration camp guards and staff, doctors and Kapos (prisoners assigned to administrative detail of some sort) towards the prisoners. In-depth press coverage of the trials – especially the testimony of hundreds of witnesses – insured the dissemination of knowledge about the atrocities that took place at the concentration camp and it focused on seemingly ordinary Germans¹⁶³ who committed unthinkable crimes.

The trials provoked not only a large, general public response,¹⁶⁴ but also a specific cultural one. In their wake, more literature was written about the Holocaust, especially in

advance across Eastern Europe and on into Germany. After the war, use of the term 'displaced persons camps' generalized and blended the identities of those who were persecuted by the Nazi regime on the basis of ethnicity, political beliefs and sexual orientation, not to mention those not persecuted by the Nazis, including former soldiers and POWs, stateless refugees and those who were expelled by the Red Army from former German territory in the East. However, the Allies did try to separate displaced persons according to a specific rubric. For a fuller discussion of displaced persons, see Wyman.

¹⁶²The policies regarding reparations, in their language, obscured the specificity of populations of recognized victims, such that Jewish Holocaust survivors were categorically included in a pool of *Opfer der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung* (victims of Nazi persecution) as well. As early as 1950 an organization was formed, the *Verband der Heimkehrer, Kriegsgefangenen und Vermisstenangehörigen Deutschlands*, which concerned itself primarily with the repatriation of prisoners of war, especially those returning from the Eastern Front and Soviet Union (Fischer and Lorenz 78).

¹⁶³For an extensive look at just how “ordinary” many perpetrators of the Holocaust were, see Browning.

¹⁶⁴See Pendas's chapter on the public reception and reactions to the Frankfurt-Auschwitz Trials.

the form of autobiographical writing, documentary fiction¹⁶⁵ and fiction by survivors.¹⁶⁶ Writers such as Peter Weiss, Rolf Hochhuth, Alfred Andersch, Günter Grass and George Tabori produced plays and novels that also dealt, at least in some way, with the Holocaust – a signal that the Holocaust was no longer principally a concern of historiography, but also a public and cultural one.¹⁶⁷ Their literature incorporated documentary evidence from the horrible details revealed about the Holocaust in the course of the trials, or, in Tabori's case, based on personal experience. Hochhuth's cutting criticism of Pope Pius XII and the Catholic Church's compliance with the Hitler regime, which was based on real people and events, Weiss's stylization of the Frankfurt trial proceedings, and Andersch's literary adaptation of graphic testimony stretched the bounds of what was acceptable to discuss from the perspective of non-victims.¹⁶⁸ Hochhuth's attack against the Catholic Church, though criticized, was not revisionist, nor was Weiss's literary rendering of the brutality of the concentration camps voyeuristic, but Andersch's appropriation of the Jewish voice through his Jewish protagonist was considered problematic by Sebald.¹⁶⁹ Importantly, non-Jewish Germans still largely

¹⁶⁵Documentary fiction about the trials and the Catholic Church's complicity in, i.e., silence regarding the atrocities found an audience (see Weiss, Hochhuth). However, Holocaust memoirs were still largely ignored during this period – that is, after the couple of years immediately following the trials.

¹⁶⁶Notable among fictional works by survivors are: Kertész (originally published in Hungarian: *Sorstalanság*, 1975; in English translation: *Fateless*, 1992) and Hilsenrath (first appeared in German in 1977). Although published prior to the Frankfurt-Auschwitz trials, Wiesel's novel (originally published in Yiddish as *Un di velt hot geshvign*) is one of the best known examples of Holocaust literature.

¹⁶⁷This is not to claim, however, that other writers had not authored works on the subject. Indeed, a number of European Jews had written volumes of poetry, memoirs and other autobiographical works in multiple languages including German prior to 1963 (Braese, *Erinnerung* 11). Adorno's essays on "working through the past" and its challenges in literature would find positive reception in the first postwar generation. Adorno's "Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit" is a pivotal contribution to the discourse on Vergangenheitsbewältigung and offers an alternative to Freud's concept of "working through" ("Durcharbeiten") in the sense of repressed experience(s) (see Freud "Erinnern").

¹⁶⁸Peter Weiss, however, was a victim of the Nazi regime insofar as he was forced to flee Germany in 1934 due to his Jewish heritage (his father was a Jew).

¹⁶⁹Andersch was harshly criticized by Sebald for his inclusion of autobiographical details in his fictional characters, which appeared to be apologetic in nature. See W.G. Sebald, "Der Schriftsteller Alfred Andersch," *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, Frankfurt: Fischer, 2001, 111-147.

avoided portraying Jewish suffering in their novels, opting to depict German suffering instead, as was prevalent in the immediate postwar period. A cyclical pattern of presence and absence of the Holocaust in postwar German public discourse – about every fifteen years – continued into the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁷⁰

Holocaust and Cultural Production about the Nazi Past in 1980s West Germany

Discussion about the Nazi past faded into the background before being conjured up again from the late 1970s on by way of first an American film. At around this time and shortly thereafter, important anniversaries related to WWII – the 40th anniversaries of *Kristallnacht*, the invasion of Poland/beginning of the war, and the liberation of Auschwitz, and Victory in Europe Day (celebrating German capitulation on May 8, 1945; aka. V-E day), to name a few¹⁷¹ – and political missteps during commemorative events, such as the Bitburg affair in 1985,¹⁷² Richard von Weizsäcker's speech,¹⁷³ and

¹⁷⁰Here I refer to the Nuremberg trials and *Die Todesmühlen* (1945), Eichmann and Frankfurt-Auschwitz trials (1961-5), *Holocaust* mini-series (1978-9), and the Holocaust memorial debate, Wehrmacht exhibit, Goldhagen controversy and Opfer-Debatte (1993-7), though several other debates took place in the wake of the last period (Wilkomirski, Walser-Bubis and Koeppen controversies).

¹⁷¹These 40th anniversaries took place in 1978, 1979 and 1985, respectively. The liberation of Auschwitz on January 27, 1945 is now known as International Holocaust Remembrance Day, and takes place every year on January 27.

¹⁷²The highly controversial visit of U.S. President Ronald Reagan to West Germany in 1985 to mark the 40th anniversary of the end of WWII, on Chancellor Kohl's invitation, ignited a heated controversy (Bitburg affair). An official ceremony at a cemetery outside of Bitburg on May 5, 1985, where SS graves were mixed in with other soldiers' graves, honoring soldiers who were "victims" of the war, ironically, called attention to the discrepancy in actions of the regular army versus those of the SS. The presence of the SS graves had serious ramifications for the ceremony and its purpose, despite the seemingly unintentional nature of Kohl's and Reagan's gesture. As James Young points out in his analysis of the events,

The problem may not be so much the conscious or unconscious manipulation of history, which is intrinsic to all memory and representation. Rather, as we have seen in the Bitburg affair, the real danger may lie in an uncritical approach to monuments, so that a constructed and reified memory is accepted as normative history – and then acted upon as if it were pure, unmediated meaning. [...] On the strength of this particular configuration of memory at Bitburg and its "self-evident" truths, both Ronald Reagan and Helmut Kohl ignored many other historical perspectives on the war, and even encouraged their loss (Young, *Writing* 182).

¹⁷³The FRG president, Richard von Weizsäcker, gave a speech on May, 1985, reaffirming the uniqueness of Auschwitz and, thus, the Holocaust, but also labeled the day of German capitulation as the *Tag der*

Jenninger's speech before the Bundestag on November 10, 1988, which marked the 50th anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, took place.¹⁷⁴

In January 1979, an American television mini-series broadcast in the U.S. in 1978, *Holocaust*, was shown in Germany, which continued intense debate about the Nazi period since its original U.S. premiere in April 1978.¹⁷⁵ The film facilitated discussion of the genocide and its victims¹⁷⁶ but also Holocaust representation, and instigated renewed calls for a coming to terms with the Nazi past.¹⁷⁷

Befreiung (Day of Liberation), an extremely problematic term, I argue, given that it obscured the identities of various Germans and their roles in the war (perpetrators and victims, Germans and Jews, etc.) (see also Herf 359). A commonly held belief was that Germans were “liberated” from Hitler's destructive war, eliding the fact that it was, in fact, only possible through the millions of Germans who supported and fought in 'Hitler's war'. This wording (“liberation”) also is rather inappropriate given its use to describe the freeing of concentration camp inmates left behind by the SS and guards to die. To draw parallels between the suffering of aggressors and of innocents is revisionist, no matter the intent.

¹⁷⁴In his speech, Bundestag president Phillip Jenninger, gave a historical account – that is, he attempted to report how things must have appeared to Germans at that time – of the rise of anti-Semitism and its culmination in the Nazi pogroms and exterminationist policies, criticized stories of German “resistance” and connected the invasion of Soviet territory with the “Final Solution” (Herf 360-2). His poor delivery or representation of the past – the mixing of what he reported as “fascinating” and his own opinions – resulted in a misunderstanding of what his position was relative to the Nazi past. Jenninger was forced to resign as president of the Bundestag amidst a storm of criticism, in which it was generally thought that he was anti-Semitic. See Bodemann 359. However, the backlash from the political left and right was odd, considering the fact that he was only reiterating what historical research had already documented (Herf 362).

Jenninger's speech did accomplish something, despite the criticism leveled at it – it reiterated individual accountability, resonating with Richard von Weizsäcker's 1985 speech, and provided evidence that questionable public statements about the Nazi past were still carefully scrutinized. Importantly, the Jewish victims of *Kristallnacht* hardly figured into this debate about how to view the past.

¹⁷⁵See *Holocaust*, and for a discussion of the miniseries, see Kaes. Jeffrey Herf (“The “Holocaust” Reception in West Germany: Right, Center and Left,” *New German Critique* 19 (1980): 30-52; here 36) notes that criticism of the television program and the resulting public discussion began already with the American premiere of the mini-series.

¹⁷⁶The *Verjährungsdebatte* on the issue regarding murder and genocide concluded in 1979 after the film's broadcast with the permanent repeal of the statute of limitations for both crimes. In fact, the fourth debate on the statute of limitations for murder and genocide in Germany took place two months after the German broadcast, which led to a decision in July 1979, after more than two decades, to completely rescind the statute of limitations for these crimes – a decision, I suggest, that is linked to the premier of *Holocaust* and the significant amount of publicity and consciousness-raising which followed..

¹⁷⁷For a detailed discussion situating the film into its historical context, analyzing its reception, as well as laying bare the lead up to its German premiere, see Geisler 220-224. Footnote #8 in Geisler (222) suggests further sources regarding the reception of the film (“I [Geisler] refer to the studies by Zielinski and Dieter Prokop (*Medien-Wirkungen*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1981), to the various readers published by the WDR, and to the three issues of *New German Critique* published in 1980, which, taking the series' reception in West Germany as a cue, spiral out to a broad discussion of the historical relationship between

The fictional story of two German families – a Jewish and a Nazi officer’s – elicited both positive and negative responses, but the television mini-series, more than any previous public narrative about the Holocaust, exploded the silence about the past as experienced by its Jewish victims and led to more critical reflection on the atrocities and their ramifications. The film proved to be a major consciousness-raising turning point in West German history, resulting in a heightened sensitivity to and identification with the victims. However, this was not without its problems, especially in terms of what is appropriate regarding non-Jewish Germans identifying with Jewish victims (i.e., the Weiss family). The melodramatic nature of the mini-series, because of the fact that it connected with Germans on an emotional level, was, I argue, too close to sentimentality in a problematic manner,¹⁷⁸ one in which sympathy (i.e., over-identification) with the victims found expression.¹⁷⁹ Despite the increased sensitivity of Germans to the plight of the Jews during WWII, *Holocaust* was only the beginning of a broader public discourse that would span the next two decades and beyond.

Before the 1980s, besides fiction and memoirs written by Jewish authors,¹⁸⁰ many of which found little acceptance by German publishers,¹⁸¹ few Germans produced work dealing directly with the Holocaust.¹⁸² Now, however, an increase in critical literature

Germans and Jews (*New German Critique* 19-21, Winter 1980, Spring/Summer 1980, and Fall 1980). See also Mark E. Cory, “Some Reflections on NBC’s Film Holocaust,” *German Quarterly*, 53.4 (1980): 444-51. Extremely useful are the materials compiled and edited by Wilhelm van Kampen, *Holocaust: Materialien zu dem amerikanischen Fernsehfilm über die Judenverfolgung im “Dritten Reich”* (Düsseldorf: Landeszentralen und Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 3d ed., 1982).”

¹⁷⁸ Herf, “Reception” 37-41. Herf gauges the reactions in the German press from 1978-9, and shows how some critics saw the sentimentalism of the film as a means to promote identification with the victims (!) and thus understanding and sympathy – in short, it was therapeutic for West Germans.

¹⁷⁹ Sebald eschewed this type of identification with Jewish victims in his literature, and criticized Alfred Andersch and his novel, *Efraim*, for this very reason (Sebald, “Andersch” 118-40).

¹⁸⁰ A couple prominent examples include writers of the “second generation” (children of Holocaust survivors): Dischereit; and Honigmann.

¹⁸¹ Bos 12-13.

¹⁸² Peter Schneider's *Vati* of 1987 explored the unrepentant and unpunished war criminals in the figure of a Nazi doctor (based on Joseph Mengele) who had escaped prosecution by fleeing to South America.

about the portrayal of Jews in German fiction, which included research on writers in exile, could be seen.¹⁸³ Of particular concern was the tendentious depiction of Jewish figures as somehow different from “normal” human beings faced with catastrophic situations.¹⁸⁴

This change of mentality can be seen as, at the end of 1985, Rainer W. Fassbinder’s play about revenge by a Jew against an unrepentant Nazi for killing his parents was prevented from being staged. Many members of the Frankfurt Jewish community protested it on the grounds of an alleged anti-Semitic caricature of Ignatz Bubis.¹⁸⁵ The representation of a Jew as anything other than victim appeared to be inconsistent with prevailing public sentiment, especially that of the German-Jewish community.

Of the literary works by non-Jewish Germans that did reference the atrocities, only one stands out as precursor to Sebald’s writing: *Veilchenfeld* by Gert Hofmann.¹⁸⁶ Hofmann was a Germanist teaching German literature – similar to Sebald – abroad (at universities in France, England, the U.S. and Slovenia), who had little success as an author of radio plays prior to his explosive production of novellas and novels from 1979 until his death in 1993.¹⁸⁷

Considered a work of the *Väterliteratur*, the novel did not explicitly deal with the doctor's victims; rather, it was an account of his son finding his long lost father and attempting to reconcile with him.

¹⁸³Braese, *Erinnerung* 20-21.

¹⁸⁴For a few examples of this scholarship, see Braese, *Erinnerung* 19-20.

¹⁸⁵Fassbinder. Fassbinder's play, *Der Müll, die Stadt und der Tod*, provoked controversy in its “attempted” debut in Germany on October 31, 1985 in Frankfurt (Fassbinder had already passed away three years prior, paving the way for another attempt to put on the play after its failure to premier in 1975). The Jewish community of Frankfurt protested – indeed prevented – the staging of the play due to alleged anti-semitism in the depiction of a Jewish figure, ostensibly a caricature of Ignatz Bubis, then member of the administrative arm and later head of Germany's Central Council of Jews.

¹⁸⁶Hofmann.

¹⁸⁷See Butler 375. After returning to Erding in Germany, Hofmann dedicated himself to his literary career (see “Gert Hofmann.” *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation Inc., n.d. Web. 4 March 2011.

<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gert_Hofmann >.). Hofmann also corresponded with Sebald on at least one occasion – a search in the OPAC of the Literaturarchiv Marbach results in a July 11, 1984 letter from Gert

Veilchenfeld focuses on the persecution of a – though never explicitly stated in the text – Jewish professor, Bernhard Veilchenfeld, from 1936-8 in Germany. The narrative captures the anti-Semitic mood of the period using a voice that pieces together the thoughts and opinions of the townspeople (the persecutors) from the perspective of a boy named Hans, a stylistic choice that would resurface in the novels of Martin Walser, Bruno Grosjean (a.k.a. Benjamin Wilkomirski) and Sebald. Moreover, the book maintains – indeed, as Schlant argues, restores – identity to the victim of Nazi brutality (Schlant 173-4). The story ends when the old professor commits suicide after he realizes he cannot escape.

The fragmented narrative, I argue, marks a turning point in literature about the Nazi persecution of the Jews, and, by extension, the Holocaust, by non-Jewish Germans, setting the stage for what Sebald's literature would accomplish. By distancing the Jewish character and his suffering through the voice of the boy Hans, there is no usurpation of the victim's perspective – the events and actions taken by the townspeople speak for themselves. Furthermore, the depiction of the horrors of the Holocaust does not figure into this work of fiction due to its setting during the period leading up to WWII; the novel concerns itself with the actions of German citizens in everyday life during the Third Reich. In *Veilchenfeld*, it is from the non-Jewish Germans that the reader learns of Professor Veilchenfeld's suffering at their own hands. Importantly, the German narrator is charged with the task of carrying on and preserving the memory of the Jewish protagonist – through the recounting of the persecution of Veilchenfeld.

As should be clear from the above discussion, Holocaust victims were relegated to the background and not explicitly discussed by non-Jewish Germans. As I will show, it

Hofmann to W.G. Sebald sent from Erding. More information is not available without physically examining the letter itself, but it is notable that this exchange occurred two years prior to the publication of *Veilchenfeld*.

was only after reunification that Holocaust victims and their suffering would feature prominently – instead of appearing marginally – in German public discussion of the Nazi past.

In my close readings of Sebald's texts, I investigate several aspects of his work that relate to the discourse(s) on representation, victims and memory in the German context: their narrative structure and unusual representation, the centrality of themes of identity and witness, the problems of memory and trauma, and ethics in writing. First, using a hybrid model of narratology based on Gérard Genette's and Mieke Bal's theories,¹⁸⁸ I investigate how, precisely, the narrative mood and voice affect the formal integrity of the Jewish protagonists' subjectivities and how it produces distance between the non-Jewish German narrator(s) and the protagonists' stories. Second, I analyze the use of fiction and the subversion of genre conventions in Sebald's novels as Holocaust literature. Third, I explore the use of additional narrative devices such as self-reflexivity and ambiguity (language of uncertainty) to better understand the effects of representation and distancing techniques in the novels. Fourth, I analyze the type and use of memory as it relates to trauma in order to show whose memory is being depicted in the novels. Finally, I analyze the relationships of the characters to one another, as well as the ethical implications of this kind of writing.

In this way I will demonstrate that these two novels are not only strikingly similar, but also indicate where they are different and how and why these differences are related to the changing Holocaust discourse in Germany. For this reason, I focus first on *Die Ausgewanderten*, but devote a majority of the present study on *Austerlitz*, as the latter reacts to the debates that developed after the former's publication, resulting in stylistic,

¹⁸⁸Genette: *Narrative and Revisited*. See also Bal, *Narratology*.

thematic and other structural changes. Precisely these changes are the reason Sebald's novels deserve to be revisited, in order to read them as part of a larger literary project, one which resists the notion of coming to terms with the past.

SYNOPSIS OF *DIE AUSGEWANDERTEN*

Sebald's second "novel" is a collection of narratives told ostensibly by the same non-Jewish narrator¹⁸⁹ about three Jewish émigrés and a non-Jewish German and their experiences with emigration. The first narrative, "Dr. Henry Selwyn," is told from the outsider perspective of the book's unnamed German narrator, who has little knowledge of his landlord (Selwyn), a member of a Lithuanian-Jewish family. The protagonist eventually commits suicide, which, although not explicitly explained, is connected to the loss of a friend, Johannes Naegeli, a general sense of detachment, and homesickness for his village in Lithuania. Interestingly, Naegeli makes an appearance at the end of the story, when the narrator coincidentally sees a headline in a Swiss newspaper, detailing the recovery of his body from a retreating glacier decades after his disappearance.

The second story in the novel is "Paul Bereyter." Paul, the narrator's former grade school teacher, is discriminated against by the Nazi regime for being one quarter Jewish; he is dismissed from his teaching position, and is unable to resume his career until after the war. After WWII, Bereyter returns to Germany and is reinstated in his former job as a teacher in the town of 'S.'. Despite returning to work, Bereyter feels alienated from the town, which leads to his choice to move to France, where he meets Madame Landau, the mediator of his story to the unnamed German narrator. His eyesight beginning to fail,

¹⁸⁹ The idea that the same narrator tells each of the stories about encounters at different times in his life is largely an assumption based on biographical readings of the novel. Several critics refer Ambros Adelwarth as Sebald's uncle and Paul Bereyter as Sebald's childhood teacher (the title characters of the third and second stories, respectively), which presupposes a biographical continuity in the narrator; however, I argue that this is never explicitly portrayed by the novel.

depression overtakes Bereyter, and leads to his suicide, which he accomplishes by laying down on train tracks as a train speeds towards him and runs him over.

In the third narrative, “Ambros Adelwarth,” the reader is introduced to a Jewish character, but not the title character; rather, it is Ambros Adelwarth’s employer and companion, Cosmo Solomon, member of a wealthy Jewish banking family. The narrator, who is the great-nephew of Adelwarth, hears about his great-uncle through his Aunt Fini, Uncles Kasimir and one Dr. Abramsky during a visit to the United States in January 1981. Having only met his great-uncle on one occasion in the summer of 1951, it is the first news he receives of Adelwarth’s death in 1953.

The life story of Adelwarth proves to be one of adventure, but also tragedy. Although not explicitly stated anywhere, the companion for whom Adelwarth works as a majordomo and butler (127), Cosmo Solomon, appears to also have been a love interest – Adelwarth was, as Kasimir notes, “of the other camp” (129, my trans.). This explains why Ambros is deeply shaken by the death of his “friend” in 1923 and serves subsequently as the butler to Solomon’s family on Long Island in New York. When they, too, pass on, Adelwarth is upset to the point that he commits himself to a sanatorium, where he insists on electroshock therapy in order to erase painful memories from his mind, which eventually leads to his death.

The fourth and final narrative of the novel, “Max Aurach,” follows the life of a child Holocaust survivor, who becomes a successful artist. The narrator becomes acquainted with the artist through happenstance, and they develop a platonic friendship, in which Aurach, over an extended period of time, tells the narrator his life’s story. The two characters meet in 1966 in Manchester, England, a dark and somber setting that sets the tone for the narrative and the novel as a whole. In the course of the tale, the reader learns more about the narrator’s experiences as a newly arrived emigrant to England,

though, unlike Aurach, he clearly does not suffer the trauma of Nazi persecution. Having the opportunity to watch Aurach at work, the narrator is entranced by Aurach's art, and later attends an art exhibition in London (November 1989) prominently featuring Aurach's work, about whom he coincidentally reads in an art magazine. Shortly afterward, the narrator travels to Manchester and visits Aurach for three days, during which time he takes notes on Aurach's life. Aurach entrusts the narrator with the diary of his mother, Luisa Lanzberg, from the 1930s, just prior to his family's deportation and murder at the hands of the Nazis. After the visit, the narrator begins to read the diary of Aurach's mother, who, aware of her and her family's desperate and unavoidable situation (deportation), wrote down accounts of her childhood (288-9). The narrator then begins assembling a biography of sorts for Aurach, and, following in the footsteps of Lanzberg, visits Bad Kissingen and Steinach. Hesitant to present his writing to Aurach, the narrator suddenly learns about Aurach's hospitalization due to emphysema.¹⁹⁰ After visiting with each other, the narrator goes to an exhibit about the Litzmannstadt ghetto.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Die Ausgewanderten is a novel with a complex narrative structure. It is told from the perspective of an unnamed German narrator, whose biographical details resemble those of the author Sebald, but, as I show later in this chapter, is not to be confused with Sebald. The four narratives are chronological, retrospective accounts of a family member (Adelwarth) and acquaintances (Selwyn, Bereyter, Aurach), told by or to the unnamed

¹⁹⁰The irony of emphysema, also referred to as one of two types of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or COPD, is its pathology: it generally stems from smoking but is also a result of air pollution and other irritants such as asbestos. That Aurach spends so much time working around dust and particulates produced through his artistic process is both ironic – having survived the Holocaust – and somewhat deterministic/fatalistic: creating art about the atrocities ultimately, it could be argued, resulted in his impending death.

narrator, within a frame narrative – the narrator is the common element binding them together. Assuming, however, that the narrator is the same for each of the narratives is, as previously mentioned, a contestable assumption, which adds to the ambivalence and uncertainty of the novel.

The “erzählte Zeit” (narrated time) or “histoire” (story) as well as the “Erzählzeit” (narrative time) or “discours” (narrative) of the four narratives differ.¹⁹¹ In “Dr. Henry Selwyn,” the narrated time of the extradiegetic¹⁹² (frame) narrative covers a period of less than a year (September 1970 to late summer 1971), with the exception of a brief passage of less than a page (*DA* 36-7) that takes place in 1986, whereas the intradiegetic narrative (Selwyn’s) covers his life from 1899 to 1971. By contrast, the narrative times of the extradiegetic and intradiegetic narratives are almost equal: sixteen and fourteen pages, respectively. In the second story, there is a noticeable shift; the frame narrative occupies a space of twenty-two pages (41-62), whereby the much longer, embedded narrative of Lucy Landau telling Paul Bereyter’s story, accounts for the majority of the narrative time, totaling thirty-one pages (63-93). The narrated time varies depending on the narrator: the frame narrative extends only a few months (January to April 1984), though the narrator’s own story on the frame level reaches back to December 1952, thus giving a split narrated time of four months and thirty-two years, respectively. The intradiegetic narrative of Landau, too, has an embedded narrative, resulting in her story of meetings with Bereyter (summer of 1971 to December 1983, or roughly twelve years) being interspersed with Paul’s life story, as reported by Landau, beginning in 1934 and ending in 1983 (close to

¹⁹¹ I use the terms “histoire” and “discours” as defined by Genette (*Narrative* 87-8).

¹⁹² “Mood,” is that aspect of a narrative that indicates which character or who is “seeing” (i.e., point of view such as first-person; can be zero, internal or external); who is “speaking” (identity of the narrator) is referred to as “voice” (focalization) by Genette (*Narrative* 186). Focalization can be external to the story (extradiegetic) or can come from within a story (intradiegetic); it represents the position of the narrator relative to the events being narrated.

the present of the frame narrative). This complex layering of time and voices contributes to a sense of detachment, as represented in the narrator's near indifferent research of Bereyter's life – the narrator gives little commentary on his feelings about Bereyter – despite a personal connection as a former pupil, but contrasted with Landau's emotional, personal “outburst” (75). As an outsider to Germany, i.e., southern Bavaria, Landau shows rather more sympathy and emotion regarding her former lover, as would be expected. Nevertheless, it serves as a striking counterpoint to the lack of personal investment on the part of German characters in the narrative. As the novel progresses, so too does the narrative speed change to match increasing distance placed between the reader and the protagonists of the stories via the narrator.

In “Ambros Adelwarth,” the narrator comments very little on the life of the protagonist, Adelwarth, and, instead, relies on the second-hand stories and explanations of Aunt Fini, Uncle Kasimir and Dr. Abramsky. Gaining complexity in both narrated and narrative time, the third story has five principal narrators: Ambros (via his “diary”), Fini, Kasimir, Abramsky and the frame narrator, encompassing approximately twenty-seven, thirty-three, ten, eleven, and forty-two pages, respectively. The story of Adelwarth's life as told through multiple voices makes up two-thirds of the text, with the frame narrator accounting for the remaining third. Thus, the reported life story of the protagonist dominates the narrative, but the number of pages devoted to the narrator and his framing the protagonist's story bear further scrutiny. With the final narrative of the novel, however, the structure changes to reflect a more personal testimonial given by the Jewish Holocaust survivor-protagonist, Max Aurach.

“Max Aurach” differs greatly from the other three stories in the novel in several ways, more closely resembling *Austerlitz*, which I discuss in the next chapter. In terms of narrative speed, the frame narrative is longer than the embedded one (sixty-one and

thirty-nine pages, respectively), which is roughly equal in length to the diary of Luisa Lanzberg, and, together, account for one hundred thirty-eight pages or forty percent of the novel, the third, second and first stories occupying much less space (one hundred twenty-one, fifty-five and thirty-three, correspondingly), and, therefore, less emphasis.

On the level of the frame narrative, narrated time covers a period of twenty-five years and is slow (encompasses half of the pages), whereas the embedded, i.e., intradiegetic narrative of Aurach is told over several encounters in 1966-9 (one summer evening in 1967), November 1989 (three days) and June 1991 (one day), totaling five days. The narrative time of the frame narrative is roughly half of the story, essentially dominating the story with the narrator's experiences. The intradiegetic narrative of Aurach is almost twice as fast as the unnamed German narrator's but is equal to the intradiegetic diary. Thus, the Jewish Holocaust victims' narratives are couched within the non-Jewish German perspective, allowing for a more detailed look at the effects of their testimonies on the narrator.

The unnamed narrator is ostensibly the same for all four narratives. In "Max Aurach" especially, the reader shares in some of his impressions and thoughts about the places he visits and people he meets; we are guided by his point-of-view, but, therefore, need to exercise greater caution in how we perceive the Jewish protagonist. Unlike the previous three stories, this last one deals with Holocaust victims, one being a child survivor, provoking questions as to how, for a German audience,¹⁹³ to interpret and characterize the figures.

¹⁹³ Chandler also refers to Sebald's style as presupposing a German audience, stating that "there is a recurring sense that an implied German reader looms large among the various audiences for [Sebald's] books" (40).

NARRATIVE MOOD AND VOICE: REPORTED SPEECH AND LAYERS OF MEDIATION

Die Ausgewanderten concerns itself with telling the stories of fictional Jewish characters, including a Holocaust survivor, by a non-Jewish German narrator. Establishing who is speaking, how this is reported, and what relationship exists between speaker and listener, then, is of great importance in the German context. Complicating matters is the amount of ambiguity in the extradiegetic narratives: the extradiegetic-homodiegetic (extradiegetic focalizer level 1, or EF1)¹⁹⁴ narrator, but also the intradiegetic narrators, in *Die Ausgewanderten* has/have no insight into other characters' thoughts and feelings, and the reader must rely on him or her to render pertinent details about Selwyn, Bereyter, Adelwarth or Aurach visible and legible so that s/he, i.e., the reader may better understand the lives of these characters. Nevertheless, to begin to attribute or ascribe qualities to, speculate about, project upon these protagonists is a problematic venture (e.g., objectification), one which, I argue, Sebald's literature in fact delegitimizes and disrupts in practice. Moreover, who is speaking (narrative voice) and

¹⁹⁴Genette lays out three categories of focalizer (heterodiegetic, homodiegetic and autodiegetic) and two distinctions of narrative level (extradiegetic, intradiegetic) between them. These terms are defined as follows: heterodiegetic refers to a narrator absent from the narrative s/he tells; homodiegetic expresses that the narrator is a character in the story s/he tells; and autodiegetic indicates a narrator that is also the main character in the (intradiegetic) narrative (*Narrative* 245-6). Furthermore, extradiegetic narrative level describes the position of narrative level one, often resulting in a frame narrative (external focalizer level one or EF1). This formulation is taken from Mieke Bal (*Narratology* 105, 112). When a frame narrator's voice disappears and a character within the story instantiated by him/her takes up narration, it is said to be intradiegetic (character focalizer level two or CF2). Thus, a frame narrator (EF1) who is also a character in the story-within-a-story and narrates from this position (CF2), can be considered extradiegetic and homodiegetic or autodiegetic, depending on whether s/he is the main character.

Problems arise in cases of autobiographical extradiegetic narrators (fictive or not), especially in terms of separating knowledge of the past available to the present-day narrator from what s/he would have reasonably known at the time of the events being narrated. This difficulty is exacerbated by the passage of time and the epistemology of memory (in real autobiographical writing), and believability (in fictional autobiography). The terms extradiegetic and intradiegetic are useful when discussing autobiographical work, and, indeed, when differentiating between degrees of omniscience. The employment of a narratological analysis here uncovers the text's rhetorical strategies and effects on the reader vis-à-vis focalization. By showing who is "speaking" and "seeing" in Sebald's text(s), I can demonstrate the unreliable nature of the narrator and narrative instability (e.g., violations of character knowledge such as *paralepsis*).

what s/he sees (narrative mood/focalization¹⁹⁵) helps us to better understand the texts' subtle approaches to the problems of representation, identity, witness and memory as regards the Holocaust.

Melancholy dominates the tone of the narratives, owing to the deaths of three protagonists, with the final one (Aurach) on the verge of dying. The three who died were not directly affected by the atrocities, unlike Aurach. Certainly this novel contains references to and mourns the loss of Jewish victims, but these are always at least at one level removed from the narrator (EF1), such as the case of Aurach's mother, Luisa Lanzberg (Holocaust victim), by way of her inscribed diary (CF2). Bereyter's story, like Naegeli's, is mediated by someone else (Landau and Selwyn, respectively) on the intradiegetic level, who then passes it on to the unnamed narrator. The third story ("Ambros Adelwarth") is mediated second-hand to the narrator (Aunt Fini, Uncle Kasimir, Dr. Abramsky), forming a pattern of distance via narrative mood. Even so, the journal of Adelwarth, read by and written into the narrative by the unnamed narrator, presents an ostensible first-hand, if mediated, account of the great-uncle's travels in the form of witness to Cosmo Solomon.

The mediation of these characters' stories is effected through the use of photographs and texts inserted into the novel (e.g., Adelwarth's diary entries), as well as the use of the special subjunctive in German. This grammatical mood is used as means for depicting indirectly reported speech, as seen in the following quote, wherein the narrator reports what Dr. Selwyn told him:

¹⁹⁵Focalization distinguishes the role(s) and voice(s) of the narrator from that of characters (Genette, *Narrative* 188). This term is more specific and less problematic than "point of view" insofar as it addresses both mood and voice; it corresponds to three different "points of view": omniscient (narrator knows, i.e., says more than what the character[s] know[s]) = zero focalization; first-person (narrator knows only what s/he as a character has access to) = internal focalization; and (third-person) objective (narrator does not know what the protagonist knows, thinks, etc.) = external focalization (188-90).

Tatsächlich begann Dr. Selwyn, nach einem gewissen Zögern, aus der Zeit zu berichten, die er kurz vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg in Bern verbracht hatte. Er habe, so begann er, im Sommer 1913...sein medizinisches rundstudium... abgeschlossen und sei danach unverzüglich nach Bern gefahren [...]. (23, my emphasis)

The special subjunctive is marked by the alternative conjugations of the helping verbs (“habe” and “sei,” as opposed to ‘hat’ and ‘ist’ for indicative mood), and is introduced with the preterite tense indicative verb “begannt,” including the past perfect (“verbracht hatte”). The indicative mood does not express what Selwyn said; rather, the special subjunctive marks the actual quotes for the reader of German. In this manner, the reader knows that what is presented to him or her in the text is a faithful account of what the original speaker said.

In other words, unlike in English, which lacks this feature, the declination of the finite verb can demonstrate a shift of voice, insofar as the reader recognizes the mediation of another’s speech through another person, i.e., character. In addition, the use of indicators of who is speaking (e.g. “begannt er,” “sagte Aurach”) helps the reader determine whose voice they are reading, which is difficult at times in *Die Ausgewanderten*, given the complete narrative structure, lack of quotation marks and often pages-long passages without reminders of the narrator’s identity.

Oddly enough, in the middle of lengthier passages of this sort, the special subjunctive often entirely disappears, switching over to the present, present- or past perfect or preterite indicative, even though the same person is speaking. This is, grammatically speaking, perfectly acceptable; however, it can be problematic in terms of identification with the speaker by the reader.

Mehr als ein halbes Jahr *habe* er...wie Aurach ohne weitere Erklärung sagte, in dem idyllischen Wasserkurort...zubringen müssen. [...] und *hätten* eine ganze Zeitlang das gesamte Panorama...aufleuchten lassen. Erst als diese gleichsam bengalische Illumination *erlosch*, *konnte* das Auge, sagte Aurach... (249-50, my

emphasis)

This passage, though truncated by me from one page to a few lines, demonstrates the sharp change from special subjunctive in the present perfect (and past subjunctive) to preterite indicative, despite the speaker, time and place remaining the same throughout. In this way, the text begins to feel less mediated, allowing the frame narrator to fade into the background, especially when the present or present perfect tenses are used, exposing the reader to an illusory closeness with the speaker.

For example, as the narrator listens to his Aunt Fini speak about Adelwarth, the present perfect dominates her speech, even though the preterite is at times employed: “Zirka zwei Jahre nach seiner Ankunft in Amerika, sagte die Tante Fini...ist der Ambros...gegangen. Was...weiter gewesen ist, kann ich nicht mehr sagen. Jedenfalls ist der Onkel im Haus der Solomons schnell avanciert”(131-3). The declarative marker, “sagte die Tante Fini,” is absent for two pages before returning in a first-person sentence (“Ich weiß natürlich nicht, was da in Wahrheit vor sich gegangen ist, sagte die Tante Fini, aber fest steht...”). In such a space, the reader can more readily identify with the speaker, who is often the protagonist (the speaker is more personable, less mediated), and feel directly addressed, as if present for the conversation reported by the frame narrator. Of course, this is not without its problems, particularly when the speaker addresses the reader, i.e., the narrator directly with the second-person singular pronouns, “Sie” and “du” (you), for example in “Paul Bereyter,” “[u]nd jetzt, so fuhr Mme. Landau fort, denken Sie sich [...]” (72), and in “Ambros Adelwarth,” “[d]er Onkel Adelwarth, an den du dich wahrscheinlich nicht erinnerst, sagte die Tante Fini” (111). This narrative trick, I suggest, increases the reader’s trust in the speaker by appearing to confirm information with the reader, which increases identification with the narrator and can lead to sympathy for or with the speaker. An emotional connection such as this need not be particularly

transgressive; however, it becomes much more problematic when used in connection with speakers who are Jewish – sympathy presupposes common knowledge or shared experience as the basis for understanding the situation (or plight) of the “other,” which I suggest is a problematic identification with the victims in Sebald’s texts.

The use of second-person address is also used to confirm knowledge that the narrator possesses. In fact, however, the text infers that the reader, too, knows the same information. In the same manner, the first-person plural (e.g., “wir”/we) tends to group the person speaking with another individual who, presumably, can identify with the speaker on some level. A clear example is to be found in the last narrative, when, discussing his only trip by train since escape from Germany on a *Kindertransport*, Aurach seeks agreement from the narrator, “wir wissen sehr wenig darüber” (253). The problem with this statement is the context: After an anxious train ride, which conjured up traumatic associations with his past (“Das Warten auf den Bahnhöfen, die Lau[t]sprecherdurch-sagen, das Sitzen im Zug,...die Blicke der Mitreisenden, all das ist mir eine einzige Pein. [...] Ich...hatte...meiner Reiseangst nie Herr werden können”) (252), Aurach attends an art exhibit for Grünewald, whose macabre paintings of burials depicted “[d]ie Ungeheuerlichkeit des Leidens” and concludes “daß an einem bestimmten Grad der Schmerz seine eigene Bedingung, das Bewußtsein, aufhebt und somit sich selbst” (253). At first glance, it would appear that this depiction of death and execution (“Zeugen der Hinrichtung”) would be beyond Aurach’s ability to comprehend, were it not for his family’s persecution at the hands of the Nazis. Although unable to bear direct witness to the death of his family, Aurach finds a certain affinity with art’s ability to express horrors, as evidenced by his work, in which he sketches by charcoal pencil,

erases, redraws and repeats the process over and over again.¹⁹⁶ On the other hand, the narrator cannot reasonably know the suffering Aurach experiences; owing to his birth at the end of WWII (he is an instructor at a school in 1966, placing him in his mid-twenties), the narrator does not share in this particular knowledge. Nonetheless, I suggest that this is a moment of self-reflexivity in the novel, inasmuch as the text, as a piece of literature, too, can portray horrors, but not without its own set of limitations.

Sebald's literature appears to counter uncertainty in a metafictional/-reflexive manner through the use of the first-person plural form of address. Discussing precisely this issue in her book on postmodern poetics, Hutcheon writes, "The 'we' of the narrating voice, in the present, underlines the metafictional historical reconstruction on the level of form" (Hutcheon 108). Thus, what seems to be creating consensus between the narrator and the reader, is, in fact, undermining the *effet de réel* by directly addressing the reader, not unlike Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, reminding the reader that the novel is artifice.

Besides the special subjunctive, the insertion of texts allegedly¹⁹⁷ written by other characters can convey a sense of mediation. Whenever a text is incorporated into the novel, the narrator interjects comments, frames and/or introduces passages to the reader. An example of this appears in "Ambros Adelwarth": "Der letzte Eintrag in dem Agendabüchlein meines Großonkels Adelwarth wurde am Stephanstag gemacht. Cosmo, steht da geschrieben, sei...von einem schweren Fieber befallen worden..." (214). Here,

¹⁹⁶It should be noted, however, that Frank Auerbach, on whom the figure of Max Aurach is based, did not use charcoal, but, rather, paint in a technique referred to in Italian as "impasto." This method of applying paint results in a raised or contoured layering of the paint. Auerbach, like Aurach, scraped the paint off his paintings (charcoal off his drawings, in Aurach's case), resulting in a unique appearance that resembles impressionist art. See "Frank Auerbach," *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation Inc., n.d. Web. 20 Sept. 2011. <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Auerbach>.

¹⁹⁷As Sebald discusses in an interview by Carole Angier, Ambros Adelwarth, although mostly biographically accurate as regards his own great-uncle, did not write the diary as presented to the reader; there are modifications made by Sebald himself (Schwartz 71-2).

the use of the lead-in, as narrated by the frame narrator, alerts the reader to the change in narrative voice, and then doubles this through the use of special subjunctive (“sei”). Curiously, both sentences are written in the passive voice, removing agency from Adelwarth and focusing instead on the diary entry.

Furthermore, the diaries of Adelwarth and Lanzberg are written in a first-person perspective, often in the present tense. To wit, Adelwarth notes, “Wir kommen an einem verdorrten Weingarten vorbei” and, further, “Droben...geht ein Reiterweg entlang” (208). This passage in his diary turns from present to present perfect and then the preterite within the space of two pages:

In der Vergangenheit, steht da zu lesen, hat Jerusalem einen anderen Anblick geboten. Neun Zehntel des Glanzes der Welt waren auf diese prachtvolle Hauptstadt vereint. Wüstenkarawanen brachten Gewürze, Edelsteine, Seide und Gold. Handelsgüter im Überfluß kamen...herauf. Kunst und Gewerbe standen in hoher Blüte. Vor den Mauern dehnten...Gärten sich aus... (209)

The only indicator that this is being read on the level of the frame narrative is “steht da zu lesen,” a gentle and unobtrusive reminder for the reader. Interestingly, the passage turns, immediately thereafter, into a preterite and past perfect narrative, interspersed with passive constructions, not unlike the previous quote examined above. In both cases, there is an emphasis on the actions taking place, but not the agents responsible for, what in this case, is wide scale destruction:

Und dann kam die Zeit der Zerstörung. Mehr als vier Stunden...wurden sämtliche Ansiedlungen vernichtet, die Bewässerungsanlagen zerschlagen, Bäume und Buschen geschoren, verbrannt und ausgetilgt bis auf den letzten Stumpf. Jahrelang ist das Projekt der Niederlegung des Lebens...planmäßig betrieben worden, und auch späterhin hat man Jerusalem heimgesucht...bis endlich die Verödung vollendet und von dem unvergleichlichen Reichtum des Gelobten Landes nichts mehr übrig war als der dürre Stein und eine ferne Idee in den Köpfen seiner inzwischen weit über die Erde hin verstreuten Bewohner. (209-10)

Describing the scale of systematic annihilation as transforming the city into a desert reverberates with descriptions of the expunging of entire villages in Poland during the Holocaust, which would not pass unnoticed by the astute or careful German reader. As a non-Jewish German, Adelwarth's use of the passive voice is deeply problematic, as is his wish to expunge his memory of the past, i.e., Holocaust through electroshock therapy. Moreover, the reference to the "Promised Land" and the diaspora of its people can only refer to the Jews, and ironically so, as if the past had predetermined the repeated destruction of the people at the hands of their enemies. In this passage, the Cesars are responsible for the city's being laid to waste, which also evokes the neo-classical parallels of the program of the Thousand-Year-Reich, as envisioned and espoused by the Nazis. By contrast, Lanzberg's diary in the final narrative, and particularly its description of the disintegration of the German-Jewish "symbiosis,"¹⁹⁸ places emphasis on the specifically Jewish memory that German literary discourse has consistently ignored.¹⁹⁹

FICTIONALIZING THE REAL, IMAGES AND META-REFLEXIVITY

Autobiography? The Question of Ontology in Sebald's Work

Are Sebald's novels classifiable as fiction or non-fiction, or are they something entirely else? In the critical literature on and reviews of Sebald's work, there is an overwhelming tendency to affix the label of "autobiographical" to his writing. Some critics go so far as to equate the narrators of *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz* with the author, as if his novels are not fiction, or should not be read that way. I find this particular

¹⁹⁸ As Jack Zipes points out in his 1994 essay, "The Negative German-Jewish Symbiosis," Gershom Scholem had already in 1976 refuted the idea of a prewar German-Jewish symbiosis in his *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis* (144). Dan Diner's term, "negative symbiosis," from his 1986 essay refers to a paradoxical symbiosis created through the Holocaust and its impact on postwar German-Jewish relations.

¹⁹⁹ Certainly this is not the case in German and Anglo historiography, such as the works of Konrad Jarausch, Saul Friedländer, and David Crew, about life in the Third Reich for Jews, i.e., their persecution.

characterization of his novels questionable and problematic, precisely due to the fundamental disregard of their status as fiction, i.e., recognition of their literariness. Sebald himself states on multiple occasions that fiction and fact are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are opposite ends of a sliding scale, on which fiction and non-fiction contain elements of one another (Bigby, "Sebald" 141, 153).

Sebald's second novel, *Die Ausgewanderten*, is subtitled as "Vier lange Erzählungen." The last word can be translated as "narratives," "tales," "novellas," or "stories," all of which imply some kind of literary or fictional style. Nowhere is there an indication that the stories to follow are biographical, autobiographical or another kind of non-fiction. Nevertheless, there is some ambivalence generated through the use of photographs, such as the one encountered on the first page of the narrative. As I show later in this chapter, however, these images are not guarantors that the text is non-fiction.²⁰⁰

At the beginning of the story, the reader is confronted in the first sentence with this statement: "Ende September 1970, kurz vor Antritt meiner Stellung in der ostenglischen Stadt Norwich, fuhr ich mit Clara auf Wohnungssuche nach Hingham hinaus" (7). For the reader who knows something of Sebald's life, this introduction to the novel will appear to be autobiographical. Sebald did, in fact, join the faculty of the University of East Anglia in Norwich in the eastern part of England in 1970, and he was married at the time, which appears to ground the story in his biography.

What appears at first glance to be nonfiction, however, reveals itself in the first few pages of *Die Ausgewanderten* to be fictive in nature. Whereas autobiographical

²⁰⁰ Garloff ("Emigrant" 88), speaking on *Die Ausgewanderten*, also makes this point without further expanding upon it: "The textual incorporation of photographs and journals whose authenticity remains questionable has to be seen in this context. The interstion of what may or may not be historical documents allows Sebald to hover between the claim to authenticity and the creation of fictions that come to substitute for irrecoverable memories."

writing is generally constrained by the autobiographical pact (Lejeune) – that is, when the name of the author refers to the first-person narrator, it then sets the reader’s horizon of expectations –, this novel quite clearly plays with this expectation, manipulating the reader through its fictionalizing of “facts” about the author’s life and experiences, whether through writing or numerous, carefully-placed images, which often are Sebald’s own.²⁰¹ The fact that this novel (but also *Austerlitz*), unlike what is common practice in German literature, does not carry the label of “Roman” (novel) on its cover or titlepage could lead readers to presume it is non-fiction, whose author is the unnamed narrator.

An example of biographical information that does not correspond to the author is found in the passage cited above. Sebald was married to Ute in 1967 not Clara, with whom he is looking for a place to live – presumably they are married or lovers in the novel – which should warn the reader that the author Sebald is not to be confused or conflated with the narrator. Yet, in the next narrative, “Paul Bereyter,” the narrator, describing the uncanny ability of an idiot savant (Mangold) to name the day of the week any given date fell/will fall on, suggests as an example Sebald’s own birthday of May 18, 1944 (59-60). Clearly, this is a provocative and self-reflexive moment in the novel, one that appears to give credence to the autobiographical style of the text while simultaneously undermining itself in the juxtaposition of fact and fiction throughout the text.

In other instances of art reflecting life, the narrator refers, in “Ambros Adelwarth,” to his mother, Rosa. Rosa is the name of Sebald’s mother; however, this should not constitute an autobiographical reading of the text. Besides her first name and relationship to the narrator, we have no information about Rosa, including her last name,

²⁰¹The ontological status of these images fluctuates in the course of reading the novel, based on information accrued by the reader about the narrator.

nor is the narrator's name revealed anywhere in the novel. Similarly, the title of the last narrative, "Max Aurach," is a combination of not only Sebald's preferred name, but also it is the name of the father of Frank Auerbach (Max Auerbach), who serves as the basis for the Jewish protagonist.²⁰²

Besides characters that resemble real people, the inclusion of texts, presumed to be real on the textual level (e.g., Adelwarth's and Lanzberg's diaries), serve as further evidence of fictional play. Only the former of these diaries is photographed and included in the novel (187, 194-5, 200-1), even containing names of other characters from the novel (201) on its pages, but this, as Sebald admits, was merely literary stylization; that is, he wrote the pages himself, photographed them, and had them included in the text. It should be noted that Lanzberg's diary is only textually, not photographically, included in the novel, which I suggest is due to the sensitive nature of Lanzberg's fate – she died during the Holocaust.²⁰³ To create a faux diary and reproduce it visually, like Adelwarth's, would be transgressive in a way – owing to the ontological status granted photographs as representative of factual reality²⁰⁴ – yet the fact that Lanzberg's diary is a

²⁰²What can be seen in both of Sebald's novels is that Jewish characters are not depictions of individual, real people; rather, they are fictional composites – pastiches – of actual survivors. The figure of Austerlitz is a combination of an architectural historian from Prague and a refugee who settled in England (Biggsby, "Restitution" 69-70 and "Sebald" 162). The refugee I refer to is Susie Bechhofer, who is featured in a television production about the *Kindertransporte* called *Into the Arms of Strangers* (Dir. Mark Jonathan Harris, 2000). The picture of the boy on the cover of *Austerlitz* and on page 276 is that of the architectural historian as a child. In *Die Ausgewanderten*, the figure of Max Aurach is based on the painter, Frank Auerbach and Sebald's landlord in Manchester (Biggsby, "Restitution" 59 and "Sebald" 161). In blending multiple figures together they become, in essence, fictionalized.

²⁰³It was discovered that the diary is actually a composite of several pieces of autobiographical writing by Jewish survivors. See Gasseleder. This follows the pattern established by Sebald in his character pastiches, which is ethically questionable in its rendering fictive real Jews' experiences – the blending of multiple autobiographical works creates a new work, one which cannot be said to have actually existed as the experience(s) of any one historical person.

²⁰⁴This has not been the case for some time, insofar as photography and the filmic medium have been manipulated to show contrary-to-fact images (e.g., double exposure). Indeed, in the past fifteen to twenty years (when Sebald was writing), the ability of the typical, proficient personal computer user to manipulate images digitally through software (e.g., Photoshop) and the pervasiveness of such falsifications over the Internet has certainly led to broader skepticism regarding the absolute truth content and "objective" reality

composite of actual Jewish survivors' autobiographical writing must also be addressed – it is not any less “real” despite the lack of photographic “evidence.” I suggest that the

Fictionalizing Real Places

Sebald's second novel, *Die Ausgewanderten*, appears, at first glance, to faithfully depict real places, historical characters and events, though this would be a misguided interpretation of his specific kind of Holocaust fiction. As is typical in German literature, an abbreviation is often used for the villages, towns and cities in which stories are set. These places are abbreviated using the first letter, capitalized, of the location, followed by a period. In Sebald's novel, there are several instances of this, including the use of ‘W.’ and ‘S.’, which, though likely referring to Wertach im Allgäu (Sebald's birthplace) and Sonthofen (a nearby village he moved to prior to starting school), cannot be assumed to be the mimetic equivalents of Sebald's childhood homes; they function more metonymically, I suggest, since they are anonymous for the reader who knows nothing of Sebald's background, but trigger associations within the reader of literary stylized place-naming.

In the third narrative, the protagonist, Adelwarth, checks himself into the Samaria Sanatorium, a place that seems to have no direct correspondence in the real world.²⁰⁵ As descriptions of the treatment of inmates per Dr. Abramsky reveal a more unethical side to the electroshock therapy practiced there by one Dr. Fahnstock, his predecessor, it is not altogether surprising that references to alleged Nazi doctors appear in the text – i.e., the founder of the “block method” of electroshock therapy, German psychiatrist Braunnmühl,

of photographic images. Moreover, the subjective perspective behind the camera has been well researched and noted (see Benjamin; Barthes; Sonntag; and Santer).

²⁰⁵ After brief searches via the Internet have turned up no evidence of a mental health ward, much less a sanatorium/sanitarium, having existed in Ithaca in the past hundred years, I am inclined to tentatively view this location as a fictional construct.

referring to Dr. Anton von Braunmühl²⁰⁶ (164). That the non-Jewish German friend of a Jewish American, Cosmo Solomon, consigns himself to potentially inhumane treatment (according to Dr. Abramsky, whose last name is a typical Jewish one) in order to erase his memory, including the death of Cosmo, is ironic in its correspondence to the trend in Germany at the time (early 1950s) to forget the Nazi past. Moreover, Samaria is the same place where Adelwarth had Cosmo committed, meaning that both were subjected to Dr. Fahnstock's problematic and potentially unethical treatments (143).

Still another fictional construct is the tower of a building located, according to the novel, at 500 West 187th Street and Amsterdam Avenue in Manhattan (123-4). As can be seen on Google Maps (satellite view and street level), there is only a multiple story building at this intersection, with no evidence of the existence of a tower. It appears to me that such examples of phantom buildings are not completely decoupled from reality, but neither are they meant to do so. Sebald is creative and inventive in his fiction, even if it requires a certain amount of research and investigation to uncover the truth behind these constructs. Moreover, the seeming verisimilitude plays with and even subverts the use of detailed information to enact a more "factual" reading of the text – in other words, the novel appears more rooted in real, i.e., historical people, places and events, which frames the reader's horizon of expectations.

Another instance of rendering fictive a place in the world is in "Dr. Henry Selwyn." Showing slides from and discussing their trip to Crete, Edwin and Selwyn mention the Lasithi Plateau, which reminds the narrator of the Caucasus Mountains that he saw in a film. To him, they had an "Indian" look, which is unexpected, considering that the Caucasus are not close to either the Himalayas (India) nor Crete; rather, they are

²⁰⁶Dr. Braunmühl worked at the Eglfing-Haar Asylum outside Munich, which was associated with the euthanasia program of the Nazis (Healy and Shorter 69).

halfway between. I suggest that this is a moment of identification with the protagonist by the narrator because Selwyn, not the narrator, spent time in India and would know the “look” of the mountains there. This moment also serves as an instance of self-reflexivity: the narrator’s casual remark indicates to the reader a slippage in maintaining distance between a Jewish character, who takes his life at the end of the story, and a non-Jewish German. This theme is developed over the course of the novel, though it fluctuates in importance depending on the identities of those thus identified with.

Images

Much has been written about in the Sebald scholarship on the use of photographs, sketches, paintings and other images.²⁰⁷ Therefore, I will concern myself more with the absence of images described in the texts. The photographs scattered throughout Sebald’s novels are, in and of themselves, pieces of fiction, insofar as they do not really depict what the corresponding text purports to portray, and they are also sometimes from people Sebald has met or researched (i.e., not his own).

Another different kind of image is found in the “picture” of the three women from the Lodz ghetto in *Die Ausgewanderten*, which does not appear in the text, but is, instead, described in detail (DA 353-5). The picture, according to the text, is from an exhibition in the 1980s, but, obviously, is not Sebald’s own.²⁰⁸ The origin of the photo is not as important as its physical absence from the text, which produces an irritation for and sense of loss in the reader. A second example of such a photograph is found in the Adelwarth

²⁰⁷Essays and other works that deal with photography and (traumatic) memory include: Anderson; Barzilai; Crownshaw; Duttlinger; Furst; S. Harris; Hirsch, Frames; Hoffmann; Horstkotte; Jones; Kouvaros; Long; and Tischel. A recent volume has also been published on this topic (Patt).

²⁰⁸This and other pictures were taken by a Nazi accountant named Genewein (Baumgarten 284-6). In her dissertation, Susanne L. Jones, citing Ulrich Baer, suggests that the described image of the three women resists relegation to history and, instead, causes it to “survive” in the mind of the reader (Jones 149-150).

episode. Only when leafing through a family photo album, does the narrator discover a picture of family members who emigrated, prompting the narrator's decision to seek out his Aunt Fini and information about his great-uncle Adelwarth. Thus, it functions as a conduit for memory. Yet another picture given to Sebald and included in his work is that of the Bavarian family in traditional dress, which is mentioned in the Bigsby interview as well (*DA* 325).²⁰⁹ Such images affirm the provisional nature of authenticity for the photographic medium, a presumption that is challenged by Sebald's novels.

Another irritation is the picture of a cemetery framed in the middle of the first page. Centered in the photograph is a yew tree, the branches of which extend over several tombstones, nearly reaching both sides of the picture. Numerous other tombstones surround the tree, many of which are leaning, which contrasts on the visual level with the rather straight and upright yew tree, a traditional symbol of immortality. Combined with the quote from above, the reader is confronted with the "search for a dwelling" juxtaposed with an image of a cemetery, an ironic foreshadowing of deaths to come, but not those of the couple, as the reader might expect.

On the next page, a cemetery is mentioned – ostensibly the very one from the photograph on the previous page – which lies near the house they have come to view – that of the title figure of the narrative, Dr. Henry Selwyn. Described as "unweit der in einem Rasenfriedhof mit schottischen Pinien und Eiben stehenden Kirche lag [das Haus] in einer stillen Straße," the house appears to be ruled by the same silence and solitude as found in the cemetery, and this is reinforced by the following description of the house as un-lived in (*DA* 8-9). Curiously, the Scottish pines, multiple yews (only one is depicted) and the church described above do not appear in the photo. This discrepancy is another

²⁰⁹Bigsby "Sebald" 154.

irritation for the reader, who is left uncertain as to whether the incongruence of the description with the image is a question of the photographer's perspective (framing) or of two different places. The use of distorted and displaced images such as this one in Sebald's work leaves the reader feeling unsettled and instills a questioning, cautious approach to reading the text.

The effect of placing images in areas of text not directly relevant to their content is jarring, and affects the reader in two ways. On the one hand, s/he begins to anticipate the images described in the text, even though s/he is frustrated in cases when they are not depicted. On the other hand, the reader becomes aware of the highly constructed nature of the text, though the displacement of images could also be modeling an aftereffect of trauma, which, however, is not without its own significant and inherent difficulties.²¹⁰ The use of photographs and other imagery throughout Sebald's work problematizes the reliance on such artifacts' seemingly objective depiction of reality and truth content, although in and of themselves, as Susanne Jones suggested in her study, photos do not capture anything more than a moment; a (fictional) narrative is required to tell these artifacts' stories.²¹¹

Meta-Reflexivity: The Self-Reflexive Narratives of Sebald

In *Die Ausgewanderten* the reader encounters a number of passages that problematize the acts of writing and narration in self-reflexive ways. Such sections contribute to creating a more critical awareness in the reader as to the constructedness of the texts as well as showing the narrators and protagonists to be more hesitant and

²¹⁰The use of delayed images could reflect the belated nature of trauma and traumatic memory. However, such a reading fails to ground this in textual evidence, insofar as the physical displacement of the images is an effect of the narrator(s), who is/are not traumatized.

²¹¹See Jones.

uncertain in their own attempts to represent the past. The passage I quoted on the first page of this study from *Die Ausgewanderten* is but one example of how the unnamed German narrator struggles with putting down in writing the story of the Jewish “other” (Max Aurach). The narrator describes his painstaking approach (“Skrupulantismus”) insofar as “[d]ieser Skrupulantismus bezog sich sowohl auf den Gegenstand meiner Erzählung...als auch auf die Fragwürdigkeit der Schriftstellerei überhaupt” (DA 344-5). The narrator finds writing to be a “questionable” practice, one which may not be up to the task of accurately and faithfully transmitting the story of a Jewish Holocaust survivor. As we will see in the following section, there are several instances in which the project of Holocaust literature is scrutinized, disrupting the spell of fiction for the reader. This has certain effects for the reading process, which I also discuss.

In a very informative passage in “Max Aurach,” as the narrator illegally enters and looks around the closed, neglected Jewish cemetery in Bad Kissingen, Germany, he encounters two particular graves that give him pause to reflect:

Eine Art Erkennungsschreck durchfuhr mich vor dem Grab, in dem der an meinem Geburtstag, dem 18. Mai, dahingegangene Meier Stern liegt, und auch von dem Symbol der Schreibfeder auf dem Stein der am 28. März 1912 aus dem Leben geschiedenen Friederike Halbleib fühlte ich mich auf eine, wie ich mir sagen mußte, gewiß nie ganz zu ergründende Weise angerührt. Ich dachte sie mir als Schriftstellerin, allein und atemlos über ihre Arbeit gebeugt, und jetzt, wo ich dies schreibe, kommt es mir vor, als hätte *ich* sie verloren und als könne ich sie nicht verschmerzen trotz der langen, seit ihrem Ableben verflommenen Zeit. (DA 335-6, emphasis in original)

The name “Meier Stern” is a monogram for Max Sebald, the name the author preferred to use in place of his given name (Winfried Georg). The monogram hints at the author’s name in connection to the narrator, who is somewhat shocked (“Erkennungsschreck”) through his identification with “Meier Stern,” even if only in name. This suggests that Sebald is the narrator, but bringing the author’s name into the novel is a violation of the

universe of the novel, a fictional construct not to be read as an autobiography, especially since Sebald is neither Jewish nor a Holocaust survivor. What is not clearly laid out is why the narrator is alarmed by the coincidental association of the deceased's name with his own: is it a premonition of his own death? This identification is rather problematic because of the narrator's fleeting existential fear, which, being a non-Jewish German, is unfounded – he would never have been persecuted during the Third Reich, so this “it-could-have-happened-to-me” realization, whether conscious or not, is gratuitous and therefore unethical. Because the novel is fiction, the use of Sebald's monogram functions, I suggest, as a moment of self-reflexivity, which underscores the constructedness of the writing.

The second name, which the narrator mentions after Meier Stern, supports this interpretation, as the narrator views a gravestone with a feather on it (“Schreibfeder”) as a symbol indicating that the buried woman (Friederike Halbleib) was an author. Of course, this is only speculation on the narrator's part – he imagines her bowed over her writing and alone, much like the narrator himself, who, self-reflexively, calls attention to the act of writing, “wo ich dies schreibe” (337). The “dies” (this) refers to the narrative the reader has before him/her, which is written some time after the visit to the cemetery. In the present – as the narrator writes this passage – it occurs to him that perhaps he had lost her and is unable to grieve for and get over her death (“verschmerzen”), which implies a personal tie to or familiarity with the deceased.²¹²

²¹² My suggestion of an implied personal connection (heteropathic identification) with the departed is not to foreclose the possibility that others can grieve for those they are not directly related to or friends with; rather, it is to underscore the identificatory processes taking place in the narrator – he already imagines that she was a writer like himself, triggering a feeling of loss. This kind of “heteropathic identification” (“feeling and suffering with another” as Silverman defines it), in this case, leads to “appropriative identification,” which is unethical for a non-Jewish German, given the circumstances.

The implied moment of contemplation years after seeing Halbleib's tombstone is an instructive piece of meta-reflexivity – the reader is addressed (that there is an audience is implied in his writing down the story and pointing to its construction) insofar as s/he is asked to evaluate the fact that the narrator is identifying on some level – i.e., as a writer – with a Jewish woman, as if he had known her personally or can grieve at her loss. I would argue that this passage problematizes the narrator-writer's difficulties in separating his personal history from that of German-Jews – he came to Bad Kissingen after reading the diary of Max Aurach's Jewish mother, Luisa Lanzberg, who died in the Holocaust. Moreover, the narrator's association with Halbleib, the cause of which he appears unable to ascertain (“nie ganz zu ergründende Weise”), draws upon his own knowledge of what befell the Jews during the Holocaust and shows the narrator's implicit connection (Silverman's “appropriative identification”) of himself to Jewish survivors who “lost” (“als hätte *ich* sie verloren”) loved ones during WWII.²¹³ However, the use of the subjunctive mood interjects uncertainty in the form of speculation: “als könne ich sie nicht verschmerzen.” Thus, we cannot determine whether or not the narrator cannot come to terms with her death. In fact, the narrator, upon seeing Luisa's and her family's tombstones, places a stone upon Lily Lanzberg's (Luisa's mother and the only one interred there) according to Jewish custom. This gesture is ambivalent insofar as it is left open as to whether the narrator feels this is a representative act on behalf of a decimated and no longer extant Jewish community, or if it is done out of guilt; the former explanation would suggest an inappropriate level of identification.

²¹³ Halbleib's death prior to WWI also evokes the idea of a time prior to the Nazis' racial policies, which separated Jews (by religion and/or ethnicity) from “Germans,” as if Jews were never really German. This is an ironic gesture, when viewed in light of the narrator's identification with Halbleib in the moment he imagines her to be a writer like himself.

In the sentences preceding those quoted above, the narrator lists names he sees on tombstones in the cemetery, many of which could be representative of common Jewish names, but in light of the extensive intertextuality and self-reflexivity in Sebald's novels, it is worthwhile to examine the names further. At first sight, the names Hamburger, Kissinger, Wertheimer, Friedländer, Arnsberg, Frank, Auerbach, Grunwald, Leuthold, Seeligmann, Hertz, Goldstaub, Baumblatt and Blumenthal appear to be a short list of "beautiful" German names, as indicated by the narrator (335). However, the names allude to several people of (varying) importance to German history and literature: Michael Hamburger is a well-known Germanist and translator of German literature into English, including consulting on the translations of Sebald's work; Henry Kissinger, the Jewish-German/American Secretary of State and National Security Advisor under U.S. Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, is known mostly for his policies of détente in U.S.–Soviet relations and for winning the Nobel Peace Prize; Henry and Saul Friedländer are Jewish Holocaust survivors and well-known historians who focus on the atrocities; Anne Frank is of course rather important, particularly for the way her diary was problematically, in terms of glossing over her demise in the Holocaust in favor of a more uplifting and inspirational story, adapted to the American silver screen²¹⁴; Frank Auerbach was a Holocaust survivor and painter, who serves as the basis for this fourth narrative ("Max Aurach"); Grunwald is an intertextual reference to Sebald's poetry (*Nach der Natur*), in which Matthias Grünewald, an early modern painter, figures prominently, and with whom Sebald has a few things in common (Friedrichsmeyer 78); Rafael Seligmann is a famous Israeli-German writer who writes extensively about German/Jewish relations in his novels; and Heinrich Hertz, whose work on electro-

²¹⁴*The Diary of Anne Frank*, Dir. George Stevens, 1959.

magnetism and the discovery of electro-magnetic waves and light as a waveform did not spare his family, despite only a tenuous connection to being Jewish, from having to flee Nazi Germany. To a discerning reader, these names catch his/her attention, though even casual readers cannot overlook famous names like Frank, Kissinger and Hertz, which echo the lost potentialities of the millions of murdered.

Shortly after the cemetery visit, the narrator, still self-reflexively, comments upon his research and writing. The point of this meta-talk is to set up commentary about Germans and memory:

Obgleich ich während meines mehrtägigen Aufenthalts in Kissingen und in dem von seinem einstmaligen Charakter nicht das geringste mehr verratenden Steinach zur Genüge beschäftigt gewesen bin mit meinen Nachforschungen und meiner wie immer nur mühevoll vorangehenden Schreibearbeit, spürte ich doch in zunehmendem Maß, daß die rings mich umgebende Geistesverarmung und Erinnerungslosigkeit der Deutschen, das Geschick, mit dem man alles bereinigt hatte, mir Kopf und Nerven anzugreifen begann. (DA 337-8)

This passage reiterates the difficulty of the narrator's research and writing ("wie immer nur mühevoll vorangehenden Schreibearbeit"), and, at the same time, demonstrates his ability to notice the ubiquitous "intellectual impoverishment," lack of memory and the deft purging of the past from contemporary Germany. The description of the bureaucrat, from whom the narrator receives directions and alleged keys to the Jewish cemetery, is implicitly menacing and indicative of the lack of interest or care in Jewish history in the town ("in einem abgelegenen Büro auf einen schreckhaften Beamten stieß, der mir, nachdem er etwas entgeistert mich angehört hatte, beschrieb, wo die Synagoge gestanden und wo der jüdische Friedhof zu finden war") (331). The "new" synagogue was destroyed during Reichskristallnacht, and, in its place currently, is the employment office (331-2). The rather neglected state of the Jewish cemetery, as well as the inability of local bureaucrats ("nach einigem Suchen in einem an der Wand angebrachten

Schlüsselkasten”) to locate its proper key (“stellte es sich heraus, daß keiner der beiden Schlüssel in das Schloß paßte”) – the (wrong) keys are labeled, as seen in the photograph on page 333, with “Israeli Friedhof” and “Israelitischer Friedhof” – prompts the narrator to criticize the locals’ aloofness regarding the Nazi past (331-4). In an ironic twist, the cemetery is located exactly one thousand steps – clearly an allusion to the promise of the thousand-year-Reich by the Nazis – south of the office, a veiled reference to the hellish death (south/down towards a place of death) suffered by Jews mentioned in a detached manner not unlike that of Nazi euphemisms employed by bureaucrats. Furthermore, the sign on the gate of the cemetery (depicted in the photo) cites local laws prohibiting acts of vandalism (StGB §168, 304), an indicator that problems with anti-Semitism still exist in contemporary Germany.²¹⁵

The extensive use of intertextual references in Sebald’s work is also a self-reflexive strategy, which aims at exposing its fundamental constructedness and fictional status, thereby keeping the reader at arm’s length while fostering his/her critical awareness. Not only do they contain a myriad of recognizable allusions and passages across many literary periods and national literatures, but the texts obfuscate a host of further intertexts in their lack of demarcating or prefacing them (Friedrichsmeyer, Lennon, Leone, Pearson, Schedel). By hiding these intertextual references and intertexts, the reader is thrust into an awkward position of attempting to discern which words are Sebald’s and which are from other, varied sources. In the following, I look at a representative example, though by no means entirely illustrative of the complexity of this feature, of intertextuality in Sebald’s work.

²¹⁵According to a Wikipedia entry for the cemetery, there have been incidents of vandalism, including graffiti with Nazi symbols. See “Jüdischer Friedhof (Bad Kissingen).” *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation Inc., n.d. Web. 5 May 2011. <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C3%BCdischer_Friedhof_%28Bad_Kissingen%29#Sch.C3.A4ndungen>.

In *Die Ausgewanderten*, each story is introduced with a title and an epigraph, which offers insight into the subsequent text. The first narrative, “Dr. Henry Selwyn,” begins with an epigraph adapted from Friedrich Hölderlin’s “Elegie”: “Zerstöret das Letzte / die Erinnerung nicht” (*DA* 5).²¹⁶ The original quote, “verzehret das Letzte / Selbst die Erinnerung nicht?”, gives us an example of how not only altering the words slightly, but also taking them out of context and reinserting them into a wholly other text radically changes their meaning. This poem is – ostensibly – an elegy for a lover; the original line adapted into the novel is a rhetorical question, one which belongs to a litany of despondent acknowledgments that his lover can never be replaced. In its agonizing mourning of loss, the poem speaks of memory’s tendency to “consume” – as opposed to Sebald’s word, “destroy” – the last traces of the lover who has passed away. In *Die Ausgewanderten*, this line is not indicative of mourning the loss of a lover; rather, it is a nostalgic and melancholic prescript for the work to follow – that is, the loss of a mentor (Johannes Naegeli, a friend and companion of Dr. Henry Selwyn, the character after whom the first narrative is named). However, when considering the quoted line within the poem, the vast grief, as expressed in the pointlessness of what remains (“sinnlos dünkt lange das Übrige mir”), foreshadows the suicide of the main character, Dr. Selwyn, whose homesickness for his Lithuanian hometown, symbolically mourns those Jews who perished in the Holocaust during the region’s 1941-4 Nazi occupation.²¹⁷

The use of the intertext from Hölderlin has secondary considerations apart from the differing positions of the narrator relative to the departed. Hölderlin’s later poetry manuscripts were often written, rewritten and overwritten, rendering them at times

²¹⁶In the English version, this is translated as, “And the last remnants / memory destroys” (*Emigrants* 1).

²¹⁷This stanza, found on the Friedrich Hölderlin Society’s website (accessed/retrieved on 25 April 2011 <<http://www.hoelderlin-gesellschaft.de/index.php?id=118>>), is taken from the Stuttgart collection (aka. “Kleiner Stuttgarter Ausgabe”) of his work (Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke, Band 2.1*, ed. Friedrich Beissner, Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer / Cotta, 1944-62, 71-74; my emphasis).

illegible, not unlike the style of sketching, drawing and painting by the protagonist of the final narrative of the book, “Max Aurach.” Hölderlin was also one of the German Romantics, whose poetry influenced Rilke, but especially the Jewish Holocaust survivor and poet, Paul Celan, whose poetry was translated by Michael Hamburger, the poet and translator of some of Sebald’s own work.²¹⁸ Interestingly, both Celan and Hamburger wrote poems referencing Hölderlin.²¹⁹ Moreover, Sebald’s predilection for writing prose in a similar style to that of the Romantics appears to extend to admiration for their poetry as well. Given the well-known extent of intertextuality and “aleatory correspondences”²²⁰ in Sebald’s prose, I suggest that this is no coincidence, particularly when the appropriation of Hölderlin by the Nazis is taken into consideration – using Hölderlin’s “Elegie” as an intertext i.e., epigraph to foreshadow the suicide of a Jew not killed by the Nazis ironically underscores the impact the Holocaust had and still has on survivors many years later.²²¹

What does all of this mean for my interpretation of *Die Ausgewanderten*? First, as should be clear from the preceding close readings of the text, Sebald’s novel is fiction, even though it resembles biographical data about the author. The novel presents itself as a fictional construct, though one that borrows from documentary realism/fiction, such as found as the work of Peter Weiss and Rolf Hochhuth. The use of intertextuality introduces a further element of fiction, which references, among many works, other

²¹⁸W.G. Sebald, *After Nature*, Trans. Michael Hamburger, New York: Random House, 2002; and *Unrecounted*, Trans. Michael Hamburger, New York: New Directions, 2004.

²¹⁹The connections between Hölderlin, Celan and Hamburger, among others, are explained in Karl-Josef Kuschel’s thoughtful essay, “Tübingen, Jänner.” See also Michael Hamburger, “Englische Hölderlin-Gedichte,” Hölderlin Jahrbuch, 13, Eds. F. Beissner, P. Kluckhohn, Hölderlin Gesellschaft, Tübingen: JCB Mohr, 1963-4.

²²⁰For a definition and the employment of these “aleatory correspondences,” cf. Friedrichsmeyer.

²²¹This theme reappears in *Austerlitz*, both in terms of the traumatized protagonist, Austerlitz, and Jean Améry, whose torture haunted him and drove him in part to commit suicide some twenty years after the fact.

creative autobiographical approaches to writing, as in the case of the recurring trope of the “butterfly man.”²²²

Second, when considered in light of its status as fiction, the constructedness of the text becomes much more apparent, resulting in awareness of the critically self-reflexive moments in Sebald’s text, further opening up the meaning of the novel. *Die Ausgewanderten* is mired in the ethical difficulty inherent in representation of the Holocaust from a non-Jewish German perspective. Thus, many of the allusions and intertextual references do not directly depict the atrocities or offer German opinions on what transpired; rather, they form a network of associations that point to the missing signifier at the center of the work, which no character names: the Holocaust. Indeed, the images that would seem to offer a glimpse into Jewish suffering (e.g., the unincluded image of women in a Jewish ghetto described on the last two pages), are distinctly absent, leaving the novel open-ended – the reader does not know what becomes of Max Aurach, the narrator or the women in the missing photograph.

Third, and directly related to the previous point, the use of images as a counter-narrative literary device and technique, about which much has been published,²²³ continuously interrupts the act of reading, calling the reader’s attention to discrepancies in what is said (written, i.e., memory) and what is depicted (photographs/images, i.e., history). In the many instances of disjuncture between the text and its images, the reader is placed in the role of a critical observer, who cannot help but notice the stark discrepancies between description and depiction, itself a moment of meta-self-reflexivity. Sebald’s literature questions our reliance on and quest for knowledge of the past in the

²²²This figure, found in each of the four narratives, alludes to Vladimir Nabokov, whose fictionalized autobiography, *Invitation of a Memory*, is reflected in Sebald’s work, which has already been discussed extensively in the Sebald scholarship (Curtin, Durantaye, Jacobs, Kilbourn, Trousdale), including several dissertations (J. Harris, Reitano, Zdrakovic).

²²³See Crownshaw, S. Harris, Jones, Long, and Tischel.

form of “objective” evidence and accounts, demonstrating, instead, that such evidence is always already embedded in a narrative (White), and that we should utilize other narrative means, i.e. fiction, to help better understand the Holocaust.²²⁴ As I will show in the next chapter, in which I analyze *Austerlitz*, the discourse of photographs and other images should not overshadow the written discourse and its intense impact on the reader, but, instead function as rupture in the reader’s experience of reading the texts.

Fourth, the position of the frame narrator (EF1) in relation to other narrators (Aunt Fini, Uncle Kasimir, Lucy Landau) and the protagonists (Selwyn, Bereyter, Adelwarth, Aurach) produces several effects. Not only is the narrator distanced from the protagonists through mediators, i.e., other narrators, but is at times obscured from the reader. The former has the appearance of a more objective handling of the suffering of others, whereas the latter raises concerns about the reader getting too close, even possibly identifying with the protagonists. Identification of this sort is ethically questionable from the perspective of a non-Jewish German identifying with a Jewish character vis-à-vis his or her suffering.

As I show in the next chapter, many of these concerns and narrative devices are addressed in Sebald’s last novel, *Austerlitz*. By contrast, however, the complexity and content of his final novel indicates the degree of correspondence to and reaction against contemporary debates about the Holocaust in terms of representation, victimization and memory discourse in Germany.

²²⁴ In Bigsby’s chapter on Sebald, he quotes the author as saying that he began to “work with very fragmentary pieces of evidence to fill in the gaps and blanks and create out of this a meaning which is greater than that which you can prove” (Sebald quoted in Bigsby, “Restitution” 40). For me, this quote is crucial to understanding the scope of Sebald’s literary project and his insistence on fiction as an equally valid genre for writing about the Holocaust.

Chapter Four: Sebald's *Austerlitz*

In this chapter, I explore the second of two novels by Sebald, *Austerlitz*. I analyze the text in terms of its *language of uncertainty* and as a critical response to debates and Holocaust discourse which transpired in the intervening years between the novels' publication. Essentially, I will show how the use of narrative strategies, including manipulation of narrative mood and voice, blurring fact and fiction, meta-reflexivity, and the use of an unreliable narrator, serve to undermine critical discourse (Chapter Five), thereby suggesting the need for a new approach to interpreting Sebald's literature. It is my contention that this final novel of Sebald's focuses more on problems of Jewish identity, suffering and representation from the non-Jewish German perspective, while problematizing standard conventions in Holocaust literature. These include art, i.e., literature as documentation, lamentation or mourning, bearing witness (to the atrocities and/or those who perished in them), enacting resistance to the Nazi program of annihilation, distancing devices (e.g., use of third-person narrative perspective to describe experiences of the first-person narrator), collapsing and fragmentation of time, metaphors/metonymies as critical tropes (e.g., Auschwitz as symbol and metonymy of the Holocaust), and the inadequacy of language to represent the horrors of the Holocaust.

SYNOPSIS

Sebald's final novel, *Austerlitz*, is a complex blending together of narrative strands and voices that tell the story of a Jewish Holocaust survivor, Jacques Austerlitz. Born in Prague, the protagonist grew up in the years preceding Nazi occupation of his country, but his life was radically altered when his mother, Agáta, secured passage for him on a *Kindertransport* to England. Upon arriving in England, Austerlitz was adopted by a preacher and his wife, with whom he had an, at times, strained relationship. It was

not until his foster parents passed away that his identity was revealed to him by his boarding school director, Penrith-Smith.

In an effort to understand his identity and roots, Austerlitz begins to study history, eventually attending graduate school in France for architectural history. His life is fraught with difficulties, including belated effects of trauma in the form of episodes (e.g., fainting) the cause(s) of which elude his understanding. Austerlitz busies himself with his work, and meets the narrator of the story several years later, at which point the novel begins.

The unnamed German narrator and Austerlitz meet on and off over a period of some thirty years. During this time, the narrator gets to know intimate details of the protagonist, visits him and corresponds with him, though with many years between some encounters. The narrator, a generation younger than Austerlitz, begins to seek out places his acquaintance describes to him, and is not only fascinated by their unusual encounters, but, by the end of the novel, even agrees to safeguard personal photographs and the key to Austerlitz's home in London.

REPRESENTATION IN *AUSTERLITZ*: FICTIONALIZING REAL PLACES

In Sebald's final novel, *Austerlitz*, interesting patterns of fictionalization and constructedness emerge. To begin with, the title of the novel is clearly an allusion to the decisive battle on December 2, 1805, in which Napoleon defeated the allied powers of Russia, Great Britain and the Holy Roman Empire (Austria). French aggression in Germany and Italy provoked a war and the aforementioned alliance, which, ultimately, was defeated at the Battle of Austerlitz. This ironic allegory for German aggression against its neighbors in WWII becomes much more complex when viewed in light of its

other meaning for the novel – it is the namesake of the Jewish Holocaust survivor-protagonist.

That the main character is named after a victorious battle by a “tyrant” (Napoleon Bonaparte I) bent on dominating Europe, the parallels to Hitler and Nazi Germany being obvious, and that this proto-fascist agenda repeated itself over a century later, should give the reader pause to consider why the protagonist, a Jew, is thus named. Because he escaped the Holocaust, Austerlitz, on one level, is an ironic reminder of the failure of Germany to conquer Europe and exterminate European Jewry – that is, named after a great victory that nevertheless did not prophesy final success for France.²²⁵ On another level, the fact that Napoleon “emancipated” the Jews in territories France controlled,²²⁶ makes the name Austerlitz into a symbol of hope, but one which was shattered by the Holocaust.

The opening sentence of the novel, although not preceded by an image, initially appears to be autobiographical (i.e., told through Sebald’s perspective):

In der zweiten Hälfte der sechziger Jahre bin ich, teilweise zu Studienzwecken, teilweise aus anderen, mir selber nicht recht erfindlichen Gründen, von England aus wiederholt nach Belgien gefahren, manchmal bloß für ein, zwei Tage, manchmal für mehrere Wochen. (AZ 9)

At this time (1966-68), Sebald was an assistant lecturer at the University of Manchester, where he earned his master’s degree in literature. It is quite plausible that Sebald himself went on several excursions to Belgium “partly” related to his “studies” (i.e., research) – his master’s thesis examined the work of Carl Sternheim, who lived in Belgium from

²²⁵Much like the Germans some one hundred and thirty years later, the French main army was defeated after invading Russia, and a couple of years later, the Napoleonic Wars were concluded with the defeat of France. It is also interesting to note that Sebald's last project, a novel fragment titled *Corsica*, was also the name of Napoleon's birthplace, which I suggest is no coincidence.

²²⁶“Napoleon and the Jews.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation Inc., n.d. Web. 13 Apr. 2011. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleon_and_the_Jews>. Napoleon also committed genocide in Haiti, and allowed slavery in the French-American colonies.

1912-18 and 1936-42. The fact that Sternheim lived in exile in Switzerland and Belgium until his death (he was the son of German-Jewish parents) resonates with Sebald's self-imposed "exile" and some of the places he had lived, researched and worked (Switzerland, Bavaria [Sternheim lived in Munich], Belgium); it almost seems as though Sebald identifies with Sternheim on some level. However, to equate the narrator on the first pages of *Austerlitz* with the author is to fall into a subtle trap – at no point in the novel does the narrator provide his name. As I demonstrate below, the introductory passage of *Austerlitz* is anything but autobiographical.

In *Austerlitz*, the narrator's trips, described on the first page, take him "sehr weit in die Fremde" (Belgium), which should not really be that foreign to him as a continental western European, i.e., German. The narrator experiences a kind of nausea, and seeks refuge in the Nocturama (special exhibit wherein night is artificially simulated during the day), a part of the zoo adjacent to the main train station in Antwerp, where he had arrived just a short while before. The "false world" of the Nocturama sets up a classic metaphor for knowledge (light) and ignorance (darkness), but, ironically, equips the animals housed in darkness with a "forschenden Blick" ('inquisitive', but also 'researching' gaze) that attempts "das Dunkel zu durchdringen, das uns umgibt" (AZ 11). The inclusion of animals in the pronoun "uns" (us) suggests that we humans are also surrounded by a lack of knowledge. Furthermore, the animals, which are nocturnal, are, for the most part, either native or of the desert, but the "Halbaffen" recall the jungle primeval – the origin of humankind as embodied by apes. These pre-Simian figures, I argue, also open up an intertextual reading of this passage. Not unlike the narrator, Marlow, in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, who, working for a Belgian firm, seeks out Kurtz, a man traumatized by the atrocities committed in the Belgian-Congo, the German narrator in Sebald's novel encounters a victim of trauma a few pages later (Austerlitz), whose life is tied

inextricably to the Holocaust. The literariness (intertextuality) of the first few pages, which parallels one of Sebald's literary influences, frustrates an autobiographical reading of *Austerlitz*. In the course of the analysis below, the subtle play with fiction and facts will reveal the extent to which the novel resists categorization as (autobiographical) non-fiction.

In the first "section" of *Austerlitz*, the narrator also describes his disoriented wandering through the city streets. These streets (Jeruzalemstraat, Nachtegaalstraat, Pelikaanstraat, Paradijsstraat and Immerseelstraat), which share names with actual streets in Antwerp, are, with only one exception (Immerseelstraat), located near Centraal Station (AZ 9). Several also have in common a religious motif: Jeruzalemstraat (Jerusalem Street), Paradijsstraat (Paradise Street), Nachtegaalstraat (Nightingale Street, which, in the Germanic context, is potentially a reference to the "Wittembergische Nachtigall," Martin Luther²²⁷) and Immerseelstraat (street named after an old Dutch family but also a play on words in German which can be loosely interpreted as 'Eternal Soul Street') allude to the religious epicenter of Judaism and Christianity (Jerusalem), the Christian belief in an afterlife and the existence of the immortal soul, respectively.

Curiously, Immerseelstraat is the only street not located within walking distance of the train station, and, combined with its double entendre (local family name and allusion to the human soul), the spatial dislocation indicates, I suggest, two things to the reader. First, since the street is not located in the "innere[m] Bezirk," the narrator very subtly indicts himself as unreliable, though one would have to be a discriminating and

²²⁷The Meistersinger Hans Sachs, a composer of many mastersongs, wrote "Die wittembergische Nachtigall" in 1523, which is a collection of Martin Luther's teachings put to verse, and was widespread and popular during the Reformation in German-speaking lands.

thorough reader or critic to take notice of this factual distortion.²²⁸ Second, the physical distance of the street to the others implies a disconnect between the soul, the religious nexus that is Jerusalem, and heaven, as if the soul is lost, wandering or is itself displaced. Read in this way, I suggest, the discrepancy is an allusion to the traumatized Jewish protagonist, who at this point in the novel (first page), has not yet been introduced, but who is also a “lost soul” like Kurtz from *Heart of Darkness*.

At the end of the novel, “section four” (AZ 362-409), we find more examples of intertextuality and fictionalizing real people and places, and this section also marks the last encounter with Austerlitz by the narrator before the former attempts to discover traces of his father. After receiving a postcard from Austerlitz in Paris, the narrator meets him in September 1997,²²⁹ about one and a half years after Austerlitz’s recovery and two-year stint in “gardening.” Austerlitz, temporarily settling in Paris in order to better research the whereabouts of his father, finds an apartment in the thirteenth district, near where his father’s last listed address was. Remembering his first Parisian apartment during the 1950s in Rue Emile Zola “nur wenige Schritte vom Pont Mirabeau” (363), he reflects upon how the bridge used to appear in his nightmares (“Angstträumen”), a unifying metaphor for not only physical location, but also the connection, i.e., “bridge” to his father, who disappeared after fleeing from Prague to Paris. There is an Avenue Emile

²²⁸The research on intertextuality in Sebald's work has shown that many references are cleverly disguised, some even completely unmarked quotes from other texts. It has even been suggested that Sebald, as a professor of literature, inserted these intertexts as a nod to his scholarly readers.

²²⁹Mentioning that it is September (362) and that a fire raged in Indonesia (363), presumably referring to the decreased air quality and increased haziness due to Indonesian farmers' slash and burn practices in 1997, the effects of which peaked in September, sets the time of the story (Cf. Cowan 57). Alternatively, the text could be referring to either an airliner crash killing 235 people in late September 1997, or a Soufrière Hills volcano on Montserrat in the Lesser Antilles (Indonesia) that erupted – off and on – during approximately same time frame. Austerlitz refers to the fires as a “catastrophe,” which is a bit of an exaggeration; while the fires certainly caused a number of problems, labeling it a catastrophe conveniently obscures the human cause of the fires. However, in referring to it this way, the text, I contend, alludes to the Holocaust in typical Sebald fashion, as well as creates a thematic bridge between Austerlitz's traumatic past, troubled present and his search for his father.

Zola leading to the bridge; however, the Rue Emile Zola is, in the real world, in Alfortville on the east side of Paris, whereas the Pont Mirabeau is located on the west side of the city.²³⁰ This kind of deliberate fictionalizing or distorting of reality (i.e., postmodern play) is a recurring instance in the novel, from beginning to end. It not only underscores the text's constructedness, it also frustrates direct correspondences in the text to the "real" world through its verisimilitude, ultimately playing with autobiographical readings or interpretations of his fiction in a nod to the most thorough of critics.

This geographical confusion (or ruse) destabilizes the narrative and problematizes the authenticity of Austerlitz's memory and the narrator's reporting of said memory, calling attention yet again to the fictive nature of the story. This type of distortion occurs already in the first few pages of the novel, in which names of streets in Antwerp are fictitiously rearranged to appear in the vicinity of the train station and zoo. Oddly enough, the location of his father's address is, in fact, in the thirteenth district. The significance of this discrepancy is apparent: the reference to Zola and the distortion of place reinforces the fictional status of the novel, suggesting a link to that of the French novelist and his style²³¹; the address of the father and the "fact" of his disappearance are tied geographically (a real location in Paris) and historically (deportations) to reality, thus maintaining a certain level of facticity in regards to the Holocaust. Sebald's writing is ever vigilant in its respect for the atrocities, but that does not prevent it from integrating

²³⁰In his very informative article concerning facts and fiction in *Austerlitz*, James L. Cowan also discusses the discrepancies in names and addresses I mention here, even connecting the address (6 Avenue Emile Zola) with the last residence of Paul Celan before he committed suicide by jumping off of the Mirabeau bridge. However, Cowan has overlooked the fact that a "rue" Emile Zola does, in fact, exist within the Paris metro area (the suburb Alfortville). Cf. Cowan 55-8.

²³¹Zola wrote in the naturalist style of fiction, which, in its social determinism (people are products of their social environments and heredity), echoes some of the ideological tendencies in National-Socialist thought (for example, racial politics and views that Jews needed to be exterminated so that Germans, i.e., Aryans might flourish).

literary- and intellectual history, as well as postmodern play, into the content of *Austerlitz*.

Also during his first stay in Paris, Austerlitz visits the Montparnasse cemetery, in which many rather famous writers' and philosophers' mortal remains are interred: notably Charles Baudelaire, Samuel Beckett, Guy de Maupassant, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre and Jean Baudrillard (367-9). Cemeteries appear several times in Sebald's work, and function both as a symbol for death and a meta-reflexive reminder to the reader that not only people, but their ideas and history lie buried within these Foucauldian heterotopias.²³² I contend that it is no coincidence that this particular cemetery is mentioned, especially since the thematization of simulacra and the use of distorted photographs (Baudrillard), memory and the shock of modernity (Baudelaire, and, by extension Walter Benjamin [his writing about the former's poetry]) occurs in *Austerlitz*. There appear to be many such details distributed throughout Sebald's fiction, which spawn more allusions and intertexts, making it difficult to resist exploring the texts more in depth.

In the course of his research at the old national library,²³³ Austerlitz meets Marie de Verneuil, who also is interested in architectural history. A romantic relationship

²³²Foucault's notion of the "heterotopia," as I understand it, allows for a simultaneity of physical presence and absence, such as in a cemetery: the dead are physically interred, though they are hidden from sight with only gravestones and similar markers to indicate the presence of an absence. Furthermore, the contradiction of a cemetery (center of death) within a city (center of life) creates a tension between utopian spaces of life and radically other spaces of death. Read within the frame of Sebald's literature, the use of cemeteries as heterotopias adds another (ironic) level of interpretation to the presences of Jewish protagonists amidst the unmistakable and undeniable lack of Jews in Europe in a post-Holocaust world.

²³³The new national library, which Austerlitz describes later in section four, is not located on Rue de Richelieu (second district) but along the Quai François Mauriac on the other (south) side of the Seine (thirteenth district). It is interesting to note that Mauriac was the editor and promotor of Elie Wiesel's *Nuit (Night)*, which triggers further associations in the reader with a real Jewish Holocaust survivor.

Austerlitz's Kafkaesque description of the tube system for sending messages/requests from the reading galleries to the stacks/collections is also suggestive of the library as a heterotopia inasmuch as the actual location of the books is hidden from the view of the visitor (AZ 371-2).

develops between them, though it is tempered by Austerlitz's inability to reconcile his memory with his traumatic past, eventually dooming their courtship. The protagonist feels panicked whenever Marie is not in Paris, which leads to his "wandering" the suburbs and visiting a museum of veterinary medicine that ultimately leaves him horrified. I return to the complicated relationship of memory to both of these characters later in this chapter. Let us now look again at the text's play with real places and their literary manifestations.

Avenue de la République is the name of rue Emile Zola as it runs northeast towards Maisons-Alfort, mentioned as the location of the school of veterinary medicine (376-7). The avenue, however, does not lead to the school and museum; rather, it intersects the major street on which they can be found, Avenue du Général Leclerc. Thus, we have a coincidence of names and places that may be indicative of a deeper significance for the narrative: what does Zola have to do with the grotesque, trauma-inducing collection of preserved organisms at the veterinary museum? Perhaps it is related to his naturalist style of writing, though I would argue it is more likely a result of his intervention in the Dreyfus affair (his article published in *L'Aurore*, which brought the cover-up to the public's attention), in which a Jewish army major was accused of treason, sentenced to life imprisonment, and only later exonerated through the uncovering of a military conspiracy to protect the real culprit. The anti-Semitic discourse surrounding the affair has thematic concerns in common with *Austerlitz* as a prehistory of the Nazi persecution of the Jews during WWII. Noteworthy here is the fact that Dreyfus is interred in Montparnasse cemetery and Zola's final resting place is the nearby Panthéon, which lies between – or, rather, the northern point of a triangle including – Montparnasse and

the Gare/Pont/Quai d'Austerlitz,²³⁴ but also the hospital (Hôpital Pitié Salpêtrière) where Austerlitz is taken when he collapses on a train after visiting the veterinary museum. Adding to the overlapping significance of this space, Michel Foucault wrote a study on power in the field of medicine, which includes his discussion of the “medical gaze” (an impersonal viewing of the body of the patient as divorced from the person’s identity [!], not unlike the attitude that so was prevalent in discussion of Nazi medical experiments).²³⁵ Such coincidences are numerous throughout Sebald’s work, yet the latter is a playful meta-reflexive gesture that implies a similar gaze instantiated by the narrative itself.

During his recovery phase with the help of Marie, Austerlitz and she attend the traveling circus Bastiani at the very location of the future national library, according to the text, between the Gare d'Austerlitz (Austerlitz [train] station) and Quai d'Austerlitz (Austerlitz dock) on the Seine, where they hear the performers close their show with something akin to a dirge (386). Research on the library and its representation in the novel shows, in fact, the library was not built at this site, but, instead, at a location nearby (Cowan 59-72, 74-5). Once again, the difference between literary and real places suggests a discrepancy in memory. Following this passage, there is a break in the narrative (391), and then Austerlitz proceeds to tell the narrator about the national library in Paris.

²³⁴These three places are adjacent to one another, and they represent the – actually false – location of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in the novel.

²³⁵ See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Vintage, 1994.

Upon their next meeting, Austerlitz describes to the narrator his impressions of the new library²³⁶ in all its gargantuan and intimidating dimensions, even suggesting that it is the embodiment of a paradox:

Wenn man nicht mit einem jener führerlosen, von einer *Gespensterstimme* dirigierten Métrozüge an der in einem *desolaten Niemandsland* gelegenen *Bibliotheksstation* ankommen will, ist man gezwungen, an der Place Valhubert in einen Autobus umzusteigen oder aber das letzte, meist sehr windig Stück am Flußufer entlang zu Fuß zu gehen bis zu dem in seinem Monumentalismus offenbar von dem Selbstverewigungswillen des Staatspräsidenten inspirierten und, wie ich, sagte Austerlitz, gleich bei meinem ersten Besuch erkannt habe, in seiner ganzen äußeren Dimensionierung und inneren Konstitution *menschenab-weisenden* und den Bedürfnissen jedes wahren Lesers von vornherein kompromißlos entgegengesetzten Gebäude. (AZ 392, my emphasis)

Austerlitz sets up the experience of arriving at the library as a kind of transition from reality into a place of otherness. The subway trains, guided by a “ghost’s voice,” cross over into a “desolate” place (the library station), where one encounters the library, whose presence actually “repels” people. It is as if visitors to the library must cross the River Styx, a boundary only passable by the dead or with the help of the ferryman, Charon. The utopian space of the library as the sum total of knowledge and history is a heterotopias, insofar as it is a space separated from the rest of the city (one must cross a “no man’s land” to reach it), contains knowledge from all over the world, and is meant to resist the passage of time and forgetting by preserving this knowledge for the future, thereby providing a site of resistance to silence. However, history has generally been hegemonic in nature,²³⁷ having only recently – particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century – been radically challenged in post-structuralist, post-modern and post-historicist cultural and literary theories, and the library appears no less an obstacle to learning about the past.

²³⁶The library officially opened its doors to the public in December of 1996, which coincides with Austerlitz and the narrator's meeting at the Great Eastern Hotel bar.

²³⁷I refer here to the adage that history is written by the victors, a famous quote attributed to Winston Churchill, but whose characterization of historiography I do not entirely agree with.

In fact, Austerlitz mentions that the new national library proved to be of no assistance in his search for traces of his father (AZ 399).

Describing the library in Kafkaesque terms, Austerlitz depicts an ironic, irrational and dystopian apprehension of what is supposed to be a bastion of knowledge: it is simultaneously the repository of “unseres gesamten Schriffterbes” (399), and, ironically, a hindrance to accessing said information, “menschenabweisenden und den Bedürfnissen jedes wahren Lesers von vornherein kompromißlos entgegengesetzten Gebäude” (392). Its apparent purpose is “zur Verunsicherung und Erniedrigung der Leser,” especially through its “Kontrollmaßnahmen,” as if one were conducting “ein höchst zweifelhaftes und jedenfalls nur unter Ausschluß der Öffentlichkeit abzuwickelndes Geschäft,” which sounds strikingly similar to Josef K’s descriptions of mysterious and ominous bureaucratic institutions and structures in *Der Prozess* (395, 396).²³⁸ The intimidating quality of the enormous complex heightens the sense of danger in the reader:

Hat man die wenigstens vier Dutzend ebenso eng bemessenen wie steilen Stufen erklommen, was selbst für jüngere Besucher nicht ganz gefahrlos ist, sagte Austerlitz, dann steht man auf einer den Blick förmlich überwältigenden... zusammengesetzten Esplanade, die sich...über eine Fläche von schätzungsweise neun Fußballfeldern erstreckt. (393)

Additionally, there are security personnel and measures – including long waits in order to find answers to questions about access to sought-after information – that imply restricted access despite the fact that it is open to the public; its very physical form is so imposing (“überwältigenden”) as to scare away potential visitors, and the use of words related to climbing and physical obstacles (“eng,” “steilen,” “erklommen”) make it appear to be an arduous task that might be dangerous for some “younger” people.

²³⁸ Taberner has made a similar association between this work of Kafka’s and the earlier passage in *Austerlitz* about the Palace of Justice in Brussels (“Nostalgia” 191).

Moreover, the comparison of the main plaza of the library to an ocean liner during a storm creates the impression of instability and danger.

Insbesondere an Tagen, an denen der Wind, was nicht selten vorkommt, sagte Austerlitz, den Regen über diesen gänzlich ungeschützten Plan treibt, meint man, durch irgendein Versehen auf das Deck der Berengaria oder eines anderen Ozeanriesen geraten zu sein...(393).

The building even becomes so threatening as to conjure up an image of people being washed overboard (“und wäre wohl nicht im geringsten erstaunt, wenn auf einmal...eine der winzigen Figuren...von einer Sturmböe über die Reling gefegt und weit über die atlantische Wasserwüste hinausgetragen würde” [ibid.]).

It is hardly surprising that Austerlitz’s research leads to his discovery of a former concentration camp on the site where the new national library stands, a “fact” which has been shown to be “fictive.”²³⁹ Austerlitz’s (chronologically) later description of the library to the narrator is thus informed by his discovery of its geographical significance for his own, traumatic past, coloring it in a more menacing fashion – it is “unheimlich.”

Memory and Visual Representation

As has already been commented upon extensively in the secondary literature on Sebald’s novels, photography and images are tied intrinsically to representation and memory in his work.²⁴⁰ In fact, much of the draw to his work stems from the unusual

²³⁹See Cowan; and Pearson. According to Cowan, the site of the camp is actually a couple of blocks south of the location of the new library, which is skewed as part of Sebald's way of “ma[king] facts fictive” (Wood cited in Cowan, 67). This distinction of making fiction appear to be factual in Sebald's work finds its roots in James Woods' review of *Austerlitz* in 2001.

²⁴⁰ The discrepancy in the placement of images – vis-à-vis the passages allegedly describing them – in Sebald’s novels results in a loosely constructed net of signification; the images may or may not be the referents indicated by the textual passages. The “belatedness” or “displacement” of these images has been used to read the texts through the lenses of memory and trauma theory (Barzilai, “Exposure”; Crownshaw, “Limits,” “Reconsidering”; Furst; Hirsch, “Generation”; Horstkotte, “Fantastic”; Jones; Patt; Schmitz-Emans; Tischel), but also in Barthesian studies of the images’ *punctum* and *stadium* (Harris). The uncited

interplay of memory and visual representation. In *Austerlitz*, for example, the protagonist sets up a metafictional analogy between memory and the photographic development process which questions his own – Austerlitz’s – memory:

Besonders in den Bann gezogen hat mich bei der photographischen Arbeit stets der Augenblick, in dem man auf dem belichteten Papier die Schatten der Wirklichkeit sozusagen aus dem Nichts hervorkommen sieht, genau wie Erinnerungen, sagte Austerlitz, die ja auch inmitten der Nacht in uns auftauchen und die sich dem, der sie festhalten will, so schnell wieder verdunkeln, nicht anders als ein photographischer Abzug, den man zu lang im Entwicklungsbad liegenläßt. (AZ 117)

Memory, like photography, is subject to being over-developed, and, by extension, the narrator’s reiteration of Austerlitz’s story, too, faces the limits of what memory can provide him in his narration. That is, the more we try to grasp the original, the longer (more) it is processed (“verarbeitet”) and the more likely it is that the original content – itself not stable or reliable – will be lost. This self-reflexive moment in the novel suggests that the narrator’s attempts to write down his conversations with Austerlitz will also necessarily fail – the harder he tries to capture the detailed monologues, the more likely he is to already be re-inscribing them in a way different from their original form and content.

Throughout *Austerlitz* invocations of the impossibility of holding on to (preserving) memory and not forgetting becomes a recurrent theme. When the narrator visits the fortress of Breendonk outside Antwerp, he displays such concerns:

Die Erinnerung an die vierzehn Stationen, die der Besucher in Breendonk zwischen Portal und Ausgang passiert, hat sich in mir verdunkelt im Laufe der Zeit, oder vielmehr verdunkelte sie sich, wenn man so sagen kann, schon an dem Tag, an welchem ich in der Festung war, sei es, weil ich nicht wirklich sehen

and unexplained images, which are not introduced but which are visually framed by the text (e.g., through indentions and center-justified text), are said to be those photographs taken by the characters (both narrators and protagonists). Moreover, the use of images as metaphor and metonymy for memory dominates much of this scholarship on visual representation in Sebald’s novels.

wollte, was man dort sah, sei es, weil in dieser nur vom schwachen Schein weniger Lampen erhellt und für immer vom Licht der Natur getrennten Welt die Konturen der Dinge zu zerfließen schienen. (38)

The cause of his fading memory of the fortress is unknown (“Die Erinnerung...hat sich in mir verdunkelt”), yet the narrator speculates that it could have been “weil ich nicht wirklich sehen wollte, was man dort sah,” or it could have been due to poor lighting. In suggesting that he did not want to see, i.e., comprehend what he saw, the narrator implies a traumatic experience in his visit to Breendonk; he cannot specifically recall seeing the mentioned rooms (“Stationen”), only words. In other words, he was unable to integrate the experience into a cognitive narrative or history, and, thus, it was not able to be remembered.

Immediately following the above passage, the narrator describes a feeling of unwellness: “das in mir sich festsetzende...überkommende Gefühl, dass mit jedem Schritt...die Atemluft weniger und das Gewicht über mir größer wird. [...] und ich gezwungen war, mit der Stirn mich anzulehnen an die...Wand” (39-41). He feels disoriented, dizzy and weak, as if due to terror. I argue that his experience is traumatic because of the symptoms mentioned, and, only many years later, does he begin to understand the impenetrability of the “darkness” – that is, forgetfulness. Given that the darkness “löst sich...nicht auf,” I read this passage as indicative of postmemorial over-identification with Jewish suffering (39-40). Indeed, he feels compelled to make several excursions to and in Belgium (“ganz und gar planlosen belgischen Exkursionen”), which, I argue, is similar to the compulsion indicative of traumatic repetition (44). The very general and vague terms of an underlying trauma, I contend, is due to the dissociative nature of Austerlitz’s/the narrator’s post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Austerlitz experiences a much more intense trauma, whereas the narrator is the personality created in wake of it. This situation causes less intrusive, forceful manifestations in the narrator

precisely due to his being an aftereffect of the original trauma, and not the subject who “actually” experienced it (i.e., Austerlitz).

Some commentary about memory is also to be found in this section of the text, which sets the tone for the rest of the novel’s handling of memory and its opposite, forgetting.

Selbst jetzt, wo ich mich mühe, mich zu erinnern, wo ich den Krebsplan von Breendonk mir wieder vorgenommen habe und in der Legende die Wörter ehemaliges Büro, Druckerei, Baracken, Saal Jacques Ochs, Einzelhaftzelle, Leichenhalle, Reliquienkammer und Museum lese, löst sich das Dunkel nicht auf, sondern verdichtet sich bei dem Gedanken, wie wenig wir festhalten können, was alles und wieviel ständig in Vergessenheit gerät, mit jedem ausgelöschten Leben, wie die Welt sich sozusagen von selber ausleert, indem die Geschichten, die an den ungezählten Orten und Gegenständen haften, welche selbst keine Fähigkeit zur Erinnerung haben, von niemandem je gehört, aufgezeichnet oder weitererzählt werden... (38-9)

The little amount of history or events “that we can hold on to” reminds “us” of how much is forgotten (“wie wenig wir festhalten können, was alles und wieviel ständig in Vergessenheit gerät”) (39). As stated by Austerlitz in the later passage (quoted above), “memories that appear suddenly in the middle of the night, which one wants to hold tight, just as quickly darken again” (117, my trans.). Thus, attempting to recall and, in fact, hold on to memories is an exercise in futility. Time and again, Austerlitz and the narrator are frustrated by their inability to remember certain things as well as details of the past, yet, nevertheless, the narrator here remembers specific details, such as names on the fortress map’s legend, which allude to death (“Leichenhalle, Reliquienkammer”). Another example of this is the simile the narrator uses when describing the stories that “attach” themselves to places and objects, such as straw mattresses “zusammengeschrumpft, als seien sie die sterblichen Hüllen derjenigen, so erinnere mich jetzt, dachte ich damals, die hier einst gelegen hatten in dieser Finsternis” (38). This

image certainly evokes, especially in the piling up of the mattresses, iconic images from film and newsreels about the liberation of the concentration camps; it is an example of postmemory. It is also written with a degree of contingency, insofar as the narrator comments, “das kommt mir jetzt beim Schreiben zum erstenmal seit jener Zeit wieder in den Sinn” (39).

The above passage also includes several instances of the subjunctive mood (“sei” and “seien”), which indicate a hypothesizing narrator, whose conjecture reveals the extent of his own uncertainty as to what he might have thought when he visited the fortress. Furthermore, the contrast of words such as “light” (Licht), “darkness” (Finsternis), “to darken” (sich verdunkelt), “illuminated” (erhellten) “shadowy” (schattenhaft), and “shine” (Schein), used in conjunction with memory and forgetfulness, foreshadows and ties together a later passage about the photo development process, referred to above. Such passages permeate the novel and create an underlying ‘red thread’ whereby the elusiveness of memory – its fading to dark – and the resulting lack of knowledge of the past are depicted as intertwined, and hints at oblivion. The “shadows of reality” simile (photographic images likened to memories) mentioned in the first passage (117) draws attention to the mediated nature of both photographic “reality” and memories, and, further, suggests that these products are not replacements for reality; rather, they are substitutes, which are less than the original they allegedly capture. In fact, their likening to shadows questions their veracity: they are neither black nor white, and, therefore, open to interpretation. The idea of “shades of truth” found in expressions such as “black and white,” which reflect upon absolutist notions of perception, is contrasted with verbs of apprehension and perception throughout Sebald’s writing, undermining the subjective positionality of the narrators and protagonists. The discrepancy between defined or “objective” perspectives and subjective uncertainty problematizes received

memory and “truth”: can it really only be either this way or that, with no “shades of gray” or “gray area” to navigate? The metaphor embodies multiple tensions, at the heart of which lie notions of truth. Thus, the texts simultaneously strive for a degree of authenticity while self-reflexively questioning the possibility of truth in memory, testimony and their transmission.

The final (fifth) section of the novel (409-21) – its epilogue – is very succinct, as the narrator prepares to leave Paris. His final conversation with Austerlitz results in “inheriting” the keys to Austerlitz’s apartment in Alderney Street and finding out that Austerlitz has a new lead on his father’s history and plans to seek out further traces of Marie and his father in the south of France (410, 414). In a very self-reflexive and meta-fictional moment, Austerlitz discusses how he has always found the Gare d’ Austerlitz to be “der rätselhafteste aller Pariser Bahnhöfe” (412). I contend that this statement sets up an analogy between Austerlitz’s mind and the train station, an allegory reminiscent of Edgar Allen Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Austerlitz admits to having spent a lot of time as a student there, even having written a “Denkschrift” (both “memoir” and “memorial” is connoted by use of this term) about its layout and history. Furthermore, he feels unsettled “von der hinter dieser Fassade gelegenen, nur von einem spärlichen Licht erhellten und fast vollkommen leeren Halle, in der sich eine...Bühne mit galgenähnlichen Gerüsten und allerhand verrosteten Eisenhaken erhob,” and has the impression that “ich befinde mich am Ort eines ungesühnten Verbrechens” (412-13, emphasis mine).

Throughout the novel, light and dark serve as leitmotifs, corresponding to remembrance and forgetting or trauma, respectively. This emptiness and relative darkness of the train station, I suggest, symbolizes Austerlitz’s loss of memory; hence the very little “light” in the hall, i.e., knowledge in the brain. The gallows-like structure is an allusion to the imprint of the traumatic experience on his mind, and the iron hooks point

back to the beginning of the novel in which we read about Jean Améry's torture while hanging from such a hook. That the train station reminds the protagonist of an "unatoned-for-crime" – the Holocaust – at once is both an icon and a space of personal, mental imprisonment for Austerlitz – Gare d'Austerlitz is the most puzzling because it represents his trauma and allegorizes his incapacity to remember.

Moreover, the use of words related to vision – although previously mentioned in the secondary literature insofar as direct references to vision and eyes are concerned – forms a strong theme of perception, yet simultaneously problematizes the reliability of sight and images in the text in a self-reflexive manner.²⁴¹ Blindness, eyeglasses, staring, illusions, hallucinations, shadows, light and dark, dreams, fog and invisible are words – motifs – used throughout the text, which effectively cast into relief the fallibility of human perception and memory – they are often used in conjunction with words describing memory. Implicit in this narrative strategy is a meta-reflexive critique of perception: the instability of the world in which the novel takes place reflects upon the unreliability of "knowing" the world around oneself. Because the Holocaust complicates issues of referentiality, witness and knowledge in unique ways, and is a dominant theme in Sebald's work, the manner in which his novels handle perception, history and authenticity are of critical importance. It is hardly surprising then, that the use of uncertainty and ambivalence occurs with great frequency in Sebald's texts; memories, objects, history, documents, videos, and oral history are insufficient to render the past whole for the characters.

The final few pages of the epilogue, after Austerlitz mentions his visit to a cemetery that cannot be seen from his apartment, is a return to the frame narrative level,

²⁴¹See Kilbourn.

in which the unnamed narrator reflects upon his experiences and encounters with the Jewish protagonist. The narrative follows the narrator as he returns to Antwerp and Breendonk. Arriving in Antwerp, the narrator proceeds to the Nocturama, a place intended for the preservation of living things, which stands in stark contrast to the cemetery in Alderney Street described on the pages before. Afterward, he returns to Breendonk and reads *Heschel's Kingdom* by Dan Jacobson, a gift from Austerlitz, which he suggests Austerlitz gave him during their first Parisian encounter. However, their first encounter was on the previous day, and no mention is made of the book – a conspicuously absent detail on the narrator's part that seems to coincide with Austerlitz's past. Is the book an invention on the part of the narrator? Does it serve as the basis for the story of Austerlitz's own father?

On the narrator's first day in Paris (1997), Austerlitz talks about his first stay in Paris as a student (late 1950s), and on the second, Austerlitz discusses his recent tour of the national library and search for his father – much like the *Heschel's Kingdom* reflects on the childhood of Dan Jacobson and his subsequent search for traces of his father. Remarking on the failed quest of Jacobson to locate traces of his family in Lithuania, the narrator also notes the more than thirty thousand people who died at Breendonk (419-21). The ironic open ending of the novel, in its juxtaposition of places of life and death, offers an interesting observation by the narrator. He notices that, in contrast to thirty years ago, the number of visitors to Breendonk is noticeably greater, most likely due to increased awareness of the crimes committed under the aegis of Nazi terror. The unnamed narrator then departs for nearby Mechelen (Belgium) as evening approaches.

Contingency and Coincidence as Ordering Principles

The use of coincidence and contingency appear to be the ordering principle in Austerlitz, which reflects the manner of how the Jews were persecuted: without any particular or consistent method. In addition, the notion of being lucky (to be alive) is a concept that survivors often attribute to the most banal of moments and choices. The novel's seemingly endless series of tangents in Austerlitz's testimony also reflect the use of contingency – one thing prompts memories of another.

Austerlitz dominates his conversations with the narrator during their encounters²⁴² with monologues on historical topics such as train stations, torture, fortresses and other architectural curiosities, all of which indirectly hint at the Holocaust through associations of technological developments in mass transit and militarism. Austerlitz senses that train stations are places of departure and freedom, unsettling and traumatic – his first mental breakdown occurs aboard a metro train in Paris in the 1950s, and his second takes place at the Liverpool Street station in the 1990s. Further, the torture of Jean Améry at the hands of the SS is described, as a means of thematic connection to the Holocaust, by the narrator in gruesome detail:

...erst ein paar Jahre später las ich bei Jean Améry von der furchtbaren Körpernähe zwischen den Peinigern und den Gepeinigten, von der von ihm in Breendonk ausgestandenen Folter, in welcher man ihn, an seinen auf den Rücken gefesselten Händen, in die Höhe gezogen hatte, so dass ihm mit einem, wie er sagt, bis zu dieser Stunde des Aufschreibens nicht vergessenen Krachen und Splittern die Kugeln aus den Pfannen der Schultergelenke sprangen und er mit ausgerenkten, von hinten in die Höhe gerissenen und über den Kopf verdreht geschlossenen Armen in der Leere hing... (AZ 42)

²⁴²These five or six encounters take place in 1967 (June in Antwerp, Autumn in Brussels, November in Terneuzen, and December in Zeebrugge), 1996 (London) and 1997 (Paris). What is unclear, is whether or not the meeting in the Fall of 1967 coincides with the meetings in either Terneuzen or Zeebrugge; hence the uncertainty regarding the number of actual encounters (five or six, depending on the “facts” of the narrative and how they are interpreted).

This conjures immediate associations with the persecution and atrocities inflicted upon Jewish victims, not the least because Améry was himself a Jew. The narrator feels compelled to visit places Austerlitz described to him, and he has an uncomfortable experience at Fort Breendonk, which was commandeered by the SS during WWII. That it happens at Breendonk, I argue, relegates the fortress to a kind of negative lieux de memoire.²⁴³ In fact, the narrator problematically identifies with Austerlitz on some level, as evidenced by his feeling unwell – he feels vicariously traumatized – in the halls of Breendonk, which he visits after Austerlitz tells him about his own visit to Breendonk – it appears to me to be an example *Wiederholungszwang* in the Freudian sense.

In the passage about the narrator visiting Fort Breendonk, at the moment when the narrator enters the torture chamber containing a large metal hook, the narrative begins a series of tangential “leaps.” He is reminded of a butcher’s shop from his childhood that he passed by every day (*AZ* 41). He then experiences feelings of nausea due to a particular smell in Breendonk. The first of these “leaps” is the recognition of an odor that “an einer irren Stelle in meinem Kopf” (*ibid.*, emphasis mine) is associated with a word his father – who is only mentioned this once in the novel – used to say, “Wurzelbürste” (scrub-brush, my trans.).²⁴⁴ What is curious, is that the narrator recalls a specific word that his father used at the moment that he approaches the chamber in which Jean Améry, according to Austerlitz, was tortured, which I read to be an allusion to Nazi language (40-2).²⁴⁵ This triggers feelings of weakness or vertigo (he leans against the wall for support

²⁴³See Nora.

²⁴⁴The fact that the narrator is trying to tell the story of a Jewish Holocaust survivor and would be problematic if it were revealed that his father may have played a role in the atrocities, might account for this one-time reference.

²⁴⁵“Aber ich weiß noch, daß mir damals in der Kasematte von Breendonk ein ekelhafter Schmierseifengeruch in die Nase stieg, daß dieser Geruch sich, an einer irren Stelle in meinem Kopf, mit dem mir immer zuwider gewesenem und vom Vater mit Vorliebe gebrauchten Wort >>Wurzelbürste<< verband...” (*AZ* 41, my emphasis).

after seeing spots before his eyes), which leads to the foregrounding of “objective” narration not influenced by his later knowledge of what transpired in the fortress: “Es war nicht so, daß mit der Übelkeit eine Ahnung in mir aufstieg von der Art der sogenannten verschärften Verhöre, die um die Zeit meiner Geburt an diesem Ort durchgeführt wurden, denn erst ein paar Jahre später las ich bei Jean Améry...von der von ihm in Breendonk ausgestandenen Folter” (41-42). Such a self-reflexive claim – that he is not describing feelings somehow affected by his privileged, retrospective knowledge – does not, however, preclude associations with more general knowledge of what occurred in similar installations (concentration camps, etc.) under control of the Nazis during WWII; the words in the map’s legend suffice to activate his imagination (“Einzelhaftzelle, Leichenhalle, Reliquienkammer”).

In the following pages, the narrative leaps from discussing “intense interrogations,” Améry’s torture, to Claude Simon’s story of an Italian, Gastone Novelli, who was tortured in a manner similar to that of Améry, was interred in Dachau and documented a South American language not previously cataloged (41-43). The abstruseness of these tangential or coincidental thematic leaps, which allude to the silence of the tortured victims (à la Améry) and conclude with a scream based on a language that could express it, reflects upon the difficulty of expressing the horrors and suffering of Holocaust victims, for whom no language aptly suited to the subject matter was available. After reproducing what such a scream would orthographically look like, the narrative jumps to the next encounter between the narrator and Austerlitz, as if the series of capital ‘A’s invoked the protagonist’s name (44). Thus, the plots and development of Sebald’s novels follow a “random” pattern of contingencies: one idea conjures up associations, which then, in turn, evoke further tangential digressions.

Unlike Goethe's "aleatory correspondences" in his *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, the connections derived in Sebald's texts, more often than not, evade the source of their protagonists' trauma (e.g., Austerlitz).²⁴⁶ The seeming randomness is an ironic recall of stream of consciousness writing popular among modernist writers, yet, precisely in its re-inscription in a postmodernist novel, draws attention to the constructedness of the text. Because of the seemingly impossible odds and sheer number of "coincidences"²⁴⁷ throughout the novel, the believability of the story is compromised, placing the reader in a position of critical doubt, and, thus, reaffirming an "alienation effect" (see Brecht).

SUBJECTIVE LANGUAGE AND AMBIGUITY

The use of highly subjective language throughout Sebald's novels, but especially in Austerlitz, foregrounds the unreliability of memory and the fallibility of the characters. The protagonist, Austerlitz, when speaking of his personal life, uses many words that indicate varying degrees of uncertainty in what he relates to his listener, the unnamed narrator, but the latter also does this on the level of the frame narrative. Reflecting upon the past is a difficult task with inherent gaps of forgetfulness; however, this language is not restricted only to memory; rather, it juxtaposes facts with opinions and speculation.

Sebald's work often employs words suggesting subjective judgment as opposed to objective qualifiers, casting into relief the unreliability and uncertainty of the narrative voice. The use of this type of language destabilizes the text through its foregrounding of the highly subjective position of the narrator – in other words, there is a distinct lack of "facts" in the text, and the only perspective the reader has is what the narrators think they

²⁴⁶For a definition and the employment of these "aleatory correspondences," cf. Friedrichsmeyer.

²⁴⁷I would like to point out that, through its very constructed nature, "coincidence," I contend, most often belies an intentional association. To view it otherwise, especially in Sebald's work, which revolves around "coincidences," would be a naive reading, in my opinion.

see, hear or believe. Already on the first page of Austerlitz, the frame narrator is uncertain in his surroundings (Antwerp Central train station), despite his multiple trips to Belgium from England:

In der zweiten Hälfte der sechziger Jahre bin ich, teilweise zu Studienzwecken, teilweise aus anderen, mir selber nicht recht erfindlichen Gründen, von England aus wiederholt nach Belgien gefahren, manchmal bloß für ein, zwei Tage, manchmal für mehrere Wochen. Auf einer dieser belgischen Exkursionen, die mich immer, wie es mir schien, sehr weit in die Fremde führten... (AZ 9, my emphasis)

What is interesting in this first couple of sentences, is the introduction of the erosion of self-certainty as regards the narrator's memory: it "appears" to him ("es schien mir") that these trips take him deep into foreign territory ("die Fremde," which is a vague nominalization of the adjective for 'foreign'), not unlike the narrator, Marlow, in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, who, working for a Belgian firm, boats upriver into the Belgian-Congo jungle in search of a man named Kurtz.²⁴⁸ However, Belgium should not be foreign for someone who has often traveled to the country, and, Antwerp being the second-largest city, would seem anything other than strange, especially for a German, given the close geographical proximity and some cultural commonalities.

The narrator departs on a journey that will have an enormous impact on the rest of his life, as indicated by the retrospective, ominous description of his discomfiture. At this point in the text, the reader does not know the identity of the unnamed narrator, but several images lead the reader to suspect that the narrator's identity is bound somehow to the Holocaust. This is indicated through the arrival in Belgium by train (reference to deportation), crossing a bridge flanked by "Spitztürmchen," which, I argue, is an iconic image alluding to the watchtowers typically found in concentration camps (an example of

²⁴⁸The numerous similarities between Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Sebald's writing are discussed by Margaret Bruzelius in terms of *Ringe des Saturn*, in which novel explicit references are made to Conrad's writing (Bruzelius). In terms of *Austerlitz*, however, this has not, to my knowledge, been researched.

postmemory), “rolling into the dark train station hall,” being “deeply moved” by a feeling of “unwellness” (suggestive of anxiety), which does not go away until he departs Belgium (*AZ* 9, my trans.). Given the unsettling description of his arrival in Antwerp, the narrator’s departure from England is suggestive of his potential status as a Holocaust survivor and refugee. Here the reader catches a glimpse of the narrator’s inner emotions, one of the exceptional moments in the novel. Furthermore, his “unsicheren Schritten...kreuz und quer” give the impression that he is disoriented, and he is also afflicted with a headache and “unguten Gedanken” (evoking thoughts of the systematic murder of millions of people) (9-10). Together, these images cause the reader to suspect that the narrator is a Holocaust survivor. Already at the beginning of the text, the device of the unreliable narrator plants the seed of narrative doubt – the narrator appears to suffer from trauma – which is only later discernible for what it really is: identification with a Jewish Holocaust survivor (Austerlitz) by the non-Jewish German narrator. I read this passage about the narrator’s arrival in Antwerp as a metaphor for and foreshadowing of his looming encounter with one, who, like Kurtz, is traumatized: Austerlitz.²⁴⁹

Upon entering the Nocturama, the narrator admits, “Ich weiß nicht mehr genau, was für Tiere ich seinerzeit in dem Antwerpener Nocturama gesehen habe” (10). He guesses that it was “probably” (“Wahrscheinlich waren es...”) a number of animals, which he lists, but can only really recall the raccoon (“Wirklich gegenwärtig geblieben ist mir eigentlich nur der Waschbär...”) (11). Furthermore, he “believes” to have asked himself whether someone turns a light on at night for the animals (“ging mir, glaube ich, damals die Frage im Kopf herum”), so that they can sleep. Curiously, there is confusion (“durcheinandergeraten”) on the part of the narrator between memories of how the train

²⁴⁹Marlow, during his return to England with Kurtz, witnesses the latter's last words (“The horror! The horror!”) and death. In the course of the novel it becomes clear that Kurtz suffers from trauma, and is radically affected by it.

station's "waiting hall" and the Nocturama look ("Versuche ich diesen Wartesaal heute mir vorzustellen, sehe ich sogleich das Nocturama, und denke ich an das Nocturama, dann kommt mir der Wartesaal in den Sinn"), leading to his assumption ("wahrscheinlich") that he could only imagine one in place of the other because he came directly from the station to the zoo and then back again (12). The narrator then speculates (subjunctive mood) that the animals of the Nocturama "must have" arrived in the train station like him, an idea which suddenly appears ex nihilo and makes it appear to him ("mir...vorgekommen ist") that the waiting hall was similar to another Nocturama (13).

Extending the metaphor, the narrator then explains that the other two travelers "appeared" to be smaller in size, similarly to the animals in the Nocturama (14). Strikingly, the text fluctuates between this subjective thinking ("schiennen") and the special subjunctive mood ("sei es...," "es handle sich"), the latter of which is a construction used to speculate on, in this case, the cause of an effect. The narrator "assumes" ("ich nehme an") he is "grazed" by the nonsensical idea that the travelers' unusual appearance is because ("es handle sich") they are the last members, i.e., survivors of a "lost" people ("untergegangenen Folks"), who resemble the animals (!) (ibid.). The integration of the special subjunctive with subjective terms creates the impression that the narrator does not know the source of his own conjecture or thoughts – it has the appearance of being random, though the allusion to Jewish survivors and their similarity to animals (i.e., not human) recalls the derogatory Nazi word for Jews, Ungeziefer (vermin). That this is the introduction the reader has to Austerlitz (one of the travelers and presumably Jewish), is problematic at best.

Austerlitz is framed within the narrator's recollection of their first encounter – the narrator names Austerlitz before actually narrating their meeting one another (14). For most of the rest of this first section of the novel, the narrator rarely comments about the

setting or Austerlitz, transitioning instead to indirectly reported speech of the protagonist, though the special subjunctive mood and declarative markers fade away, letting the indicative mood dominate. It is the protagonist, Austerlitz, whose language more often takes a subjective turn – owing to the fact that his narrative constitutes the vast majority (more than eighty-five percent) of the text – calling attention to his uncertainty in what he thinks and perceives. This tendency in Austerlitz’s speech occurs more frequently when he begins to talk about his own past, beginning in the second section of the novel. However, there are moments in his architectural-historical monologues, such as when he is discussing the interior of the rail station, in which Austerlitz also guesses and presumes things, for example, “wie ich gesehen haben müsse” (21). This formulation, reported by the narrator, leaves a trace of uncertainty, insofar as how he “must have seen” the various figures and symbols carved into the stone; Austerlitz is not, however, sure that he did see it this way. By foregrounding the rather contingent nature of the subject position of Austerlitz through highly subjective and loose terms, the reliability of the narrator becomes more suspect, despite implicitly suggesting an “authentic” encounter with a Holocaust survivor in the indirect quoting of speech. At times philosophizing, at other times waxing speculative, the figure of Austerlitz draws attention to his own conjecture and personal perspective. Pervasive use of such a point of view, and the lack of more concrete statements of “fact,” underscores doubt as regards memory – especially of a traumatic nature.

Besides the utilization of subjective language to sow uncertainty, at no point in the text does the Jewish protagonist think to himself (inner monologue) about his situation or what is happening around him.²⁵⁰ Deferring access to the inner thoughts and

²⁵⁰ This technique is also evident in *Die Ausgewanderten*.

emotions of its survivor-protagonists to perceptible actions and reactions, these texts (*Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz*) allow the reader to make only surface interpretations about their central figures, based on the narrators' perspectives. The high degree of ambivalence in these characters' external behavior – such as the use of pauses in Austerlitz's monologues – leaves it relatively open whether they are unable to remember something, are overwhelmed by emotion, or suddenly introspective; their expressions and ambiguity are not so much described as indicated, as evidenced by the following:

Mehr als ein Jahr nach dem Besuch in der Anstalt in Denbigh, zu Beginn des Sommertrimesters 1949, als wir gerade mitten in den Vorbereitungen auf die unseren weiteren Weg entscheidenden Prüfungen standen, so nahm Austerlitz nach einer gewissen Zeit seine Erzählung wieder auf... (AZ 100-101, my emphasis)

The reason for Austerlitz's pause is never explicitly addressed, yet this occurs several times throughout the text.²⁵¹ With a few minor deviations – when Austerlitz refers to pauses in the past relative to his conversation in the past with the unnamed narrator, such as when Vera pauses (263) or he remembers pausing himself (294) – these pauses indicate a need to “collect himself” or that he is “in eine tiefe Geistesabwesenheit versunken,” but do not ascribe a specific emotional state of being to the protagonist. In other words, the narrator is unable to psycho-analyze or even guess as to the causes of these pauses – it is left up to the reader to draw conclusions based on the evidence presented by the narrator.

Immediately prior to whenever Austerlitz recounts any of his personal history, there is an insertion of a hyphen to indicate a pause, much like the intake of a deep breath, before stating that he actually pauses or hesitates. These moments of suspension heighten tension through the expectation of something dramatic to follow, or, in a few

²⁵¹See also pages 118, 132, 167, 177, 237, 240, 263, 294, and 359.

cases, are breaks in the narrative in transitioning from one time and/or place to another.²⁵² It appears to be difficult for Austerlitz to continue at these moments, as if concerned that the metaphorical “floodgates” holding back an overwhelming emotional barrage will be forced wide open. Oddly enough, Austerlitz plunges into his rather lengthy monologues sans emotions, yet, and this is a critical component, his language takes a rather subjective turn, flooding the narrative with verbiage related to perception and personal opinion – as opposed to the typically “factual” and encyclopedic lectures about architecture, history, and art.

One particular instance of Austerlitz beginning to speak, however, is “prefaced” by the following comment, which, I argue, provides insight into the possible horror and fear that permeates his speeches:

Während der beim Reden eintretenden Pausen merkten wir beide, wie unendlich lang es dauerte, bis wieder eine Minute verstrichen war, und wie schrecklich uns jedesmal, trotzdem wir es doch erwarteten, das Vorrücken dieses, einem Richtschwert gleichenden Zeigers schien, wenn er das nächste Sechzigstel einer Stunde von der Zukunft abtrennte mit einem derart bedrohlichen Nachzittern, daß einem beinahe das Herz aussetzte dabei. (17)

This passage clues the reader as to the feelings Austerlitz experiences (“schrecklich,” “bedrohlichen Nachzittern”) during all of the subsequent pauses in his monologues, yet they are ambivalent, since we cannot ascertain whether the effects of the pauses are consistent throughout the novel. In addition, the use of “uns” (us) to indicate the emotional state of both the narrator and Austerlitz (horror) is a violation of the latter’s psychological independence from the former. In other words, how could the narrator know

²⁵²This occurs many times: on pages 12, 14, 17, 22, 32, 33, 60, 100, 118, 132, 145, 152, 166, 177, 237, 240, 263, 294, 313, 359, 361, 391, and 414.

what Austerlitz is feeling? Does the narrator have access to information he should not be privy to (paralepsis)?²⁵³

Creating a very specific image in the above passage, which may be an allusion to Kafka, is the “Richtschwert” image of the clock hand, the potential violence of which, I suggest, refers to the – for Austerlitz – ever-present anxiety of living in a post-Holocaust world.²⁵⁴ The implicit violence associated with time is a recurrent leitmotif in the novel, alluding to an unwelcome and alien life for the protagonist, as well as an indirect reference to the Holocaust itself. Moreover, the sheer tension infused into this image threatens to crush not only Austerlitz, but also the narrator, beneath the weight of time. I suggest that the characters experience existential fear, which only makes sense in the case of the narrator if he, too, has suffered from trauma.²⁵⁵

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

The structure of Sebald’s fourth novel is more complex than is often assumed, and it breaks from earlier stylistic choices exhibited in *Die Ausgewanderten*, which results in a very different reading experience. In order to determine how the story is being told, by whom and what impacts it has on understanding the novel, I analyze the structure of *Austerlitz*. As I will show in the analysis below, the changes in Sebald’s approach to his

²⁵³On the other hand, it does fit with my earlier postulation that Austerlitz and the narrator can be read as the same person, which would provide an alternative explanation for the pauses: a change from the voice of one personality to the other.

²⁵⁴The multiple allusions to Kafka and his work have already been examined in several essays (Brunner, Duttlinger, Garloff, Kilbourn, Klebes, Laufer, Prager, Zisselsberger), so I will not discuss them in further detail here. See the novel fragment by Franz Kafka (*Der Verschollene*, Frankfurt: Fischer, 2004, 9), in which the Statue of Liberty appears to the protagonist, Karl Roßmann, as a menacing symbol in contradiction to its actual symbolic value for Americans (as opposed to immigrants).

²⁵⁵If we consider the concept of “empathic unsettlement” by Dominick LaCapra, we find an interesting parallel in the case of secondary traumatization – that is, the listener or analyst is traumatized by the trauma of the victim/analysand. I return to this theme at the end of the next chapter.

literature reflect the evolving Holocaust discourse in Germany, particularly in the impact of several key debates in both the American and Germanic contexts about representation, memory and victimization on the discussion of the Nazi past.

Contrary to what many critics have claimed, *Austerlitz* is not a work without breaks – it is not one continuous paragraph.²⁵⁶ Read as a continuous text, this elides the many pauses indicated by hyphens, as well as the distinctively marked ends of narrative sections through the use of text breaks and asterisks. The asterisks are centered with blank lines before and after the lines on which they are placed. I consider the several text breaks denoted by asterisks (found on pages 50, 173, 362 and 409) to be caesura indicating new sections, not unlike chapters; although not numbered or labeled as such, they function as textual breaks. Thus, *Austerlitz* can be divided into four sections and an epilogue, much like its forerunner, *Die Ausgewanderten*, but in contrast to the earlier novel, *Austerlitz* relates the story of only one character.

Usually, the breaks in the text occur due to temporal shifts, which range from days to months to years, which, however, remain chronological insofar as the frame narrative is concerned.²⁵⁷ The sections cover, in order, the following episodes of the story: 1) Belgian excursions and meetings (June 1967, 9-50); 2) narrator's nine-year absence from and return to Germany (1966-75), then back to England, and finally encounters Austerlitz again in London, where he tells the narrator about his childhood in Wales up until the Fall of 1965 (December 1996, 51-173); 3) narrator travels to London

²⁵⁶Cf. Bigsby, "Restitution" 105.

²⁵⁷In order to differentiate between the time it takes to narrate the story (frame narrative) and the time that lapses in the course of the events narrated (diegetic narrative), I employ Genette's corresponding concepts (adapted from Heinrich Müller): story time (the time elapsed from the first event recounted to the last, which cannot exceed the narrative time) and ("pseudo"-)narrative time (the time it takes to relate the story by way of the [in this case frame] text being read), which are further delimited through notions of "order" (chronology of the story [histoire] versus the narrative's arrangement of the events [discours]), "duration" (how long [i.e., how many pages] events are in the narrative), and "frequency" (singulative and iterative narrative repetitions) (Genette, *Narrative* 34-5, 113-7).

to visit Austerlitz at his home on Alderney Street, when he tells the narrator how he came to find out about his childhood in Prague, his breakdown and search for traces of his parents, i.e., his mother Agáta from 1993-6 (late March 1997, 173-362); 4) narrator visits Austerlitz in France, where Austerlitz talks about his studies in France in the 1950s, meeting his love interest, Marie de Verneuil, and about the national library in Paris (September-October 1997, 362-409); and 5) Austerlitz and the narrator take leave of one another at the Paris train station, Austerlitz in search of his father and Marie, whereas the narrator returns to Antwerp and Breendonk, where the narrative began, thus coming full circle but lacking any sense of closure (409-21).

The narrative “speed” of the novel is of particular interest for us as readers, owing to the lengthy, tension-building passages, whose actual “erzählte Zeit” (narrated time) or “histoire” (story) concerns four encounters between the narrator and protagonist spread out over thirty years (Genette 87-8). Conversely, the “Erzählzeit” (narrative time) or “discours” (narrative) takes an incredibly large amount of space (pages) in the novel, despite that the sum total of conversation, during which Austerlitz’s story unfolds, occurs over the course of seven days of encounters, compared to the thirty-year duration of the story. The fact that the novel is over four hundred pages long and covers approximately thirty years, but whose embedded narratives require only about seven days within this period to tell, deserves more critical attention.

Arguably, *Austerlitz* is a narrative about memory, and, as such, one would expect for the recounting of a significant part of the protagonist’s life, which does take place. However, on the level of the frame narrative, very little is expressed in terms of the narrator’s memories – there are many ellipses in the frame narrative, though his extradiegetic narrative is chronological. Thus, we can say that the frame narrative is relatively fast in terms of speed, accounting for fifty pages out of the four hundred and

twenty-one in the novel. On the other hand, the intradiegetic (embedded) narrative of Austerlitz's life story is rather slow, taking three hundred seventy-one pages to narrate over three encounters lasting approximately two days each. During this narrative time, Austerlitz tells the narrator about his life, beginning with early childhood (ca. five years old) to the intradiegetic present (ca. 1997), a period roughly equal to fifty years. It is clear, then, that the importance of Austerlitz's story is underscored by the differing speeds attributed to the two narrative levels.

Narrative Mood and Voice

With the multiple layers of narrative in the novel, it is vitally important to maintain a clear idea of the level within which the narrators are focalizing. I categorize and separate the various narrators, i.e., focalizers and suggest why this particular work could be read against much of the extant scholarship. First, determining the narrative voices of the multiple narrators helps to delimit their function(s) and access to their and other characters' thoughts, feelings, etc. Second, by differentiating between levels of narration, not only does the novel's structure become more concrete, it allows for incisive questioning of the ethics of this kind of construct, especially as it relates to speaking for the Jewish "other." As I mentioned in the previous chapter, my narratological analysis explicitly demonstrates how the unreliable narrator destabilizes the narrative through the blending together of narrative levels, and how this affects readers and their understanding of the text.

In order to better understand and more fully appreciate the complexity of narrative mood and voice in *Austerlitz*, let us turn to the various textual voices observable in the novel. The unnamed German narrator of the novel is a conduit for the voice of the Jewish protagonist, Austerlitz. This extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator (EF1) has limited access

to Austerlitz's subjectivity, making it difficult to understand the protagonist's perspective. In fact, Austerlitz's "becoming Jewish" through the voice, i.e., narrative of the non-Jewish EF1 necessitates a re-evaluation of just how "Jewish" the protagonist (Austerlitz) really is.²⁵⁸ In fact, neither Austerlitz nor his mother, Agáta, is ever explicitly referred to as Jewish or a Jew, though the narrative and situations it describes certainly infers that this is the case.²⁵⁹ For the purposes of the current analysis, I argue from the position that Austerlitz is, in fact, Jewish, despite the ethical problem inherent in a non-Jewish narrator framing him as such.

The extradiegetic narrative is one level higher (in this case the frame narrative of *Austerlitz*) than that of the intradiegetic, which remains on the level of the narrative itself. Furthermore, intradiegetic narrators can only communicate one story, whereas extradiegetic narrators can tell the stories of others as well. On the extradiegetic level, all narrators and focalizers of the story are present, and can also present or focalize further narrations told by intradiegetic narrators. Complicating the structure of *Austerlitz* is the fact that the intradiegetic – embedded – narrative told by Austerlitz, at first glance, appears to be just that. However, as evidenced by Austerlitz's relaying of his and his mother's prewar lives through the figure of Věra – Austerlitz tells the unnamed narrator (EF1) Věra's story –, Austerlitz's own narration appears to contain other embedded narratives. Although several others "narrators" appear to focalize on the meta-diegetic

²⁵⁸I am grateful to Dr. Sabine Hake for pointing out this peculiarity during one of our sessions as part of a graduate student colloquium at the University of Texas at Austin in spring 2009.

²⁵⁹Consider the discussion by Věra of Austerlitz's mother, in which she describes Agáta's increasing isolation and difficulties as a result of the Nazi occupation and their rules/laws (AZ 232-4, 243-63). It would appear that Agáta is Jewish, based on her situation and the restrictions imposed upon her, yet it is never stated that she is Jewish – this is left to the reader's interpretation. This scenario would change our entire reading of the character Austerlitz, forcing a re-evaluation of all of his symptoms of trauma, destabilizing the narrative and casting the entire novel into doubt as a faux Holocaust survivor story, which is not inconsistent with postmodern "play," but which I refrain from making my argument and/or point of departure.

level – e.g., Věra, Gerald, Andre Hilary, Director Penrith-Smith – this is actually not the case; rather, they are part of Austerlitz’s narrative, though at times their “presence” seems palpable through a trick in the narrative. This “trick” is the use of present- and present-perfect tense, giving the reader the impression that the quoted individual (by Austerlitz) is actually “speaking” or focalizing.

Austerlitz contains two narrative voices: the unnamed narrator and Austerlitz; this is very similar to *Die Ausgewanderten*, with the exception that there are four narratives with different characters in the earlier novel. In each case, these voices (Austerlitz and the German narrator) are homodiegetic – they are not omniscient, meaning they do not have insight into the thoughts or inner emotions/feelings of other characters.²⁶⁰ Furthermore, they both are actors in the narratives they focalize; they are not separate from the world they describe, and they mirror one another insofar as they embed themselves into the narratives they focalize, creating a sense of repetition. This repetition, I suggest, symbolically depicts Freud’s notion of “Wiederholungszwang” found in victims of trauma.²⁶¹ Moreover, the unnamed narrator (EF1) can – and has been – interpreted as being autodiegetic, a special form of the homodiegetic narrator. This would mean that he resembles the author and is the principal character in the story, which is typical of autobiographical writing, but not of Sebald.

In much of the secondary literature on Sebald’s prose, the unnamed German narrators are often conflated with Sebald, suggesting that the coincidence of biographical

²⁶⁰It is unusual to read Holocaust literature that does not in some way make an appeal through the expression of subjectivity, i.e., the depiction of thoughts and feelings about what the protagonists/narrators experience, whether it is that of the narrator (e.g., memoirs) or someone whose story the narrator is relating to the reader (e.g., second-generation writing).

²⁶¹Freud, in discussing “acting out” and “working through” trauma, posits that the “repetition compulsion” (Wiederholungszwang) is part of traumatic return in the present; that is, the experience is repeated in the present instead of being integrated into consciousness as a memory belonging to a historical event. See Freud, “Erinnern” and *Beyond*.

details warrants this type of reading. However, the autodiegetic narrator refers to the fact that s/he is the main character and implies a certain omniscience about the character, since the author presumably coincides with him/her, but with an amount of knowledge beyond the character's (intradiegetic narrator's or CF2's) ken. To clarify, the autodiegetic narrator has access to present knowledge, which helps to shape his/her interpretation of the events after-the-fact, with – presumably – more knowledge than at the time of their occurrence. This is in contrast to the other type of homodiegetic narrator, who possesses no omniscience, and ignores the fact that Sebald's work is fiction. In *Austerlitz*, Jacques Austerlitz clearly plays the role of main character in the intradiegetic narrative – compared to Austerlitz, we have virtually no personal information about the unnamed narrator, thus eliminating the possibility that the unnamed narrator is autodiegetic. The narrators of *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz* are not the main characters (not autodiegetic), and the main characters (e.g., Max Aurach, Jacques Austerlitz) are not present in the frame narratives (extradiegetic).

I prefer to use Bal's distinction between the extradiegetic and intradiegetic focalizers (EF1 and CF2) and her term "double focalization" in order to accomplish two things: first, to distinguish between two different narrators (the more knowledgeable, retrospective EF1 and his younger self, CF2), whose relative experience and knowledge requires treating them as different versions of the same figure; and second, to indicate two different levels of focalization – that is, the EF1 "sees" Austerlitz, but sees other people and places in the course of the story, whereas the CF2 "hears" Austerlitz's narration, functioning as a passive medium or witness.

In the former case, the EF1 describes the settings in which he encounters Austerlitz, fluctuating between the past (descriptions) and present tenses (reflections), but

the EF1 does not project himself into the second level (intradiegetic) narrative. For example, describing his first encounter with Austerlitz, the frame narrator (EF1) says,

Eine der...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 Niebelungenfilm. Nicht anders als bei all unseren späteren Begegnungen *trug* Austerlitz damals in Antwerpen schwere Wanderstiefel [...]. Einmal *holte* Austerlitz...einen Photoapparat heraus...und *machte* mehrere Aufnahmen von den inzwischen ganz verdunkelten Spiegeln, die ich jedoch unter den vielen Hunderten mir von ihm bald nach unserer Wiederbegegnung im Winter 1996...Bildern bisher noch nicht *habe auffinden können*. Als ich schließlich an Austerlitz *herangetreten bin* mit einer...Frage, *ist er auf sie...sogleich ohne das geringste Zögern eingegangen*, wie ich ja oft seither *erfahren habe*... (AZ 14-15, my emphasis)

The underlined words in the passage above reflect two different forms of the past tense in German. Switching from the preterite to the present perfect (a.k.a. conversational past) tense reflects two distinctly different narrative levels: the extradiegetic (frame) narrative being told to someone and the intradiegetic (embedded) narrative, which is a written account²⁶². In the middle of sentences, such as the first one above, the tense fluctuates, indicating a change from present-day observations and recollections of time past to that of the action in 1966, when the narrator meets Austerlitz for the first time.²⁶³ Additionally, there are adverbs of time (“damals”) and phrases that indicate future events (foreshadowing) relative to the intradiegetic narrative of 1966 (“bei all unseren späteren Begegnungen,” “nach unserer Wiederbegegnung im Winter 1996,” and “wie ich ja oft seither erfahren habe”), which point back to the extradiegetic narrative. This technique of blending tenses increases tension between past events and memory of those events, as

²⁶²In spoken German, the present perfect tense is used to indicate the past, and, in written German, the preterite tense is used. Although these grammatical rules are not observed 100% of the time, they are in most cases followed.

²⁶³What is particularly interesting in the narrator's recollection is the absence of the pictures that Austerlitz allegedly took, but the absence of which casts further doubt on the reliability of the narrator and – potentially – Austerlitz. I return to this in Chapter Three.

“told” to the reader. That is, the present perfect tense’s usage indicates a conversation between the EF1 and another conversant, who I identify as the reader.

In the latter capacity, the CF2 is present on the second level of narration in what appears to be a space reserved for Austerlitz’s lengthy monologues (Austerlitz is an “intradiegetic” or second level narrator), but which, I argue, should be understood as an interaction between two characters, whereby the CF2 “hears” the Jewish protagonist, as seen in the following passage:

Die wenigen Gäste, die sich zu später Stunde dort aufhielten, verliefen sich nach und nach, bis wir in dem Buffetraum...allein waren mit einem einsamen Fernet-Trinker und mit der Buffetdame [...]. Von dieser Dame...behauptete Austerlitz beiläufig, sie sei die Göttin der vergangenen Zeit. (AZ 16)

As can be seen in these few lines, the descriptive narrative is written in the preterite tense, but is separated from the intradiegetic reported speech of Austerlitz by means of the special subjunctive (“sei”), which, in tandem with the declarative marker, “behauptete Austerlitz,” and the lack of quotations,²⁶⁴ clues the reader in to the transition between past tense extradiegetic narrative description (EF1) and the intradiegetic reporting of what Austerlitz said (CF2). The use of the word, “sei,” functions, however, more like subjunctive two (conditional/hypothetical mood, e.g., “wäre”), which is usually only used this way in literary prose. Indeed, the lack of quotation marks or other dialogue markers – there are only declarative markers such as “sagte Austerlitz” – presents a seemingly third-person perspective, but which is in fact a reporting by the EF1 of everything the CF2 heard.²⁶⁵ After the interjection of special subjunctive, the narrative is taken over by

²⁶⁴In the special subjunctive mood in German, the use of quotation marks is unnecessary and would be redundant, since the mood indicates what is said.

²⁶⁵Although the EF1 and CF2 narrators are essentially the same person, they are different insofar as their temporal distance to the present (EF1 is “writing” the book that we read, whereas the CF2 listened to Austerlitz from thirty to four years prior to the publication of the novel [2001]), reflects their disparate knowledge about who Austerlitz is and what has transpired in the intervening time. Thus, the hindsight, which the EF1 is privy to, can color his perspective and attitude(s).

Austerlitz using predominantly a combination of the preterite and present tenses, with the occasional return of the special subjunctive before or after a declarative marker (e.g., “sagte Austerlitz”). What is significant is the lack of the present perfect (aka. conversational past) when Austerlitz “speaks”; it only very rarely occurs when Austerlitz is speaking in the present tense, as when he describes a painting, “...ist eine Dame zu Fall gekommen,” a common convention in art history (*AZ* 24). What I find particularly striking, however, is the complete lack of active participation by the CF2 in the “conversations” he shares with Austerlitz – to imagine such one-sided “dialogue” places the reader on notice regarding the reliability of the unnamed narrator, which I investigate later in this chapter.

Direct or Indirect Witness? The Use of Special Subjunctive Mood

Sebald’s texts make liberal use of the special subjunctive mood, by means of which the narrator reports what Austerlitz allegedly said.²⁶⁶ The distancing effect of indirectly reported speech creates a literary space wherein the narrator acts as the conduit for Austerlitz’s story, but the reader must rely on purportedly faithful reporting of the protagonist’s words by a narrator, whose reliability I will examine in the next section. Let us examine exemplary passages in order to see more concretely how the text accomplishes this slippage in narrative mood.

²⁶⁶In German, the special subjunctive indicating directly reported speech (i.e., not set off by quotation marks, it is a style commonly found in newspapers) also contains an inflection of truth content. That is, the speaker or narrator can give hints as to what they think regarding the veracity of the reported speech, but typically only in the use of the subjunctive II of the verbs “sein” and “haben” where they are not otherwise warranted. Take the following two sentences: 1) Austerlitz sagte, dass er nichts vergessen habe. (special subjunctive); and 2) Austerlitz sagt, dass er nichts vergessen hätte. (subjunctive II). In the latter sentence, the use of “hätte” is not needed because there are other forms of verbs in special subjunctive to indicate reported speech. In this case, the use of “hätte” indicates that the reporter of Austerlitz’s speech doubts as to whether Austerlitz really had forgotten nothing.

The pervasive use of special subjunctive in German underscores that what Austerlitz says is being reported and is at one level removed from the intradiegetic narrative of Austerlitz. By the structure of this grammatical mood, whenever the narrator writes using the special subjunctive in the present or present-perfect tense (e.g., “er könne”; “...gestanden sei”; “habe erkennen können” [double infinitive]), bracketed by the preterite (“sagte Austerlitz”), the text is understood to not be a dialogue but reported speech (175-7). Here the narrative transitions from the preterite of the EF1, to an ephemeral interjection of a declarative marker (“sagte Austerlitz”), followed by the EF1 indirectly reporting Austerlitz’s words to the reader. After a passage, written in the special subjunctive, the narrative voice “transfers” to Austerlitz, as evidenced by the exclusive use of the preterite by him. We can see how this is constructed in the following discussion of a passage from the beginning of “section three.”

At the beginning of the section, the EF1 tells how he met Austerlitz at his home in London (173-7). What makes this passage particularly complex are the multiple changes in narrative level and voice, alternating not only grammatical tenses and moods, but also focalizers, from the unnamed narrator (EF1/CF2) to the embedded narrator-protagonist (CF2-Austerlitz). This pattern occurs regularly at the beginnings of “sections,” and ends with a hyphen indicating a changeover to (CF2) Austerlitz’s narrative (monologues) in the preterite. The passage begins with the EF1 in the preterite tense (“Ein Vierteljahr war beinahe verstrichen, bis ich wieder nach London fuhr und Austerlitz besuchte in seinem Haus in der Alderney Street.”), then changes, after a half page, to the present indicative (“Die Alderney Street ist ziemlich weit draußen im East End von London.”). Shortly thereafter, the EF1 transitions mid-sentence from the present-tense to the preterite twice, extending the present-tense verb “to remember” (sich erinnern an) to include each of three things he recalls in the present, but ending in the past (“Ich erinnere mich...an einen

grünen Kiosk, in dem ich...keinen Verkäufer sah, an den...Rasenplatz und an die...Ziegelmauer...an deren Ende ich...das Haus von Austerlitz fand.”) (174-5). As Austerlitz shows the narrator around his home, the narrative remains in the preterite tense. However, the moment Austerlitz speaks to the narrator, it is followed by the special subjunctive (“Austerlitz sagte mir, daß er hier manchmal stundenlang sitze...”) (175). This switch in grammatical mood imparts to the reader several pieces of information: 1) the narrative level has changed from the frame narrative (EF1) to the homodiegetic narrator (CF2), who is 2) reporting the present-tense indicative speech of Austerlitz, indicating that what follows is a) hearsay (the CF2 narrator cannot verify that what Austerlitz says is true) and reflects upon b) the mediated nature of Austerlitz’s narration. Thus, a transition from EF1 to CF2 occurs, which calls attention to the mediated nature of what we read as focalized by Austerlitz as a CF2 (CF2-Austerlitz).²⁶⁷

On the very next page, the grammatical mood changes again from special subjunctive to preterite indicative, which frames the present-tense speech of Austerlitz, but it is not apparent that the CF2 has taken control of the narrative again until the reader is a couple of lines into the sentence (“Bis in den Abend hinein liege ich hier nicht selten und spüre, wie die Zeit sich zurückbiegt in mir, sagte Austerlitz beim Hinübergehen in das hintere...Zimmer, wo er das Gasfeuerchen *anzündete*...”) (176, my emphasis). The lack of quotations here – a common feature in Sebald’s novels – gives the impression that Austerlitz is speaking directly to the reader, only to be interrupted by the insertion of the declarative term “sagte” by the EF1. These constant fluctuations in the passage – often mid-sentence – destabilize the narrative in terms of both narrative mood and voice, and, I

²⁶⁷Complicating the narrative mood even further, some passages have CF2-Austerlitz narrating in the preterite and the special subjunctive, adding to another level of reported speech (82-3, Austerlitz reporting what his friend, Evan, said), not unlike the postmodernist structural device, the “chinese-box” narrative (McHale).

contend, contribute to the overall effect of uncertainty and ambiguity as regards what is said and its veracity.

Once again, in the following sentence, the reader is confronted by a narrating ‘I’, which, if the text were consistent, would be Austerlitz, but, in fact, is the narrator returning to the present-tense: “Ich habe noch das leise Rauschen im Ohr, mit dem das Gas verströmte, entsinne mich, wie gebannt ich gewesen bin die ganze Zeit, während Austerlitz in der Küche die Teesachen richtete...” (176). As can be seen in this quote, the EF1 narrates in the present,²⁶⁸ reflecting on the effect of the past (in the preterite [the sound of the gas as it “verströmte”]) on him (entsinne mich) in the present-perfect (ich gewesen bin), as Austerlitz performs an action simultaneously (“während”) in the preterite (richtete). What is unclear is whether the present-perfect formulation coincides temporally with the action before or after it – certainly they do not line up grammatically. The combination of oral and written past tense forms destabilizes the narrative mood and voice, since it appears that the frame narrator is speaking to the reader and simultaneously writing the text.

As the passage comes to a close, there is yet another transition from the preterite indicative to the special subjunctive in the present tense: “Als Austerlitz mit dem Teetablett hereingekommen war...machte ich eine Bemerkung...worauf er erwiderte, daß auch er oft...hier in diesem Zimmer sitze...und daran denken müsse...” (176-7). A few sentences later, the interjection of “sagte Austerlitz” brings the fluctuations to a close. The passage ends, as indicated by a hyphen, then Austerlitz begins his narrative again, this time framed in the preterite tense only:

Doch wo, setzte er nach einer Weile hinzu, soll ich weiterfahren in meiner Geschichte? Ich habe dieses Haus...gekauft und dann...mein Lehramt versehen,

²⁶⁸Actually it is the past, since the book is already written.

bis ich 1991 vorzeitig in den Ruhestand getreten bin, teils, sagte Austerlitz, wegen der auch an den Hochschulen, wie ich selber wisse, immer weiter um sich greifenden Dummheit, teils, weil ich hoffte, meine...Untersuchungen...zu Papier bringen zu können. Ich hätte ja, so sagte Austerlitz zu mir, vielleicht seit unseren ersten Antwerpener Gesprächen schon eine Ahnung von der Weltläufigkeit seiner Interessen, von der Richtung seines Denkens und der Art seiner...Bemerkungen und Kommentare, die sich zuletzt ausbreiteten über Tausende von Seiten. (177-8)

That is not to say, however, that the tenses do not change within this frame. In the space of less than half of a page, Austerlitz “speaks” in the present and present-perfect tenses and is focalized via the CF2 as evidenced by the special subjunctive mood (“wie ich selber wisse”). This seemingly innocuous use of subjunctive is rather perplexing. Why is the (present) indicative mood used and, in the same sentence, then a subjunctive?²⁶⁹ We already know by way of the declarative marker (“sagte Austerlitz”) that his story is being mediated (i.e., indirectly reported). Moreover, how is it that the narrator focalizing Austerlitz, indicated by “Ich hätte,” uses the third-person possessive pronoun “seiner” and “seines” in combination with the first-person special subjunctive? This is a bizarre construct, to say the least – typically “Er habe” would have been used instead. Thus, the variations in mood and tense (“ich...getreten bin,” “ich...wisse,” “ich hoffte,” “Ich hätte”), combined with possessive pronouns and the return of CF2-Austerlitz’s present indicative voice (the next sentence begins “Bereits in Paris habe ich mich...”), resembles free indirect discourse – the reader cannot determine who exactly is speaking, due to grammatical disagreement of parts of speech. I suggest, however, that this goes beyond

²⁶⁹Another example of this occurs in “section two”:

Er habe den Nachmittag, sagte er, damit verbracht, sich in dem Great Eastern, das nächstens von Grund auf renoviert werden solle, ein wenig umzusehen, hauptsächlich in dem Freimaurertempel, der um die Jahrhundertwende von den Direktoren der Eisenbahngesellschaft in das damals gerade erst fertiggestellte und auf das luxuriöseste ausgestattete Hotel hineingebaut worden ist.

Eigentlich, sagte er, habe ich... (64-5, my emphasis).

In the space of a sentence and the first few words of the next, the grammatical mood and tense changes multiple times: from special subjunctive (framed by the preterite tense [“sagte er”]), to the passive mood in the special subjunctive, to the passive mood in the present-perfect indicative, and finally to the present tense indicative framed by the preterite. These changes are jolting and require careful attention, especially when they unexpectedly occur mid-sentence, as they often do in Sebald’s work.

ambiguity; rather, this passage demonstrates a slippage in narrative voice and mood, which subtly causes the reader to question whose story is being told and by whom.

An even more curious example of the special subjunctive and indirectly reported speech occurs when Austerlitz narrates the episode in which he learns his true identity (100-4). In this passage, the CF2-Austerlitz quotes from his school director (Penrith-Smith) using a combination of special subjunctive, declarative markers and direct quotations in English, ostensibly repeating verbatim what the director says. The direct quotes from Penrith-Smith duplicated here in English are prefaced with the marker, “sagte Penrith-Smith.” When Austerlitz paraphrases him in German, there is a doubling up of markers (“sagte Penrith-Smith, sagte Austerlitz” [102] and, later, when André Hilary speaks to him: “so sagte er mir einmal, sagte Austerlitz” [105]), followed either by Austerlitz’s commentary in German preterite tense, or the indirectly reported speech using the special subjunctive. The sentences in English are not set off by quotation marks,²⁷⁰ and the code-switching, so to speak, catches the reader by surprise, interrupting the flow of the text, creating distance. Of particular interest is the singular occurrence – to my knowledge – of text set off by German quotation marks, marking the end of the conversation between Austerlitz and the director: “>>Thank you, Sir<<, sagte Austerlitz” (102). This construction is rather problematic – why add quotation marks here, and not for any of the other spoken English? And why should it be in the present tense instead of preterite indicative, like the rest of Austerlitz’s story? It might have to do with the fact that Austerlitz is the one speaking.

When the narrator “coincidentally” encounters Austerlitz in the bar at the Great Eastern Hotel in London, he introduces Austerlitz’s following life story with several

²⁷⁰Some of the English quotes are preceded by colons (100, 104).

statements in the special subjunctive mood (“Sonderbarerweise, sagte Austerlitz, habe er...gedacht,” and “er...gekommen sei”), citing matters Austerlitz told him about in the passage leading up to this moment as well as during their previous meeting in Antwerp (67-8). I will compare this passage with one that occurs several pages later, in order to show how fluctuations in grammatical- tense and mood contribute to the altering of narrative mood. The narrator describes a pause taken by Austerlitz before continuing his monologue: “Austerlitz verstummte, als er dies gesagt hatte, und schaute eine Weile, wie es mir schien, in die weiteste Ferne. Seit meiner Kindheit und Jugend...habe ich nicht gewusst, wer ich in Wahrheit bin.” This pause, as he stares off into the distance, sets up the last use of a declarative marker in the preterite (“Ich bin aufgewachsen, so begann Austerlitz”) before one reappears a few pages later (“fuhr Austerlitz fort”).

This passage continuously switches between the preterite and present-perfect tenses; it is striking, considering that the present-perfect is typically the spoken or conversational past tense, and the preterite is most often used in the written word.²⁷¹ In both *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz*, the use of the special subjunctive suffuses the texts and alternates with the present, present-perfect and preterite tenses, creating the impression of a second-hand story while, simultaneously, calling attention to the mediated nature of what is being reported. An occasional blurring of the narrative levels (narrative mood) in *Austerlitz* occurs particularly whenever Austerlitz’s narrative takes a more personal turn, such as in the above quoted passage, as opposed to, for example, his monological “digressions” on architectural history.

In this passage the special subjunctive changes to first-person indicative (“wie es mir schien”), signifying the switch from EF1 to the CF2 – the latter narrator is about to

²⁷¹There are a few exceptions to this, in particular the use of the preterite forms for the modal auxiliary verbs and the verbs “to be” and “to have” in the conversational past tense.

“hear” Austerlitz speak in the present/present-perfect tense, despite the reader’s knowledge that this is actually taking place in the past (the EF1 narrative is written almost entirely in the preterite tense). For the reader, however, the mediating voice of the narrator (EF1/CF2) entirely and surreptitiously disappears for up to several pages at a time, effacing the distance between the reader and protagonist.²⁷² This appears to include the reader in the conversation taking place between the protagonist and the narrator.

Unlike what occurs in the first section of the novel, when Austerlitz delivers lengthy monologues on architectural history, the lack of quotation marks is not accompanied by the use of the special subjunctive in sentences with declarative markers to indicate the mediated nature of Austerlitz’s words. Instead, the narrator’s voice intervenes, describing what Austerlitz does (“verstummte,” “hob...an,” “herblickte zu mir,” “begannt”), but only at the beginning and end of the passage, which are separated by two pages of text. The narrator’s interjections are in the preterite, indicating to the reader that Austerlitz’s words are framed by the narrator, and that the encounter is in the narrative past. However, the narrator’s voice disappears in between.

Austerlitz uses personal pronouns (“ich,” “mich,” “mir”) and possessive adjectives/pronouns (“mein,” “meiner,” “meinem”) to further underscore that he is the one “speaking,” i.e., focalizing. As Austerlitz speaks, the reader enters into the space of the intradiegetic narrative, almost as if s/he were listening to the protagonist directly:

Es ist mir immer unmöglich gewesen, zurückzudenken an dieses unglückliche Haus [...]. Noch heute träumt es mir manchmal, dass eine der verschlossenen Türen sich auftut und ich über die Schwelle trete in eine freundlichere, weniger fremde Welt. (69)

²⁷²Austerlitz talking about his childhood in Wales (69-71, 72-4, 76-9, 79-83, 88-91, 95-8, 107-9, 110-2, 120-3, 123-5, 130-2, etc.). These passages are numerous in the novel, and are usually juxtaposed by two or three sentences in a row, where declarative markers are used (e.g., “sagte Austerlitz,” “fuhr er fort,” etc.).

In terms of narrative mood, the external focalization (third-person objective point of view) of the frame narrator on the intradiegetic level (CF2) subtly disappears, making it appear that Austerlitz's speech is internal (first-person) focalization and the one who is "seeing" is actually the reader:

So ist mir aus meiner frühesten Zeit in Bala fast nichts mehr erinnerlich, außer wie sehr es mich schmerzte, auf einmal mit einem anderen Namen angeredet zu werden, und wie schrecklich es war, nach dem Verschwinden meiner eigenen Sachen, herumgehen zu müssen in diesen kurzen englischen Hosen [...]. Und ich weiß, dass ich...oft stundenlang wachgelegen bin... (69-70)

This appears to place the reader in the position of direct witness to Austerlitz's recall of memory, and offers an intimacy with the protagonist, which may or may not lead to identification with and/or sympathy for the child Holocaust refugee. However, the sharp contrast of the declarative markers (e.g., "fuhr Austerlitz fort") to the otherwise flowing present tense indicative abruptly reminds the reader that the narrative is being mediated by the frame narrator (external focalization through the unnamed CF2 narrator). This has the effect of disrupting the flow of the narrative, and giving the reader pause to reflect on his/her position as an indirect witness to Austerlitz's testimony, despite feelings of sympathy for (or other emotions) or identification with the protagonist.

The second declarative marker ("so begann Austerlitz") is a transition between the present(-perfect) tense indicative and a mixture of this with the preterite (hie, stand, waren, dmmerten, auslschte, schmerzte, versuchte, frchtete, lhmte, senkten, entsann, bedrckte, verbrachte, vorbeikam, wurde), which is unusual in its high frequency in conversation. Although "war(en)" occurs several times, this is normal in spoken German; the rest of the verbs are neither modal auxiliaries nor helping verbs – verbs often used colloquially in the conversational past – with the exception of "wurde" in the passive voice construction.

Now if we look at the content of the passage, it becomes increasingly clear why the shift to a more subjective/personal encounter between the reader and Austerlitz is important. Here, Austerlitz describes a very claustrophobic and restricted childhood in an “unglückliche Haus” under the care of a preacher, “der...verehelicht war mit einer furchtsamen... Frau” (69). Not only is the house too big for Austerlitz and his foster parents, but many of the rooms remain locked and out-of-use. The enormous size of the house relative to the family appears oppressive to the protagonist, and he views his childhood there as a prison (“in einer Art von Gefangenschaft”). Austerlitz feels oppressed (“bedrückte”) by the always closed windows, one of which in his bedroom was “von innen zugemauert,” and depressed by the number of “sparsely furnished” (“spärlich...möbliert”) upstairs rooms, which are perpetually dim due to drawn curtains. In his bedroom, there is only one window, whereas, seen from the outside of the house, there were two at some prior point in time, one of which was walled up. The reader sympathizes with what appears to be a wretched childhood. What is odd, however, is that, in his description of the house, Austerlitz draws connections to seemingly unrelated things – his self-esteem, early childhood memories and the physical conditions of the house – which set up a metaphor in hindsight.

Austerlitz prefaces the story of his childhood with meta-commentary about his own inability to remember his earliest years – a kind of Freudian *Reizschutz*.²⁷³ As a child, he was pained whenever his foster parents called him by his new name (about the only thing he remembers from this period), only learning his real name at the age of

²⁷³ Freud’s term refers to a psychological defense mechanism that blocks, to a certain extent, potentially damaging stimuli or “excitations” (*Reizmengen*) from entering into consciousness. Trauma overwhelms and breaks through this defense mechanism against experiential excess (*Erregungsmengen*). See Freud, *Beyond* (part IV “Spekulation über ein “Jenseits des Lustprinzips”: Reizschutz und Trauma”).

fifteen. The description of his mind's "systematic" efforts to shield him from making connections to his previous life in Prague is symptomatic of trauma:

...weshalb eine meiner Denkfähigkeit vor- oder übergeordnete und offenbar irgendwo in meinem Gehirn mit der größten Umsicht waltende Instanz mich immer vor meinem eigenen Geheimnis bewahrt und systematisch davon abgehalten hat, die naheliegendsten Schlüsse zu ziehen und die diesen Schlüssen entsprechenden Nachforschungen anzustellen. (68-9)

He attempts to explicate his biography in an unprejudiced manner, but admits to the difficulty of the task. Austerlitz, I suggest, is allowing for the possibility that some of his reconstructed story will be fictionalized to some degree, owing to his hindsight perspective and belated recall of memory.

For some time, the protagonist was unable to think back upon his first years in Wales, but occasionally dreams about it now: "Noch heute träumt es mir manchmal, dass eine der verschlossenen Türen sich auftut und ich über die Schwelle trete in eine freundlichere, weniger fremde Welt." The locked doors, which affected his self-esteem (!), I read as a metaphor for his mind, i.e., memory and imprisonment. That a happier and less strange world lay behind them is referring to his memories of his mother and father in Prague, memories to which he is beholden or, rather, transfixed. In fact, the only moments he feels happy is when dreaming of his real parents. His uplifting encounter (later in this passage) with seeing a house with all of its windows opened, draws parallels to a whole memory – therapeutic for a victim of trauma such as Austerlitz. Why else would locked doors lower his self-esteem, if not related to his forced acceptance of a new identity, one which causes him to feel a prisoner? There is a parallel in the image of a house and the mind, much like the famous allegorical short story, *The Fall of the House of Usher* by Edgar Allen Poe. In Poe's short story, the protagonist, Usher, is symbolic of insanity, and the narrator, who flees the house, is reason. In *Austerlitz*, the protagonist's

confined childhood is symbolic of inaccessibility to his memories and, thus, the lack of subjective integration. Whereas in Poe's story, the mind of the protagonist is collapsing into insanity, in *Austerlitz* it is, in terms of memory, being recovered.

Let us now turn to a subsequent passage, one which also fluctuates in grammatical- tense and mood, thus contributing to the altering of narrative mood through reported speech. Here Austerlitz describes trips made with his foster father, Elias, when the latter had to preach at churches in the countryside near their home. On one particular occasion, a bomb strikes a theater in the town they are visiting, creating the impression of divine vengeance (“Nach und nach ist so in meinem Kopf eine Art von alttestamentarischer Vergeltungsmythologie entstanden”), as Elias preaches “über die Rache des Herrn, über den Krieg und die Verheerung der Wohnstätten der Menschen,” from which the audience “[w]ar...vor Schrecken beinah versteinert gewesen.” Switching into a complex subjunctive form, the narrator compares the sermon to reality, “so hätte mir die von Elias beschworene Gottesgewalt wohl kaum nachhaltiger eingepägt werden können als durch die Tatsache, dass...am hellichten Nachmittag eine Bombe in das Kinotheater eingeschlagen war,” which resulted in the deaths of people in their Sunday dress, who did not keep holy the sabbath (78).

The use of the Old Testament (Elias was a Calvinist preacher) instead of the Torah (Austerlitz was born into a Jewish family) as a reference point, specifically in terms of apocalyptic divine vengeance, is problematic in relation to Austerlitz and his status as a Jew.²⁷⁴ Coming from a British protestant (Calvinist), and mediated by a non-Jewish German, this reference superimposes a Christian perspective over Jewish

²⁷⁴ Orthodox Jews commonly contextualize(d) Jewish suffering in the Holocaust as collectively suffering and atoning for humanity's sins (e.g., the figure of the “suffering servant” of Isaiah). Further, the coming of the Messiah was prophesied: the Jewish people were in the final days before Moshiach finally comes. Some taught that European Jews were punished for their sins, for the heresy of liberal Judaism. I would like to thank Dr. Pascale Bos for pointing this reference out to me.

suffering, and, moreover, makes it appear that an ostensibly Christian community shares historical suffering with Jews. Austerlitz appears to have internalized this “lesson” (“wohl kaum nachhaltiger eingeprägt werden können”) through the gratuitous example of the theater bombing that very day. To also equate, as Elias does, breaking one of the Ten Commandments as a crime deserving death, is to reinforce absence of human agency in the bombing, i.e., the war, and, by extension, the Holocaust. More importantly, however, is the framing of the Jewish Holocaust survivor-protagonist’s witnessing, especially insofar as it is presented to the reader.

Like the previously discussed passage, this bit of text is framed by declarative markers (“sagte Austerlitz”), signifying who is speaking, and appears to be a first-person narrative by Austerlitz. Here the use of present and present-perfect, mixed with the preterite, seems at odds with the narrative mood, insofar as the former is used in the same manner that the special subjunctive is throughout the novel: as a means of indicating reported speech (75-9). In effect, the present and present perfect interrupt the past tense story told by Austerlitz, creating a temporal duality – the preterite marks past events for the CF2-Austerlitz, whereas the present tense refers to the present of Austerlitz speaking to the narrator, which, in fact, is occurring in the past as seen from the EF1 perspective. The impression is one of direct witnessing of the CF2-Austerlitz, which is intensified through the use of extended adjectives and relative clauses, the net effect of which is a buildup of tension and identification, before being flagrantly interrupted by the sudden interjection of “sagte Austerlitz” or similar declarative marker. This calls attention to the fact that this “conversation” is not taking place in the present, from the perspective of a Gentile preacher’s Jewish foster son and how this upbringing affected him, but is, instead, a recall by the EF1 of what Austerlitz said in the past.

Unlike the first passage, however, this one ends with the use of the special subjunctive, in order to further demarcate reported speech. Elias explains to his foster son that the town in which he grew up “überschwemmt worden seien” (was flooded), which echoes the great flood of the Torah (a washing away of sins) and establishes for the reader a pattern of Christian retelling of Jewish stories. Immediately thereafter, a declarative marker appears (“sagte Austerlitz”), which reinforces the fact of the story’s mediation by a non-Jewish (perhaps Christian) German. Curiously, the reported speech is doubled here, when the CF2 narrator reports what Austerlitz reports to him of Elias’ speech: “Besonders bekannt, so, sagte Austerlitz, *habe ihm Elias erzählt, sei* Llanwddyn in den Jahren vor seinem Untergang vor allem dadurch **gewesen**” (79, my emphasis). The declarative marker of the EF1 (frame narrator writing down the story) indicates the presence of the CF2 narrator in Austerlitz’s intradiegetic narration about Elias’ story of his hometown. The italicized words tell the reader that the CF2 is reporting Austerlitz’s claim that Elias told him about soccer played in Elias’s hometown at night. Encapsulated within this reporting of Austerlitz’s claim, the bold-faced print indicates Austerlitz’s reporting of Elias’ words. Thus, we have reported speech within reported speech. This is particularly noteworthy because of the total absence of reported speech for Elias’ preaching and what others told him or Austerlitz. It is a stark moment of self-reflexivity, in which the unsubstantiated hearsay of Austerlitz and the narrator are highlighted. The reader, who has taken the intervening pages between declarative markers for a narrative told them directly by Austerlitz and who might have drawn associations between the sermon of divine wrath and vengeance, World War II and the eradication of people and whole communities in the Holocaust, are forced to reevaluate these assumptions and associations because of the context: a Calvinist preacher in Christian England who is speaking out against the war and its destruction, not a Jewish emigrant playing with

fantasies of revenge against Nazi Germany. It would be easy to draw this conclusion, but we must take into consideration the German narrator who is allegedly reporting at two levels of remove what had been said by a character the reader never interacts with. Thus, a mirror is held up to the reader in the form of Austerlitz performing the same maneuver as the unnamed narrator, both of which could be regarded as suspect.

This disruption of the flow of reading, I argue, is a meta-reflexive strategy that jarringly reminds the reader of their status as a “witness” of the witness (i.e., the narrator). Indeed, the reader is called upon to not identify or sympathize with the Jewish protagonist through the drawing in and sudden rebuking of his/her position as a (direct) witness. However, I want to point out that these present-tense passages are also often riddled with the preterite forms of verbs, which, in German, are usually reserved for formal, written language.²⁷⁵ It could also be surmised that this blurring is a change of narrative perspective from the EF1 to Austerlitz as an intradiegetic and homodiegetic narrator (CF2-Austerlitz), the possibility of which I explore later in this study in its implication of the co-incidence of the unnamed narrator and Austerlitz himself. This grammatical feature, I argue, is used meta-reflexively to remind the reader that the narrator is transmitting Austerlitz’s words. At times, the narrator’s voice disappears, effectively placing the reader in the position of the narrator – a first-hand witness –, as if the protagonists’ words on the CF2 level are that of an EF1 narrator. Such slippage in narrative mood is, however, highly problematic in terms of the effects on the reader and implications regarding identification with a Jewish survivor-protagonist.

²⁷⁵There are a few exceptions to this, including the use of the helping verbs *haben* (to have) and *sein* (to be), and modal auxiliary verbs (e.g., *sollen*, *wollen*, *können*, *mögen*, *dürfen*, *müssen*).

The Unreliable Narrator

In examining *Austerlitz*, it is imperative to consider the complex nature of not only the narrative structure but also the narrator. For the avid reader of twentieth century German literature, it is immediately apparent how striking the similarities are between Sebald's narrator(s) and those of other well-known German language authors, such as Peter Weiss and Thomas Bernhard.²⁷⁶ Despite the resemblances, his narrators differ in important ways. What concerns this study in the following analysis is whether the narrator is reliable or not, and what kind of effect(s) this has on the reader.

“Section two” of *Austerlitz* begins with an abbreviated summary of the nine-year period between the narrator's encounters with Austerlitz (1966-1975). In a matter of three pages, the narrator catches the reader up with his interim experiences, which include living in England for most of that time, returning for a year to Germany, and then moving back to England.²⁷⁷ The narrator, while in Munich, writes to Austerlitz, but receives no response. He then returns to England one year later, in December 1976, and is immediately afflicted with some kind of melancholy, which causes him to forget his intention of taking up contact with Austerlitz again. He states that a “böse Zeit” (“evil/bad time”) came over him upon his return to England, which clouded his “Sinn für das Leben anderer” (literally a “sense for the life of others” or interest in their lives), and which, only “durch das Wiederaufnehmen meiner lange vernachlässigten Schreibarbeiten” (“through the taking up again of [his] long neglected writing-work”)

²⁷⁶I refer here to the lack of chapters and paragraphs, the abundant use of paratactical sentence structures, and brief narrative interludes interspersed over a long narrated time in Bernhard's work. Several critics have commented upon these correspondences, including Schmitz who includes Weiss's *Ästhetik des Widerstands* in his comparison to *Austerlitz* (*Terms* 296, 315 [footnote 23]).

²⁷⁷ Interestingly, this is the only time that Germany is mentioned in terms of setting; the rest of the novel's plot takes place outside of the country geographically: Belgium, the Czech Republic, France and England. This figuratively points to the centrality of Germany in the presence of the absence that is the Holocaust – both represent gaps in Austerlitz's life.

was he able to reemerge (54). Without Austerlitz to talk to, the narrator felt lost, and thus needed to process his difficulty through the act of writing, an act which, symbolically, parallels that of memoir writing for members of marginalized groups (e.g., Holocaust survivors). He even feared continuing his work, though he simultaneously experiences a feeling of salvation as he sits in a chair in a garden observing the world, “befreit von dem ewigen Schreiben- und Lesen-müssen” (56).

Curiously and for unexplained reasons, the narrative takes a temporal leap (flash-forward) from 1976 to 1996 (54-5). What the narrator did during this time, besides writing, is somewhat ambiguous, though it is clear that he did not establish contact with Austerlitz, despite several attempts. In the novel, the narrator reflects, in the present, on his responsibility in failing to seek out Austerlitz: “Freilich wäre es nun an mir gewesen, Austerlitz die unvorhergesehene Änderung meiner Pläne anzuzeigen” (54). The convenient twenty-year isolation of the narrator coincides with several important events in Germany. His physical distance to these events and close proximity to Austerlitz is complicated by his steady writing, the subject of which is never revealed in the text. Since the narrator consistently forgets about his Jewish acquaintance despite living near him, and moves away from Germany after the failure of the student movement to confront the Holocaust,²⁷⁸ the narrator, I suggest, represents disillusion with the ability of Germany to come to terms with its past, even as he himself is implicated (his forgetting of his Jewish acquaintance/friend).²⁷⁹ This time-frame, I argue, coincides with the turn towards inner subjectivity (*Neue Subjektivität* or *Neue Innerlichkeit*) and the publishing

²⁷⁸Holocaust victims, the concentration camp trials and former Nazis in government were mostly seen by the 1968ers as proof of the need to combat fascist tendencies in (West) Germany. In other words, they were instrumentalized in order to “prove” the illegitimacy of the “fascist” administration, pointing a finger at the failures of that generation to live democratically, among other criticisms.

²⁷⁹ This trend or turning inwards in the literature was a result of disillusionment with the failing student movement and emergence of leftist terrorism, and resulted in a marked departure from concern with the concentration camp trials of the 1960s.

of *Väterliteratur* in West Germany, and, since we as readers are not privy to the narrator's thoughts or actions during this time, the narrative reflects this on the structural level (i.e., Genette's "discours"). Thus, the narrator symbolizes the societal turn away from Jewish suffering to that of individual and personal difficulties with the past. Following this line of reasoning, the "böse Zeit" implies guilt for not thinking ("stets im Handumdrehen wieder vergessen") about the suffering of Jews and Jewish survivors (AZ 54). The happy coincidence of meeting Austerlitz again at the Great Eastern Hotel (December 1996) prefigures the turning point in the debate on the Nazi past, specifically as regards Germans as victims (Opfer-Debatte, instigated by Sebald's Fall 1997 series of lectures at a Swiss University).²⁸⁰

Also of interest to us is the nature of the semi-blindness the narrator experiences twenty years later in December of 1996: he can see very little except from the periphery. As Sebald was wont to mention in his interviews and writing, he thought that the only appropriate way to approach horrific events was either through synoptic views or peripheral glances.²⁸¹ In a passage at the end of the novel's second "section," Austerlitz comments on his friend Gerald's remark about the perspective gained while flying a plane, saying "einzig das [flying], sagte Gerald, erhalte ihm seinen ungetrübten Verstand. Je weiter man von der Erde abhebe...desto besser" (164). For Gerald, it is only from the birds-eye point-of-view that one can maintain clear understanding. That this observation comes at the end of a section which begins with the narrator's own semi-blindness clues

²⁸⁰Further debates and controversies about the Nazi past which took place during this period in Germany include the Bitburg affair (1985), Historikerstreit (1986-7), Jenninger's speech on the 50th anniversary of *Reichskristallnacht* (1988), Holocaust- and Neue Wache memorials (1993), the Wehrmacht traveling exhibits (1995-9), and the Goldhagen controversy (March-September 1996). What these debates and controversies have in common are competing discourses on memory, victimization and representation, as thematized through the singularity of the Holocaust, acknowledgment of historical guilt, and differentiation between victims and perpetrators, which I return to in the next chapter.

²⁸¹Sebald calls this "approach[ing] from an angle" ("Last Word"); Sebald, *Luftkrieg* 33; and Bigsby, "Sebald" 146.

the reader into his/her own privileged position as an spectator from above (i.e., two levels above the intradiegetic narrative of Austerlitz). In this way, the reader, unlike the narrator, enjoys a meta-reflexive perspective, that is, critical distance to the text at hand.

After returning to England, the narrator is afflicted by something “böse,” for which his neglected writing appears to be the only salvation (*AZ* 54). The subsequent eleven pages detail the episode in which he encounters Austerlitz again. The narrator next describes a certain partial blindness that he suffers from, his visit to an ophthalmologist, and then stopping off at the bar of the Great Eastern Hotel near Liverpool Street station in London. On a metaphoric level, the narrator’s eyesight problem is resolved shortly after reuniting with Austerlitz. I read the narrator’s loss of sight, i.e., ability to focus or see clearly as related to losing contact with his Jewish acquaintance. In other words, as a German, he opted to not probe into the recent past from the Jewish perspective – Austerlitz being a victim of the Holocaust – until 1996; the narrator lived in proximity to him, yet never once attempted to take up contact.²⁸² Of the twenty years in between his arrival in England and seeing Austerlitz at the hotel bar, only the sequence of events leading up to their “coincidental” meeting is narrated, which, however, explicates scant little regarding the narrator’s personality or life. The limited importance of the narrator as a mediating figure is clearly demarcated – the novel dedicates only a few intermittent pages to the narrator, and certainly does not develop the character in any significant manner. In this chapter, the lengthiest digression out of any of the chapters, the narrator

²⁸²The relatively late interest parallels that of philo-Semitism in the wake of the memory debates in Germany in the 1990s, but also, I contend, alludes specifically to the Wehrmacht exhibit controversy and Opfer debate, which focused primarily on non-Jewish Germans and their status as perpetrators and victims.

speaks for about fourteen pages (51-64) before Austerlitz's voice resumes his narrative.²⁸³

Already a subject handled in the secondary literature on Sebald's fiction (Garloff), the theme of vision and its discrepancies or failings in this passage, I think, is tied to the narrator's attempts to write, not unlike Kafka's use of the window to demarcate paradoxically what he can and cannot see of the outside world, serving as a division between the literary and real worlds.²⁸⁴ The narrator's immersion in his writing leads literally and metaphorically to his partial blindness. The Czech ophthalmologist, whom the narrator sees concerning his ailment, explains to him – in a typical Sebald moment of self-reflexivity – the cause of this ocular problem: “Man wisse eigentlich nur, daß sie fast ausschließlich auftrate bei Männern mittleren Alters, die zuviel mit Schreiben und Lesen beschäftigt seien” (59). The metaphorical blindness of writing from a distance such as common to academic research, I suggest, is what the text is referring to here; it is the narrator's withdrawal from personal contact and burying himself in his work which triggers his ailment. In an ironic reversal, it is the narrator whose affliction leads him, “coincidentally” (“durch eine eigenartige Verkettung von Umständen”) to Austerlitz (54, 61-2).

At this point in the novel, Austerlitz has already had an encounter with his traumatic past, and, thus, does not need to seek out a listener for therapeutic reasons; rather, I contend, it is the narrator who needs Austerlitz. The narrator needs to have his sense of sight restored, which occurs through the following role he plays as “vicarious

²⁸³The page count for those times that the narrator's voice is dominant is as follows: Chapter one, 15 (32-45, 49-50); Chapter two, 21 (51-64, 145-9, 152-3, 166-7); Chapter three, 6 (173-5, 240-2, 361); Chapter four, 1 (362-3); Epilogue, 7 (415-21).

²⁸⁴The window as a metaphor has been thoroughly addressed in Kafka scholarship (Braun; Fickert; and Grandin). There is a significant amount of research done on the influence of Kafka's work on Sebald's writing, including many references and a large amount of intertextuality (Brunner, Duttlinger, Garloff, Kilbourn, Klebes, Laufer, Prager, Zisselsberger).

witness” to Austerlitz’s testimony. I would like to point out, however, that Austerlitz states he was in search of a good listener – in order to pass on his legacy or story, I argue – as the narrator explains: “Sonderbarerweise....habe er heute nachmittag...an unsere so weit schon zurück-liegenden belgischen Begegnungen gedacht und daran, daß er bald für seine Geschichte...einen Zuhörer finden müsse” (68). Austerlitz attributes this coincidence to an “inner logic,” as if fate had brought them together (ibid.). The leitmotif of fate frequently crops up in Sebald’s novels, which I read as ironic in their limited and even revisionist perspective.²⁸⁵ Viewed from a meta-reflexive perspective, the text is clearly announcing its constructedness, a fact that should not be lost on the reader; “coincidence” appears to rule the fictional world of *Austerlitz* while simultaneously calling its occurrence into question.

Why does this matter? I suggest that the direction of the plot and its increasing tension are the result of a manipulation of the reader through seemingly “coincidental,” contingent, stream-of-consciousness writing and associative structure, which is consistently reflected upon and undermined within the text. Jumping from one subject to the next, for all appearances, as if the mainly one-sided “conversations” are steered by tangential leaps of an associative nature, produces a destabilizing effect on the narrative, which catches the reader’s attention.

Unreliable or Unbelievable? The Memory of the Protagonist Austerlitz

Memory, a major theme in the novel, is problematized to a large degree, but particularly as regards coincidence and the (in)ability to recall juxtaposed with diegetic

²⁸⁵Other examples of this are Paul Bereyter’s belief that he was destined “bei der Eisenbahn enden,” a clear Holocaust reference and the means of his suicide (*DA* 92-3), Gerald Fitzpatrick’s fate to die in a plane according to Austerlitz (“Daß er von einem dieser Flüge nicht mehr heimkehrte, das war ihm wohl vorherbestimmt” [*AZ* 172]), and Aurach’s belief that he was destined “as they used to say, to serve under the chimney” (*DA* 287).

memory. For example, the narrator's second, "chance" encounter with Austerlitz occurs a few days after their initial meeting at the main train station in Antwerp. Thus he comments, "Und so wie er an jenem ersten Abend geendet hatte, so fuhr Austerlitz am nächsten Tag...in seinen Betrachtungen fort" (AZ 23). The narrator self-reflexively addresses the fact that neither he nor the protagonist mention the highly improbable, coincidental encounters in out of the way places in their conversations – it is accepted as a given: "Wie von da an immer führen wir bei dieser ersten Wiederbegegnung in unserem Gespräch fort, ohne auch nur ein Wort zu verlieren über die Unwahrscheinlichkeit unseres erneuten Zusammentreffens an einem solchen...Ort" (AZ 45). The unbelievable nature of Austerlitz's ability to pick up conversation where he last left off despite a hiatus of days or even decades, suggests that the intervening narrative time – during which the narrator takes trips to places Austerlitz has been or where they encounter one another – is an ellipsis embedded in the recall of Austerlitz's traumatic memory.²⁸⁶ It is as if the narrator and protagonist were essentially the same person, and, given the highly meta-reflexive nature of Sebald's literature, the imposition of fractured subjectivity in the form of a dissociative personality disorder (hence the use of third person as a result of trauma – that is, not viewing oneself in the first-person mode) is a viable interpretation, precisely because the critical awareness of the reader invoked by the text demands skepticism. This odd "ability" could also be the imposition of the narrator's perception of these encounters as seamless, which, however, would be another example of appropriation of Austerlitz's story without regard to how the protagonist experienced it himself; it fully elides what Austerlitz may have experienced in the time between their encounters. That Austerlitz

²⁸⁶ Read in this way, the traumatic acting out of Austerlitz is embodied in his narration of his lifestory as if framed by an external/frame narrator, which, in fact, would be Austerlitz himself. Owing to the limited space and scope of this dissertation, I cannot pursue the implication of this reading further here; however, I think it could yield an entirely new reading of *Austerlitz*.

cannot recall his childhood until much later in life, due to traumatic experience, only intensifies the irony of memory depicted in the text.

Another example of this fantastical and uncanny ability to remember occurs when Austerlitz and the narrator “coincidentally” run into each other at the Great Eastern Hotel lobby in London twenty years later in 1996. The narrator reflects on Austerlitz’s ability thus: “So hat Austerlitz...ohne auch nur ein Wort zu verlieren über unser nach solch langer Zeit rein zufällig erfolgtes Zusammentreffen, das Gespräch mehr oder weniger dort wieder aufgenommen, wo es einst abgebrochen war” (64). This mnemonic prowess is rather unbelievable, which, I argue, is a meta-fictional signal to the reader to question the significance of this “fact” for the character Austerlitz.

I find it odd that conversations involving such improbable circumstances elicit no commentary on the extradiegetic narrative level in a highly self-reflexive text, especially with regards to their unusual coincidence time and again – despite simultaneously and subtly acknowledging that very unlikelihood. Furthermore, the protagonist’s experiences of the Holocaust are never directly mentioned – Austerlitz never discusses the concentration camp life that his mother, Agáta, would have endured, other than to reflect upon the false image of Terezín established by the Nazis for the purpose of fooling the International Red Cross as to the nature of the camp(s). Austerlitz’s experiences as a child refugee fleeing Prague on a *Kindertransport* are conspicuously absent in his encounters with the narrator. Even if one were to argue this is due to traumatic experience, this part of Austerlitz’s personal history is, nevertheless, symbolically and meaningfully missing.

In a meta-commentary about the representation of horror and violence, but also of the impossibility of reproducing history, Austerlitz’s history teacher at Stower Grange,

André Hilary, describes Austerlitz's namesake, the Battle of Austerlitz during the Napoleonic Wars. Hilary states,

...denn sollte man wirklich...in irgendeiner gar nicht denkbaren systematischen Form, berichten, was an so einem Tag geschehen war, wer genau wo und wie zugrunde ging oder mit dem Leben davonkam, oder auch...wie die Verwundeten und die Sterbenden schrien und stöhnten, so brauchte es dazu eine endlose Zeit. Zuletzt bleibe einem nie etwas anderes übrig, als das, wovon man nichts wisse, zusammenzufassen in dem lachhaften >>Die Schlacht wogte hin und her<< oder einer ähnlichen hilf- und nutzlosen Äußerung. [...] Wir versuchen, die Wirklichkeit wiederzugeben, aber je angestrongter wir es versuchen, desto mehr drängt sich uns das auf, was auf dem historischen Theater von jeher zu sehen war... (108-9).

This passage certainly calls to mind the debates about Holocaust representation, questioning the ability of historiography to capture "reality" ("Wir [historians] versuchen, die Wirklichkeit wiederzugeben"). Similar to the case of eyewitnesses, what is available to us of the real events that have occurred is rather poor in comparison (summarizing complex events, such as the battle, with "Die Schlacht wogte hin und her") to the details which fiction can infuse into a scene. Whereas the first two modes of writing are limited in scope and perspective, respectively – that is, what can be attested to as accurate and truthful –, fiction is uniquely positioned to portray how it may have been, yet Sebald's literature abstains from depictions of the atrocities.

In fact, in the middle of the novel, the protagonist problematizes (his) writing in an explicit manner. Considering that this section of the novel represents the unfolding of the history of Austerlitz's trauma, the meta-commentary on his inability to write is ironic as it not only contrasts strikingly with his alleged diegetic memory, but also calls attention to the frame narrator's writing of the novel. Austerlitz tries to write his "Studien" ([die] "Konvolute") in book form, but calls up feelings of aversion and disgust (178-80). The narrator interjects with indirect speech, citing Austerlitz, who says that

reading and writing were always his favorite things to do, “[j]etzt aber war mir das Schreiben so schwer geworden, daß ich oft einen ganzen Tag brauchte für einen einzigen Satz” (180). Interestingly, Austerlitz criticizes his own writing, noting “die peinliche Unwahrheit meiner Konstruktionen und die Unangemessenheit sämtlicher von mir verwendeten Wörter,” which contribute to his increasing inability to write, but which echoes the sentiments of the narrator in *Die Ausgewanderten*, cited on the first page of this study (ibid.). The Jewish protagonist, Austerlitz, in a meta-reflexive comment, notices “die infame Dumpfheit, die dem Persönlichkeitsverfall voraufgeht” and “daß ich in Wahrheit weder Gedächtnis noch Denkvermögen, noch eigentlich eine Existenz besaß” (182). This statement subtly implies that the protagonist might not even exist, which supports a suggestion I made above, i.e., that the protagonist could be construed as one of multiple personalities of the narrator. Taken in context with the Wilkomirski controversy I discussed in Chapter Two, *Austerlitz* can be read as a faux story about an invented Jewish protagonist (assuming a non-traumatized narrator) or a Jewish personality (resulting from some childhood trauma, not unlike what has been suggested about what caused Wilkomirski/Grosjean to be so adamant about the authenticity of his memories and faux memoir). At this crucial point in the novel the narrative is in danger of collapsing under the instability brought about by the narrator’s unreliability.

Furthermore, discussing the fallibility of language, Austerlitz says “[d]as gesamte Gliederwerk der Sprache, die syntaktische Anordnung der einzelnen Teile, die Zeichensetzung, die Konjunktionen und zuletzt sogar die Namen der gewöhnlichen Dinge, alles war eingehüllt in einen undurchdringlichen Nebel,” which I read as meta-commentary on the narrator’s and, by extension, Sebald’s own writing (183). The impenetrable fog, to my mind, is symbolic not so much of Austerlitz’s inability to write as it points to the complex construction of the novel itself. Austerlitz is filled with

“Gefühlen des Grauens und der Scham,” which seem a bit extreme for writing a dissertation, but which is more appropriate for transgressive appropriation of the Jewish voice if the non-Jewish narrator and Austerlitz are the same individual (184).

Given the rather informative, detailed and in-depth nature of Austerlitz’s digressions on architecture, one could hardly expect an accurate reporting of what was said by the narrator, who coincidentally runs into Austerlitz at specific places and times over a thirty-year period, especially since the narrator is not an architectural historian, nor is it ever hinted at that he possesses an incredible memory. The extensive citation and quoting by the narrator is a virtually impossible feat of memory, even if he were writing it down as Austerlitz spoke. Interestingly enough, no one in the scholarship on Sebald – to my knowledge – has written on the possibility of the narrative instance in Austerlitz as being anything other than a narrator reporting Austerlitz’s digressions.

The narrator in Austerlitz presents the text as if it is a verbatim recounting of the Jewish protagonist’s monologues.²⁸⁷ Such a feat of memory is impossible, for the narrator must recall large amounts of Austerlitz’s monologues and conversations with him from thirty years in the past. Reflecting on his writing, the narrator “bis gegen drei Uhr an einem von den Straßenlampen fahl erleuchteten Sekretär gesessen bin..., um in Stichworten und unverbundenen Sätzen soviel als möglich aufzuschreiben von dem, was Austerlitz den Abend hindurch mir erzählt hatte” (146). This passage clearly indicates the loose transcription of Austerlitz’s testimony into a collection of “key words” and

²⁸⁷This frame narrative presents the appearance of a unified story, ending as it does with the narrator writing from the present, not unlike similar novels in German literary history, in which a story-within-a-story is told (see for example Theodor Storm, *Der Schimmelreiter*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 1963). Using Genette’s/Bal’s classifications of narrative level and mood, I designate the unnamed frame narrator as extradiegetic and homodiegetic (EF1/CF2), to indicate his presence as the “implied author” and originator of the novel we read, as well as his appearance as an “I-witness” (in Genette’s terms) in the narrative about Austerlitz. We are dependent upon the narrator to present the story “as it really was,” which appears to be corroborated through the narrative’s many references to and photographs and sketches of real people, things, places and events.

“unrelated sentences,” which is particularly problematic insofar as what is re-presented by the narrator (the novel) is far more detailed and intricate than what was scribbled down late at night.

Another instance of questioning the reliability of the protagonist is when Austerlitz finds Věra in March 1993, and, after a little while, suddenly understands Czech “nun wie ein Tauber, dem durch ein Wunder das Gehör wiederaufging, so gut wie alles, was Věra sagte” (227). One aspect of foreign language use, such as the above scene with Věra, which has not been explained in the critical literature, is how can a German narrator hear, remember and transcribe the various languages Austerlitz uses in his conversations with him? Austerlitz uses French, Czech, and English, and the narrator manages to convey this to the reader via the text of the novel – implying the narrator is literate in all languages Austerlitz uses (!). This stretches the credibility of the narrator even further, casting doubt once more upon the narrative. At the end of his first visit with Věra, Austerlitz admits, “[z]utiefst erregt, wie ich bei meinem ersten Besuch in der Šporkova gewesen bin, sind mir heute nicht alle Geschichten Věras genau mehr erinnerlich” (AZ 234). So, not only are the memories of the narrator called into question, but also those of Austerlitz are uncertain and questionable, leading the reader to be more critical of what the narrator is telling him/her. Thus, the inaccessibility of memory for the protagonist in Austerlitz and its retrieval through various persons and objects clearly problematizes memory as a constructed narrative.

The narrator is himself unreliable for a number of reasons, the most apparent of which is being able to communicate the story of Austerlitz – itself not created entirely of Austerlitz’s own volition – and presumably transmit it in exhaustive detail via the narrative embodied by the novel. I would argue that the unreliable narrator, however, is

the only truthful narrator, precisely because he calls attention to the work and its constructedness.²⁸⁸

As I have shown in this chapter, the use of postmodern play to blur distinctions between fact and fiction in Sebald's novels serves to simultaneously project an air of verisimilitude *and* destabilize appeals to authority vis-à-vis "facts." Adding to such uncertainty, the reader is confronted with an interrogation of memory, in which the authority of the image destabilizes the protagonist's memories and his retelling of them. Furthermore, the use of what appears, on the surface, to be free association in the thematic development of the characters "conversations," belies the depth of meanings inherent in the allusions and intertextuality of the novel.

Besides the novel's play with fact and fiction, the employment of subjective and ambiguous language leads to problems with narrative structural integrity. The fluctuations in narrative mood and voice call the reader's attention to the constructedness of the novel in a meta-reflexive manner – the reader is often unaware of subtle shifts in narrative structure before being starkly reminded (e.g., through declarative markers and grammatical mood) of their position relative to the Jewish protagonist, Austerlitz. Moreover, as I have demonstrated, the reliability of the narrator is questionable, which casts into relief the readers' own doubts regarding the text before them: What are we supposed to make of such a piece of Holocaust literature?

²⁸⁸Narrators who present a cohesive narrative lacking any holes, especially in the case of (postmodern) Holocaust literature or writing about traumatic experiences, should be considered suspect, even in the case of nonfiction (autobiography, memoirs, etc.). Such stories must assume a bit of fiction in order to create meaning and sense out of events by the imposition of an order upon the narrative, a fact sometimes overlooked in the reading process. The imparting of meaning within the framework of a teleological narrative – recall of the past in the present, with the present being the end-result of the reported events and the characters' responses to or in spite of said events – employs narrative devices, such as Hayden White points out in his discussion of "emplotment" (White).

Chapter Five: From *Die Ausgewanderten* to *Austerlitz*

HOLOCAUST VICTIMS AS WITNESSES: CONSTRUCTING JEWISH IDENTITY

Notions of witness and testimony are integral to understanding both *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz*, and, in their chronology (story/“histoire”) they correspond to and reflect upon historical trends in Germany of awareness and knowledge of the Holocaust. As I have shown in Chapter Two, there was little discussion about the atrocities and/or Jewish victims in postwar Germany – excepting the Institut für Zeitgeschichte – until the Eichmann trial and Frankfurt-Auschwitz trials of the 1960s. Thus, it is no coincidence that *Austerlitz* opens in 1967 after the publicity generated by the aforementioned trials.

Austerlitz, an architectural historian, was a doctoral student in the 1950s in Paris who showed a compulsive fascination with trains and the rail system (*AZ* 24, 52-3). Unable to consciously connect his obsession and work through his “Bahnhofsmanie” and his early childhood as a Kindertransport refugee during his studies in Paris, Austerlitz is still studying the architecture of train stations and fortresses. At the time that the narrator encounters Austerlitz in Antwerp’s Central Station, it is June 1967, which is not only after the inner workings and logistics of deportations orchestrated by Eichmann were revealed, but also it was at that time (June 5-11) that the Six Days War between Israel, Egypt, Syria and Jordan took place (44).²⁸⁹ Tellingly, the narrator feels compelled to visit

²⁸⁹The quick victory of Israel, due in part to its preemptive air strikes, elicited criticism for “unprovoked” aggression (Cairo radio, however, called for “total war” the “extermination of Zionist existence” on May 17, 1967 [http://www.zionismontheweb.org/middle_east/Israel/Israel_six_day_war.htm]) and made it seem that Jews were no longer “victims.” See “Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany),” *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution, Volume 1*, ed. by Richard S. Levy, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005, 270-1. According to this entry, conservatives admired Israel's military victory against the Arab countries, whereas the leftists (i.e., students) considered Israel to be “an imperialist agent and an aggressor, not...historical victims.” Furthermore, anti-Zionism turned into anti-Semitism as criticism mounted, not unlike what occurred in the Lebanon War that started on June 6, 1982 (an oddly reoccurring date in that the Six Days War started the day before (June 5, 1967) and the Historian's Debate was instigated by Ernst Nolte's June 6, 1986 published article).

Fort Breendonk, about which Austerlitz gives the narrator an extensive description, and feels unwell as, after their first conversation, the narrator tours the Belgian fortress.

During his visit to Breendonk, the narrator sees the places where Waffen SS soldiers lived and tortured their (Jewish) prisoners. I suggest that time of the visit (the increased awareness of the Holocaust due to the Six Days War), along with Austerlitz's monologues about Fort Breendonk, must have spurred the narrator's interest in making the trip, despite not knowing Austerlitz's background. The narrator claims that he came across a note in a newspaper – he cannot remember which one – that mentioned the use of Fort Breendonk by the Germans during WWII. According to him,

Wäre nicht tags zuvor im Gespräch mit Austerlitz der Name Breendonk gefallen, so würde mich dieser Hinweis, vorausgesetzt, ich hätte ihn überhaupt bemerkt, kaum veranlaßt haben, die Festung an demselben Tag noch zu besuchen. (32-3)

This “coincidence,” I argue, should not be seen as such in light of the constructedness and degree of meta-reflexivity in the novel. In fact, I suggest that this passage offers the reader another piece of evidence that the narrator is not reliable. In his telling of the narrative, the narrator repeatedly insists on the sheer coincidence of all events in the frame narrative and related to the person of Austerlitz.

In the subsequent encounters that year between the narrator and the Jewish protagonist (Lüttich, a few days later in June; Brussels, several months later; Terneuzen, November; Zeebrugge, December), architectural oddities are commented upon at great length by Austerlitz, such as the Palace of Justice in Brussels and, later, the Great Eastern Hotel (section two), particularly inasmuch as these buildings seem to hold secrets of their own. In fact, both of the examples just mentioned are rumored by Austerlitz to contain temples of the Free Masons, a group persecuted by the Nazis and Catholic Church, for supposedly Zionist connections and blasphemous beliefs, respectively: referring to the

Palace of Justice, Austerlitz “erzählte weiter, dass er, auf der Suche nach einem Initiationslabyrinth der Freimauer...viele Stunden schon durch dieses steinerne Gebirge geirrt sei” (AZ 47). The very fact that Austerlitz seeks out traces of and clues about these mystical, secretive places connected ostensibly to Jews, uncannily – albeit indirectly – comments upon the prevalence of anti-Semitism in Europe (in this case, Belgium and England) in the form of insidious stereotyping and conspiratorial Zionism.²⁹⁰ Furthermore, the time frame for the construction of the palace (1866-83)²⁹¹ coincides with the Franco-Prussian War and the establishment of the first German Kaiserreich under Wilhelm I; the text indirectly conjoins the history of the German nation with that of anti-Semitism, suggestively implying that the founding of the former led to the propagation of the latter.

Interestingly, the Palace of Justice contains a *salle des pas perdus* (waiting area), just like the Central Station in Antwerp at the very beginning of the novel (12). This is a typical Sebald reference insofar as it connects the train station (a Holocaust reference) with one of the largest structures built in Europe in the nineteenth century, and the fact that the text ties it to anti-Semitism while symbolizing justice is an ironic gesture, one which suggests complicity with the atrocities in Belgium on some level. The palace was partially damaged (set afire) during the Germans’ retreat from Brussels at the end of WWII, which resonates with the narrator’s earlier discussion (footnote) of the burning of

²⁹⁰According to some of the more egregious claims made, the Free Masons, i.e., Jews were present in all seats of power (here the Palace of Justice), involved in a world-wide conspiracy to control not only Europe, but the entire world.

²⁹¹According to a Belgian government website, (<http://www.buildingsagency.be/realisatieberichten_fr.cfm?key=39>), the palace was also one of the most impressive structures of the 19th century.

the main train station's dome in Lucerne (18-20).²⁹² The narrative, however, is not so blatant in referring to the history of anti-Semitism, relying instead on associations.

Austerlitz's identity is still unclear at this point in the novel, though hints about his origins (and the narrator's) appear on occasion. The narrator's feelings of guilt for the burning down of the Lucerne main train station's dome, its traumatic repetition in his dreams, and his feelings of guilt lead the reader to infer that the narrator is not himself a Holocaust survivor nor are his parents. However, the connection sparked by Austerlitz's discussion of Antwerp Central Station's construction to the later fire in Lucerne in the narrator's mind implies a catalyst for this indirect Holocaust reference, which I suggest is his perception that Austerlitz is Jewish.

The narrator described Austerlitz earlier as similar in appearance (wavy blond hair) to the actor playing the role of Siegfried (embodiment of the Aryan "race") in Fritz Lang's *Nibelungen* films (14).²⁹³ The description is later revealed to be ironic (Austerlitz barely escaped the Holocaust); when we consider that the conversations they had took place not in German but in French, later switching over into English during their last encounter on the ferry headed back towards England, there appears to be a disjuncture between language and identity (50).²⁹⁴ This revelation strikes the reader as

²⁹² The frame narrator writes in a footnote (the only one in the entire novel!) about his association of the fire that burned the Lucerne train station's cupola with Austerlitz's earlier mentioning of the Antwerp central station's dome. Important to note here are two things: 1) the chain of associations produces guilt that indirectly references guilt for the Holocaust or, possibly, trauma, and 2) the narrator refers to looking through "these records" (the novel we are reading), which leads to him recalling his visit to Switzerland in February 1971, and which implies that the text before us (*Austerlitz*) is a reproduction of notes he took while listening to Austerlitz give his lengthy monologues. This, in turn, could be explain the seemingly super-human feats of memory by the narrator, who, excepting this footnote, appears to accurately remember, even decades after the fact (1997 or later), "conversations" in their entirety.

²⁹³Paul Richter, the actor who played Siegfried in Lang's two films based on the German saga, was blond, blue-eyed, and forever marked for his role as Siegfried (i.e., prototypical Aryan). See Adolf Heinzlmeier and Schul.

²⁹⁴ I refer here to a long-standing discussion as to the interconnectedness of identity and language among linguists and literary scholars.

odd because they have appeared to be speaking in German, since the text is written in German. However, the text the reader sees turns out to be a translation of their French conversations into German in a remarkably intricate and prosaic manner, provoking the question of how such a lengthy transmission of speech across languages thirty years after the fact is even possible. Of course, the reader does not find out until a few pages later, that so much time has passed.

The majority of “section two” consists of the protagonist describing his upbringing in Wales. Austerlitz’s ability to finally discuss his personal story reflects upon the more receptive climate regarding the Holocaust in 1990s Germany. Throughout this section of the novel, many allusions to catastrophic events are made, which suggests that Austerlitz already as a child – even if only subconsciously – suspected that something about his life and early childhood was amiss. Despite his Welsh name, Dafydd Elias, he never feels particularly close to his foster parents, the preacher Elias and his wife, Gwendolyn. In fact, he even learns Welsh and Welsh folklore from a neighbor, Evan the cobbler. Austerlitz, prior to learning his real name, says “Seit meiner Kindheit und Jugend...habe ich nicht gewußt, wer ich in Wahrheit bin” (68). Having felt largely out of place until attending a private boarding school at Stower Grange, Austerlitz first learns about his real identity through the director of the school prior to taking his qualifying exams. Fascinated by history, Austerlitz learns about the battle during the Napoleonic Wars that is his namesake from his teacher, Andre Hilary, and, indeed, exhibits a mild compulsion to seek out other people bearing that name. What Austerlitz finds out comes to him through a series of seemingly unrelated coincidences, as relayed by the narrator to the reader, as I discussed in the previous section. After a break in their conversation, they say goodnight, and the next morning the narrator relates to Austerlitz an article about suicide he read in the paper. The narrator berates himself later for his likely

“tastelessness” in telling Austerlitz such a story, especially in his dwelling upon the “absurdity” of it, as if to suggest that suicide is something Austerlitz has contemplated or someone he knew had killed him- or herself (147).

In “section three,” the narrator hears about the protagonist’s trip to the Czech Republic – mainly Prague and Theresienstadt, i.e., Terezín – during which Austerlitz begins to recover his mother tongue (Czech), and is confronted by a version of himself that he does not recognize. Austerlitz learns of his mother’s, Agáta’s, arrest, internment in Terezín, and subsequent deportation to Auschwitz, where she was murdered, through conversations with his former governess, Věra, archival research and later visit to Terezín. In fact, it is only through Věra’s references to Agáta being affected with Nazi restrictions for Jews in Prague (“Seit die Deutschen ihre die jüdische Bevölkerung betreffenden Vorschriften erlassen hatten, durfte [Agáta] nur zu bestimmten stunden ihre Besorgungen machen” and “Trotzdem ist sie...in die Stadt gegangen und...hat stundenlang in dem einzigen, den vierzigtausend Prager Juden zugänglichen Postamt gestanden...” [251, 252]) that we even know Agáta, i.e., Austerlitz is Jewish (it is never explicitly mentioned anywhere in the text, which begs the question of whether Austerlitz is Jewish, or whether this is just a construct of his imagination). The word Jude (Jew) only appears a couple of times in the context of policies of *Arisierung* (aryanization) of Jewish property and the Nazi policy preventing attempts to save valuable property from Nazi confiscation, right before Agáta is ordered to report to the train station (AZ 257-8).

Here a certain motif, which occurs throughout the novel, reappears: Austerlitz’s feelings of guilt for actions he deems to be unforgivable (“Deshalb scheint es mir heute unverzeihlich...dass es...zu spät geworden ist, Adler...aufzusuchen und mit ihm zu reden über diesen...Ort”; emphasis mine) (ibid.). While this certainly could be viewed as a sign of survivor’s guilt, a feeling of guilt for having survived when so many others perished, I

am inclined to read this guilt as a provocation for the German reader to recognize the loss of Jewish life and culture, but with a twist: the Holocaust survivor is claiming to feel guilty for not having the opportunity to speak with Adler, whereas, implicitly, it should be the Germans who experience this emotion. Only upon learning of his parents' fate from Véra, does Austerlitz actually begin to mention his guilty state of mind. Furthermore, symptoms of his trauma begin to occur more frequently, and feelings of panic and fear begin to take a hold of him.

In the final sentence at the end of “section three,” as both figures say good bye at the Liverpool Street train station, Austerlitz comments that he was “niedergedrückt von dem dumpfen Gefühl, weder in diese ihm anfänglich fremde Stadt noch sonst irgendwohin zu gehören” (361-2). Thus, he never felt like he belonged in England or “anywhere” for that matter, as though he is living in diaspora – a common feeling among Holocaust survivors.²⁹⁵

The fourth “section” finishes as Austerlitz encounters a library employee, Henri Lemoine, who recognizes him from about thirty-seven years ago (404). Lemoine shows him around the library and enlightens him as to the history of the library grounds, explaining its previous purposes as both a concentration camp and collection center for all of the Jewish property confiscated by the Nazis known “coincidentally” as Austerlitz-Tolbiac (407). His description occasionally invokes the euphemistic Nazi language through such turns of phrase as “Enteignungs- und Weiterverwertungsprogramm” used to describe the redistribution of imprisoned/deported Jews' wealth (ibid.). Interestingly, it is the fact that the embedded narrator, Lemoine, is distanced from both Austerlitz and the frame narrator – at one level and two levels removed, respectively – which allows for the

²⁹⁵This sentiment is also expressed in two narratives from *Die Ausgewanderten* (“Paul Bereyter” and “Max Aurach”).

employment of such taboo linguistic constructs while avoiding its ascription to a Jewish Holocaust survivor or a non-Jewish German – Lemoine is French, after all.²⁹⁶ The narrative becomes one of seemingly metadiegetic order, as Lemoine speaks in the present and present-perfect tenses, after several instances of Austerlitz reporting Lemoine’s speech indirectly to the frame narrator within the intradiegetic narrative. Lemoine locates the former camp near the Gare d’Austerlitz, which is the reason it was named Camp Austerlitz, or Les Galeries d’Austerlitz by its prisoners (408).

“Coincidentally” and prior to encountering Lemoine, Austerlitz finds a photograph in a magazine on American architecture in the new national library, which depicts a room in Terezín filled with the files of its former internees. He then states that in Terezín “[wäre] mein wahrer Arbeitsplatz gewesen,” which is oddly incongruous with the coincidence of place names in Paris, as well as his previous statement about not belonging anywhere (401). This juxtaposition of places and place names (multiple names including ‘Austerlitz’) vis-à-vis the photograph I read as a reference to imagined memory. Austerlitz did not encounter Lemoine thirty-seven years later; rather, the episode is imagined as a coping mechanism for trauma – Terezín serves as a trigger and Lemoine is either a dissociated personality or product of his imagination that allows Austerlitz to handle traumatic memory of his Holocaust experience and the fate of his parents. Moreover, Lemoine suggests, on the last page of the “section,” that no one seems interested in the fate of the prisoners, whose history is, ironically and literally, buried under an institution dedicated to knowledge.

²⁹⁶This is not to discount the possibility of latent anti-semitism, fascist sympathies, etc. in the French population; rather I am specifically referring to the highly emotionally-charged German context as regards the Holocaust.

TRAUMATIC MEMORY? A CLOSER LOOK

In the scholarship on Sebald, much has been written about memory, trauma, melancholy and the Holocaust. Research into melancholia – in the Freudian sense²⁹⁷ – and its connection to trauma, repetition/reenactment and latency have opened up new understandings of Sebald's novels.²⁹⁸ In several cases, it has been suggested that the narrative instance, in *Austerlitz* for example, has helped provide a separation from the narrator and the traumatized person (Austerlitz), thereby reducing the likelihood of identification between the German narrator and the Jewish Holocaust survivor, a position I likewise hold.²⁹⁹ While the narrator plays an important role in the novel, Austerlitz, the protagonist is integral to understanding the relationship between witness and testimony, and how they relate to memory in Sebald's fiction.

Although there has been a lot of research concerning memory in Sebald's oeuvre, little attention has been paid in terms of what his work does with memory, favoring more descriptive instead of explanatory approaches. Much of the scholarship focuses on describing the moments in his texts when or where memory fails and which theories his texts model, but there is little writing on what all of this does on the textual level.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷See Freud, *Mourning*.

²⁹⁸As noted by J.J. Long in his essay on secondary literature to Sebald's work, Sebald himself purported the concept of melancholy as a means of 'resistance'. See Long, "Bibliographical" 12. For purposes of citation, most of the bibliographical information for the following scholarship summary comes from Long's essay. See also Cosgrove; and Morgan.

²⁹⁹For a differing viewpoint in which the narrator and protagonist are rather similar, bordering on identical, yet simultaneously different, see Garloff. The ethical and moral implications of Sebald's work have also been investigated (Long 18-9). These include Ceupens; Fuchs; and Taberner.

³⁰⁰Notable exceptions can be found in: Friedrichsmeyer; and Kilbourn. Both articles analyze chance or coincidence as a poetic/narratological device "linked to the function of memory and its unreliability" (Friedrichsmeyer 82). I agree with Friedrichsmeyer's claim that meaning emerges out of coincidence – or "affinities," to use the Goethean term – in Sebald's works, however I think she does not go far enough to explain how meaning is constructed or, rather, how the intertextual aspects of these "affinities" resonate with one another. Kilbourn's reduction of the "literary expression of memory" to one model ignores the multiplicity of models and theories of memory in Sebald's writing (Kilbourn 38).

Austerlitz, despite his advanced knowledge of the “pre-history”³⁰¹ of the atrocities – he is an architectural historian specializing in 18th and 19th-century European architecture and had also studied history, after all – does not seem able to connect his inability to remember his childhood to the Holocaust. Indeed, the limited perspective of the narrator (external focalization) also precludes commentary on this glaring discrepancy, leaving it up to the reader through innuendo to decipher, which, of course, is rather easy given the knowledge we, as readers, possess of the events. Austerlitz, thus, does not “back-shadow”³⁰² or otherwise indict the Jewish survivor-protagonist for inaction from the contemporary perspective – not only is Austerlitz too young (not quite five years old at time of his emigration) to remember or possess knowledge of the events, many of which had not yet transpired, the separation from his parents traumatized him to the point he cannot remember his life in Prague. Use of such a young child victim alleviates the “need” to deal with the issue of interpreting the past from a present perspective (paralepsis), since Austerlitz could not know despite having experienced trauma.

Looking back at the figure of Aurach, who left Germany at the age of fifteen at roughly the same time as Austerlitz, however, shows that the earlier novel also refused a hindsight perspective of the Holocaust as a systematically organized and executed series of events. Again, it is the reader who is confronted with their own knowledge of the atrocities by the oblique references that never indicate the protagonists’ knowledge of the subject. Austerlitz’s expression on multiple occasions of feelings of indefinable loss,

³⁰¹The idea of a historically determined path to Nazism and genocide is a largely debatable point. Whether or not the German “Sonderweg” (“special path”) hypothesis – that is, the Holocaust could have only happened in Germany due to its unique historical and cultural development – holds water, is still a matter of contention.

³⁰²See Bernstein.

emptiness, nervousness, anxiety, etc. stems from the repression of memory vis-à-vis traumatic experience.

Ironically, immediately before Austerlitz tells the narrator about the history of fortresses and similar fortifications, which are reminiscent of Freud's *Reizschutz*, he seemingly casually remarks – foreshadowing the recovery of his memory of the trauma he experienced in leaving his parents behind – as reported by the narrator:

Bei seinen Studien über die Architektur der Bahnhöfe...bringe er nie den Gedanken an die Qual des Abschiednehmens und die Angst vor der Fremde aus dem Kopf, obwohl dergleichen ja nicht zur Baugeschichte gehöre. Freilich verrietten gerade unsere gewaltigsten Pläne nicht selten am deutlichsten den Grad unserer Verunsicherung. (AZ 24-5, emphasis mine)

Here Austerlitz is unable to consciously realize that his study of architecture and fascination with train stations have significant relevance for his personal history; he cannot understand the reason for his thoughts of painful departures and encountering the “foreign.” However, prior to these words, Austerlitz comments about the “Schmerzensspuren, die sich...in unzähligen feinen Linien durch die Geschichte ziehen,” which I read as an unconscious reflection on his own part of how his personal history is tied together with that of the rail system (24). Also of interest is the use of special subjunctive here, since “verrietten” is both indicative and subjunctive preterite, though the subjunctive would require a preterite declarative marker like “sagte.” Preceded and succeeded by sentences using the special subjunctive, this sentence about uncertainty in plans stands out like a quote. The importance of the statement for understanding the character of Austerlitz is its position within the passage. Immediately after, Austerlitz discusses the futility of erecting defensive structures to keep out “enemies,” which I interpret as memories. The reader of German is already attuned to the symbolism of

trains and train stations in correlation to German history³⁰³ – whether architectural or *Zeitgeschichte*. Thus, the seemingly inconsequential comment by Austerlitz cues the reader in to the possibility that Austerlitz is repressing or unable to recall memory tied to transit. This, of course, suggests another correspondence vis-à-vis the deportations of millions of Jews – the Holocaust.

On another occasion, as the narrator and Austerlitz meet for the second time in Brussels, prior to their trip to an undisclosed location via ferry,³⁰⁴ the narrator comments that “es mit Austerlitz so gut wie unmöglich war, von sich selber beziehungsweise über seine Person zu reden” (AZ 50). He is unable to either recall or talk about himself or his background, either due to reticence on his part or, possibly, trauma. In an echo of their previous encounters in Antwerp, the narrator reiterates a sentiment that Austerlitz had earlier voiced:

...dass nun an ihm eine mir bis dahin ganz verborgen gebliebene Unsicherheit zum Vorschein kam, die sich in einem leichten Sprachfehler äußerte und in gelegentlichen Stotteranfällen, bei denen er das abgewetzte Brillenfutteral, das er stets in seiner linken Hand hielt, so fest umklammerte, daß man das Weiße sehen konnte unter der Haut seiner Knöchel. (ibid., emphasis mine)

The ferry, I suggest, touches upon Austerlitz’s repressed memories of the Kindertransport, on which he embarked to England in 1938. The connection is not necessarily a conscious one, as evidenced by the nervous (subconscious) habit of clenching his glasses tightly – an outer manifestation of inner conflict, anxiety or trauma. The transition from Brussels to London perhaps indicates the direction of the ferry,

³⁰³This is not to say that those reading Sebald in translation are any less likely to understand the symbolism of trains with regards to the Holocaust. However, I contend that, for the German reader, it is unavoidable to make this connection.

³⁰⁴There are only two main ferry lines leaving from Zeebrugge: Edinburgh and Hull in the United Kingdom.

another reason Austerlitz would be unsettled, since it traces the direction of travel and final destination of his traumatic childhood experience (separation from his parents).

The unexpected revelations of the following pages mark this point in the novel as a turning point in our understanding of Austerlitz as a character. However, this does not mean that Austerlitz or the narrator is any more the wise. The Jewish protagonist is confused by his emotions and obsession, his “Bahnhofsmanie” (train station mania or obsession) (53). He cannot fathom the “drive,” which “irgendwie mit einer früh schon in ihm sich bemerkbar machenden Faszination...mit dem gesamten System der Eisenbahnen, verbunden sei” (52-3). Furthermore, speaking of his experiences in Paris at train stations, which he as “Glücks- und Unglücksorte zugleich empfand, in die gefährlichsten, ihm ganz und gar unbegreiflichen Gefühlsströmungen geraten [sei],” Austerlitz appears to be losing his mind, or at least some semblance of control over his cognition (53). As readers, we are struck by the word, “Bahnhofsmanie,” which sounds like a descriptor for Nazi overzealousness regarding deportations, indicative of the insanity of the “Final Solution,” as well as a few others, “Unglücksorte,” “gefährlichsten,” and “unbegreiflichen,” which also resonate in association with the Holocaust: concentration camps, danger, incomprehensible.

“Section three” of the novel begins with the narrator’s description of Austerlitz’s quest to uncover the truth of his childhood trauma and try to discover the fate of his mother. Visiting Austerlitz at his home on Alderney Street in London, the narrator learns about the historian’s difficulties with writing, his nightly excursions, i.e., wandering(s) and eventual mental collapse due to the return of traumatic memory in the Ladies Waiting Room of the Liverpool Street station (200). Austerlitz’s nightly perambulations stand in contrast to his daytime peregrinations in Paris (1950s) when he suffers traumatic collapse at the veterinary museum, indicative, I suggest, of traumatic repetition or acting out.

Upon hearing a radio broadcast about survivors from the *Kindertransporte* (children's transport) in an antique bookstore, Austerlitz realizes that he, too, was one of the children thus saved. Coincidentally named the Prague, the final ferry bringing the children to England – not unlike the one the narrator and he were on in Belgium (Zeebrugge) that crosses the English Channel – unleashes associations and memories of the city in former Czechoslovakia, i.e., now the Czech Republic (210). The circumstances under which Austerlitz suddenly recalls his childhood seem too coincidental and contrived, and, instead, appear to be consistent with postmemory.

This episode regarding the radio broadcast echoes an earlier passage, which reverberates with the idea of traumatic repetition. Austerlitz, upon learning his name, begins to free associate with it and recalls having heard on the radio that Fred Astaire's last name was Austerlitz before he changed it (103). Two aspects of this section deserve greater attention. First, he turns on the radio "aus bloßer Gedankenlosigkeit" and, at that very moment, hears "daß Fred Astaire...Austerlitz geheißen hat" (ibid.). As discussed above, the use of coincidence in the novel is a crucial narrative organizational strategy. That this earlier reference to his name and identity occurs at what I suggest is the turning point in the novel, and, furthermore, is echoed time and again, demands the reader's attention and critical reflection. Second, the Austerlitz family lived in Omaha near the trainstation, about which Astaire recalls, "[d]ieses auch in den Nächten ununterbrochen anhaltende Rangiergeräusch und die damit verbundene Vorstellung, weit fort mit der Eisenbahn zu verreisen, sei seine einzige Erinnerung an die frühe Kindheit" (ibid.). This is not only a striking coincidence in terms of name, but also the childhood memory fixated on trains reflects Austerlitz's "Bahnhofmanie" and traumatic associations with trains whose "uninterrupted" arrivals conjure up images of Auschwitz.

After Austerlitz tells of his visits with Věra, he describes his trip to the former concentration camp, Terezín, including his perusal of a film, *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt*³⁰⁵ (352). Austerlitz mistakenly believes to have found video footage of Agáta, which, upon further inspection, turns out to only resemble her. In between narrating these two episodes, however, the protagonist recounts the circumstances under which he suffers panic attacks – his second trip through the Rhine river valley, which triggers traumatic memories – and, eventually, his second³⁰⁶ mental breakdown (331-2). Austerlitz claims, “Ich kann heute nicht mehr sagen...wie viele solcher Anfälle ich zu jener Zeit hatte,” referring to the panic attacks (331). In the pages preceding these episodes, Austerlitz begins to describe the memories of his experiences as a child refugee:

Auch an eine zweite Zwangsvorstellung, die ich lange gehabt hatte, erinnerte ich mich jetzt wieder: die von einem Zwillingsbruder, der mit mir auf die nicht endenwollende Reise gegangen war, der, ohne sich zu rühren, in der Fensterecke des Zugabteils gesessen und hinausgestarrt hatte in das Dunkel. Ich wußte nichts von ihm, nicht einmal, wie er hieß, und hatte niemals auch nur ein Wort mit ihm gewechselt, quälte mich aber, wenn ich an ihn dachte, andauernd mit dem Gedanken, daß er gegen Ende der Reise an Auszehrung gestorben war und im Gepäcknetz lag zusammen mit unseren anderen Sachen. (324-5)

Austerlitz describes his “obsession” or “compulsion” with a twin brother, who happens to die of starvation, as his second compulsion, after that of a dark land without borders overgrown with forests, which he dreamed about as a child in England and which his second train ride through the Rhine Valley triggers (324). This dark and overgrown

³⁰⁵ The actual name of this film is *Theresienstadt: Ein Dokumentarfilm aus dem jüdischen Siedlungsgebiet*, though the name in *Austerlitz* is an alternative title; it was never finished or shown to the Red Cross, as claimed elsewhere (Mattias Frey “Theorizing Cinema in Sebald and Sebald with Cinema,” *Searching for Sebald: Photography after W.G. Sebald*, ed. Lisa Patt, Los Angeles: Institute of Cultural Inquiry Press, 2007, 226-41; here 234, 241 [footnote 43]). Instead, as indicated to me by my adviser, Dr. Pascale Bos, the Germans remodeled Terezín before a visit of the Red Cross, and then decided to make a film anyway.

³⁰⁶ Austerlitz’s first breakdown occurs later in the text (section four), but temporally prior to this episode (1950s).

Germany (“grenzen- und namenlosen, gänzlich von finsternen Waldungen überwachsenen Land”) I read as a metaphor for the lack of collective memory about the atrocities, one which indicates parallels between the Germany of 1939 and that of post-reunification. In 1993, as Austerlitz travels across Germany, there is a silence about the presence of the past – hence the menacing image of primeval forests – as evidenced by the overwhelming absence of Jewish voices in reunified Germany and in discourse on the Nazi past (*AZ* 324). Moreover, a reference to a time of political and cultural normalization – the prosperity of the *Wirtschaftswunder* of the Adenauer era – is represented by a German coin from 1956³⁰⁷ with Adenauer’s head engraved on it, given to Austerlitz by an elderly and stereotypical German woman (she is wearing a Tyrol-style hat with a feather in it) in Nuremberg, ironically in front of the *Nürnberger Nachrichten* (323-4).³⁰⁸ The woman assumes that he is a vagrant, and, thus, a social outsider, which is an ironic echo of the ostracizing of Jews no matter how “assimilated” they were in the 1930s.

Austerlitz’s second obsession with a twin brother, conjures up several associations, not to mention bears striking resemblance to the *Doppelgänger* motif in *Die Ausgewanderten*. Austerlitz does not even know the name of nor has he talked to his twin, who stared into darkness, despite it being day (“am späten Nachmittag”). The darkness, the twin’s emaciated corpse and its stowing in among the luggage, collectively, allude to deportations and the Holocaust. Much as deportees often died in transit to death

³⁰⁷This date marks the high point of Adenauer's administration, after the successful reinstatement of the Wehrmacht (renamed as the Bundeswehr), the integration of West Germany into NATO and a booming economy. This was also the year in which Sebald's maternal grandfather, who helped raise him in the absence of his father and who was a major influence on Sebald, passed away, which could be read here as a tribute to him.

³⁰⁸I suggest this is ironic for two reasons: Nuremberg was the home of the National-Socialist movement in Germany, which alludes to the “Final Solution,” and the notorious setting for three of Leni Riefenstahl’s propaganda films of Nazi rallies (*Sieg des Glaubens*, *Triumph des Willens*, and *Tag der Freiheit! – Unsere Wehrmacht*), but also, this newspaper was founded only after WWII under Allied license in 1945. Thus, this is an ambivalent – albeit implicit – symbol for both the Holocaust and the tabula rasa of the immediate postwar period in Germany.

camps, which were filled with emaciated, living “corpses,” Austerlitz’s twin – representing his childhood memories – had, metaphorically, “died,” which I read as repression of memory induced by the trauma of being separated from his family. During this second trip through Germany, however, Austerlitz is able to recognize the full import of his obsession with having a twin brother.

Austerlitz’s vision of his twin indicates not only a belated awareness of his early childhood in Prague and stealing away aboard a *Kindertransport*, but also it indicates a psychotic break of sorts, possibly including dissociation – he imagines the presence of his twin “wenn ich an ihn dachte,” indicating that this was a recurring (“wenn” implies multiple and regular action) “memory,” and clearly not labeled as a dream (like the first *Zwangsvorstellung*). If it is not a psychotic break, then it would seem to fit the symptoms traumatic memory: belated experiencing of memory that “possesses” him, in its definition as a “compulsion.” However, I argue that the textual evidence I have presented throughout this study points to a more problematic relationship to memory and identity: I suggest that *Austerlitz* more closely resembles a case of recovered memory, which can be traced through the examples of what appears to be postmemory in the novel. The novel is so thoroughly constructed and the reader is so painstakingly made aware of this fact, that any close reading of Sebald’s work should take this into consideration. As I lay out below, the adoption of large passages of an intertext (H.G. Adler’s study on the concentration camp system) into Austerlitz’s “testimony” calls into question both the veracity and believability of the protagonist, as well as reminds the reader that they are reading not just Holocaust literature, but, to be more precise, fiction about the Holocaust.

It is shortly after returning by train from his trip to the Czech Republic that Austerlitz collapses, striking his head on the edge of the curb, while underway to a kiosk on his street. He is completely mentally incapacitated for about three weeks, before

finding himself in a mental health facility, which he remains in for nearly one year. I would argue that his head injury might well have affected his memory in a way not taken into account in Austerlitz's narrative – it was severe enough to hospitalize him for three weeks, after all.

Upon completion of satisfactory observations and an “interview” with one of the doctors, Austerlitz returns home to Alderney Street, electing to take up gardening work as part of his therapy towards a full recovery. This “job” lasts for two years, during which he, seemingly puzzled, cannot ascertain what aspect of his work helped speed his recovery (334). However, he admits that he started reading H.G. Adler's study on Theresienstadt (Terezín)³⁰⁹ in the evenings and on weekends, without observing the correlation between its content and his confronting his traumatic past, as if his breakdown was itself a traumatic experience (335).³¹⁰

Adler, a Jewish Holocaust survivor, writer and intellectual, was imprisoned in Terezín for a couple of years before being deported to Auschwitz. Similarly, Austerlitz's mother, Agáta, was an internee at the same camps at approximately the same time, though, unlike Adler, she died in Auschwitz. The biographical coincidences of Agáta and Adler not only underscores Austerlitz's inability to consciously draw parallel associations, indicative of his continued trauma, but also destabilizes his narrative, casting doubt as to whether memory of his mother's fate via conversations with Věra is

³⁰⁹H.G. Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941-1945; das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft. Geschichte, Soziologie, Psychologie*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1955. It is interesting to note that the Institut für Zeitgeschichte, one of the first organizations to perform in-depth research on the Holocaust in Germany, first published Adler's study in 1960. I argue that Sebald could certainly have known this, and the fact that the Jewish protagonist begins to recover by way of reading about what transpired in the camp is curiously therapeutic, as if confirming the reality of his mother's persecution and death.

³¹⁰The uncanny coincidences between Austerlitz's reading of Adler and his recollections of his mother's internment in Terezín as well as his visit to the concentration camp is an irritation for the reader, especially when considered in light of the Wilkomirski debate about appropriating memory of Jewish Holocaust survivors and also postmemory.

really his own and not just some manifestation of postmemory or his imagination. Indeed, the unlikely circumstances under which Austerlitz reunites with Věra – from whom he was separated at nearly five years of age and from whence his story begins (like the five-year-old narrator in Wilkomirski’s book) –, I argue, sorely taxes the scene’s believability (perhaps too coincidental) and, thus, could be read in two ways: either Austerlitz is still struggling with traumatic memories, or he has become a witness by adoption, whereby the episode in Prague with Věra and his mother’s biography are, to a large degree, fabricated – that is, they are a product of his imagination.

In a startling turn towards the clinically-detached mode of euphemistic Nazi language, Austerlitz begins to relate what he learned from Adler’s work. The almost ten-page-long-sentence includes Austerlitz’s comment, “wie ich wohl schon einmal sagte” (“as I certainly already once said”), preceded by a short reflection on a missed opportunity to meet Adler, who lived in London until his death in 1988, is followed by a lengthy description of the concentration camp outside Prague (339, 344). It remains ambiguous, however, as to whether he is quoting or paraphrasing Adler, or, rather, is presenting his own narrative. The buildup of tension in this passage appears to support the hypothesis that Austerlitz is speaking from personal experience and knowledge; however, the emotionally flat presentation of the horrors of the camp – which could be interpreted as automatic memory or traumatic recall (the absence, however, of descriptors of sensory perception pose some difficulty for substantiating this reading) –, in addition to Austerlitz’s claim to have already said these words before, point, rather, to his reliance on traditional scholarly work (how could he otherwise replicate such an extraordinarily lengthy sentence?) such as archival research. Austerlitz did visit archives in Prague and

Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), and certainly could have, in his obsessive research,³¹¹ adapted some of what he learned to his own biography, similarly to Wilkomirski and his obsessive research on the Holocaust.

What makes this part of the novel compelling is its location in the narrative arc as the climax, as well as its multivalence. As discussed above, the nature of Austerlitz's relationship to Adler's study inflects our interpretation of who is speaking and remembering. If Austerlitz is speaking (from experience), he is an intradiegetic narrator (internal focalization) who describes the concentration camp during WWII as he understands it. If, however, he is not narrating his own story, but, instead, recalling descriptions by Adler, he is focalizing Adler. Alternatively, if, in fact, a pastiche of quotes from Adler's study are being focalized on the intradiegetic level by an undetermined narrator (that is, not attributable to characters in the story) – Sebald has admitted to “hiding” (not making explicit or otherwise marking) such quotes from literary works in his novels – we are faced with free indirect discourse.

What impact does all of this have on our interpretation of the text? In the first case, we can comfortably leave Austerlitz in the category of intradiegetic protagonist and Holocaust survivor who either has traumatic memories or has become a witness to the atrocities by adoption, though the latter instance is still problematic. In the second scenario, we have “paralepsis” insofar as Austerlitz cannot know nor recite the information that he is focalizing, which transgresses his narrative voice/level and the ability of the narrator to mimetically reproduce it,³¹² indicating a switch to a more

³¹¹The later passage in chapter four, in which Austerlitz describes his exhausting research as a student during the 1950s, indicates the possibility of the failure of scholarly research to gain an understanding of the Holocaust (an indictment, incidentally, that demonstrates, in my opinion, a careful and ironic self-reflexivity evident throughout Sebald's work).

³¹²I am referring to Genette's distinction between diegesis and mimesis, in which the latter is a reproducing of words actually “said” (*Narrative* 162-4).

informed, extradiegetic source, possibly the unnamed narrator. The narrator's writing (authoring) of the novel (the end product that we read) years after the fact, however, renders dubious such exactitude in quotation, but does not exclude the possibility that he has himself consulted the study by Adler in order to flesh out the passage with more detail than should otherwise be possible to recall. This case, then, implies that the extradiegetic narrator is unreliable. The last case, free indirect discourse, raises issues not possible in the preceding two scenarios. By using this grammatical mood, the text is freed from constraints imposed on narrative mood (point of view) in terms of characters – there is no need to be a Holocaust survivor-witness in order to give voice to the descriptions of Terezin and its horrors. By extension, Sebald, in his capacity as author, is likewise freed from the moral inhibition against channeling the voice of the Jewish survivor precisely because the voice cannot be attributed to him for the purposes of literary analysis.³¹³

Even more problematic is the ambivalence in differentiating between an intellectual's distanced voice (Adler's or possibly Austerlitz's) and that of a traumatized Holocaust victim (that is, if Austerlitz is not a survivor), which provokes consideration of a potentially unethical usurpation of the Jewish perspective. If Austerlitz is only a witness by adoption, then it follows that unethical identification between a non-survivor (Austerlitz) and a Jewish Holocaust survivor (Adler) is occurring in the text. This scenario would change our entire reading of the character Austerlitz, forcing a re-evaluation of all of his symptoms of trauma, destabilizing the narrative and casting the entire novel into doubt as a faux Holocaust survivor story,³¹⁴ which is not inconsistent with postmodern "play." Nevertheless, I read this passage as a meta-reflexive one, in

³¹³ Of course, Sebald ultimately wrote the words on the pages of the novel, but he should not be identified with any character or narrator in his work since it remains, after all, a fictional text.

³¹⁴ This would be similar to Wilkomirski's faux Holocaust memoir.

which the clinical detachment of the academic voice is scrutinized and challenged, effectively questioning the idea of closure regarding the Nazi past, through gaining historical knowledge about the Holocaust.

Austerlitz then suffers a collapse on the metro in Paris (“hysterische Epilepsie” [a fainting spell]) that results in his inability to recall what he saw, and is taken to Salpêtrière (381).³¹⁵ His recounting of the train ride hints at his fear of deportation, Holocaust victims (the “Zigeuner” or “gypsy”), and darkness (of the tunnel), all of which seem to trigger the collapse (381-2). While recovering in the hospital, he has visions of armies, fallen soldiers and catacombs (383). He could not remember his visits without help from Marie and photographs he took, due to “hysterical epilepsy,” which I argue is actually trauma-induced repression of memory (381). Here is an instance of postmemory aiding in the recollection of repressed memories, which actually may not be the cause of his trauma. It is possible that Austerlitz is traumatized by what he sees at the museum, triggering associations with Nazi experiments. If he is a witness by adoption, as I have previously suggested, then the fact that he appears traumatized is really an inappropriate identification with actual Holocaust victims.

I argue, however, that this is indicative of secondary traumatization triggered by heightened stimulation through association – such as visual, auditory, olfactory – and, moreover, marks the beginning of a series of such episodes, which eventually culminates in his nervous collapse in March 1993 described in the previous section. It is interesting to note that the later breakdown (1993) occurs in the text (section three) before Austerlitz relates his earlier university student life and first collapse (late 1950s, section four) to the narrator. Memory of his earlier breakdown is either triggered by the temporally later

³¹⁵ “In den Wochen, die auf meinen Besuch in dem Veterinärwissenschaftlichen Museum folgten,...war es mir unmöglich, mich an irgend etwas von dem...zu erinnern” (380-1).

breakdown or it is with the later episode that Austerlitz is finally able to begin to put the fragments of his life together in a narrative, thereby integrating his memories as a therapeutic step towards working through his childhood trauma. It is as if the conversations or “sessions” Austerlitz has with the narrator – and their recording – allow Austerlitz to finally and belatedly order the narrative of his life, which, however, provokes the question of whether it is Austerlitz’s recalling of memory or the narrator’s ordering and recording of it that (re)constructs Austerlitz’s identity.

Precisely the consistent use of association as an organizing narrative principle, which I discussed earlier, suggests that it was what Austerlitz saw in the museum that reminded him of the experiments of the Nazi doctors, despite his best attempts to shield himself from knowledge of the Holocaust.³¹⁶ Described by the protagonist as the most horrific of all he saw in the veterinary museum, the figure of a “rider” on a horse in a vitrine, both of whose skin had been flayed “auf das kunstvollste” (“in the most artistic”) manner by an anatomist, Honoré Fragonard, are displayed in perfect preservation (379-80). Yet Austerlitz notes the horse’s panicked look as it appears to be charging ahead, as if to say it had preternatural knowledge of its own macabre fate, or, suggested by the position of its life-like pose, that it was flayed alive.

Released from the hospital, Austerlitz and Marie go on walks, during one of which Austerlitz “remembers” an incident of a girl scraping her knee, the memory of which belongs to Marie, who experiences déjà vu, presumably either seeing a similar accident or place as in her memory while walking with Austerlitz. On the surface, this appears to be the jolting of Marie’s childhood memory apropos something Austerlitz says. However, this is an example of *paralepsis*, in which Austerlitz, the intradiegetic

³¹⁶In other passages in the novel, Austerlitz describes his “Abwehrssystem” (system of deflection), which helped him to repress knowledge of what happened to him and others during the Nazi regime (205-6).

narrator, has taken ownership of Marie's memory in his recounting to the unnamed frame narrator what happened on these walks with her. There is no reason to believe they are in Luxembourg – where the girl injures herself – as Austerlitz explicitly locates their walks “durch die Stadt” (“through the city [Paris]”) shortly after his stay at Salpêtrière. Furthermore, as Austerlitz phrases it, Marie “behauptete, vor mehr als zwanzig Jahren an genau dem selben Ort das gleiche, ihr...geschehen war” (386, emphasis mine).³¹⁷ The fact that he has usurped Marie's memory – he has adopted it, though not consciously – is indicative of a trend towards the end of the novel, in which Austerlitz is increasingly unreliable in his narrative. Moreover, the epistemological dilemma in his remembering the memory of someone else calls attention to the uncertainty in the construction of Austerlitz's memories – just how sure can we be that Austerlitz actually witnessed other events he has spoken of? In this way, the use of ambiguity in witnessing makes it difficult to establish the reliability of Austerlitz, and, by extension, that of the unnamed extradiegetic narrator.

Austerlitz recounts this episode from his first Parisian experience only near the end of his encounters with the narrator. It is only after further reflection on the protagonist's part that he is finally able to understand the nature of his affliction and connect it to his early postwar experiences, not just the revelation of the childhood disintegration of his family. This, of course, is in keeping with contemporary ideas on the nature of trauma, i.e., PTSD and its treatment, in which the construction of an ordering narrative – Austerlitz's personal history as recorded in the novel that the reader has before him or her – restores a sense of identity, wholeness and, to some extent, memory to the individual.

³¹⁷Marie “claimed, more than twenty years ago at exactly the same place, the same thing happened to her” (my trans.).

ETHICAL REPRESENTATION AND THE ROLES OF THE NARRATOR AND PROTAGONIST

Sebald's fictional world presents a realm of uncertainty, hovering between the central presence-of-an-absence (the Holocaust) and its characters' struggles to deal with their obliterated pasts. I have argued that two of his novels, *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz* – of which I principally focus on the latter – are critical reflections upon the lives and memory of the victims and survivors of the atrocities perpetrated under the Nazi regime, marking a turning point from the perspective of describing the events of the Holocaust to a more empathic consideration of the victims. Reading his work against the backdrop of competing discourses in Germany of victimization, memory and the problems of fictional Holocaust representation, I argue that his novels demonstrate how literary representations of Jewish memory and perspective can be modeled to critically reflect upon the difficulties of writing Holocaust literature and break down the barriers to Germans engaging in the discussion, and to speak as a German, not for Germans and against Jews (i.e., comparing their suffering), but as a German with and for Jews.

My analysis focuses on Sebald's novels, particularly *Austerlitz*, and reads them as responses to literary and theoretical discussions about the ethics – and possibility – of the depiction of Jews during and after the Holocaust in postwar (non-Jewish) German literature. The ethical crisis of representation – what can and cannot be said and who can speak for whom – is worked out by way of narrative devices that create critical distance between the narrators and Jewish protagonists, and between the narrators and reader. These devices include embedded narratives, homodiegetic narrators, subjective language, the special subjunctive mood (reported speech) and unreliable narrators. Sebald's novels can thus be read as experiments in how to write fiction about the Holocaust from a non-Jewish German perspective. This is not to suggest, however, that the notion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is a goal of this work; indeed, the novels complicate the

notion of bringing closure to the past and, I argue, supplant it through their epistemological and ontological uncertainty. His novels simultaneously resist identification with Jewish victims and preserve their “otherness,” foregrounding instead the very impossibility of knowing the “other.” The purpose here is to respect and preserve the identity and subjectivity of Holocaust victims while acknowledging and allowing the German voice to emerge and participate more fully in a moral discourse that has, historically, been limited due to, in the case of fiction, concerns about historical revisionism; essentially, the German voice of the perpetrator changes to accommodate the victims’ perspective in Sebald’s work. The various approaches to witness in Sebald’s work reflect this perspective.

Witness and Testimony in Sebald’s Novels

In both *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz*, notions of witness and testimony form the basis of the narratives. They are constructed in such a way as to prompt the reader to reflect upon the feasibility of these notions in a post-Holocaust world. The protagonists’ witnessing of traumatic events is not easily reconstructed, and, moreover, the use of subjective language by the protagonists and subjunctive mood by the narrators questions the possibility of testimony’s transmission. Furthermore, the mediation of their testimony by an unreliable narrator is self-reflexively problematized, which responds to the debates about Holocaust representation by mirroring the epistemological difficulties of translating witness into testimony – neither the witness nor the writer can re-present the Holocaust as such. Thus, the German reader of Sebald’s literature is thrust into the uncomfortable position of being unable to close the gap of knowledge and experience between her-/himself and the character of a Jewish Holocaust survivor – a gap that

persists today and points to a certain unwillingness to listen on the part of non-Jewish Germans, prompted by the idea that the past can somehow be “mastered.”

As Sara Horowitz states, “[a]t the heart of Holocaust narrative resides an essential contradiction: an impossibility to express the experience, coupled with a psychological and moral obligation to do so” (Horowitz 16). The burden of the victim is to testify to their experience, which, combined with history and historiographic writing, constitutes the extent of, until recently, accepted forms of writing about the Holocaust (17-19). Bernard-Donals and Glejzer insist on the problematic relationship of the “demand to know and to remember the events” as reproducing the “rationality” of the Final Solution – that is, the reduction of representation (witness) “to a moral imperative” or the attempt to authenticate victims’ memories against historical narratives (Bernard-Donals and Glejzer, *Between* 3-4). This “moral imperative” is a legacy handed down by successive generations of Germans, whose insistence upon it only further frames discussion of the Holocaust within a non-Jewish perspective, effectively obliterating the Jewish voice. The German public’s disregard and marginalization of Jewish voices in literature about the Holocaust only really began to erode in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall; thus it is no surprise that more and more literary works on the subject have been produced since then, including Sebald’s novels.

“The self-conscious artifice that characterizes literary reconstructions of the Holocaust insistently frames questions necessary to a moral discourse” (Horowitz 24-25). In appealing to a “moral discourse” as such, Sebald’s highly self-reflexive novels insinuate themselves in the discourse without making claims to being able to witness the Holocaust – they eschew representations of the Holocaust, thereby evading the trap of “rationality” referred to by Bernard-Donals and Glejzer. In fact, much of Sebald’s final novel, *Austerlitz*, avoids depictions of the survivor-protagonist’s traumatic memories of

forced emigration and, instead, allows the narrator to listen. Thus, although not driven by the same moral imperative as the literature of Jewish authors, Sebald's novels interject themselves into a moral discourse about the Holocaust.

In writing fiction, non-Jewish Germans might not be able to bear "witness" to the events, but, through their continued confrontation with and discussion of the atrocities, focus can be redirected back to the victims as individuals in their own right – not merely in order to lend their work authenticity. That is to say, instead of just objects of history, whose testimony to historical events determines their worth for the discourse, survivor-witnesses can be reconfigured as subjects. Despite the lack of a moral authority to identify with the victims of suffering, i.e., Holocaust victims, I argue that non-Jewish German writers obtain such authority through participation in the moral discourse.

Sebald's literature is not typical for Holocaust writing in that it models a unique form of witness; the survivor-protagonists do not directly relay their experiences to the reader but rely upon a non-Jewish German narrator to mediate their testimony and pass it on to the reader. I argue that precisely this transmission of "testimony" from the protagonists to the narrators and its final written form (the novels) emphatically underscores the fictional quality of Sebald's novels, and it is the narrator's reliability which is called into question by the narrative structure of the texts themselves (language of uncertainty), and which, moreover, problematizes the transmission of Sebald's protagonists' memories. The self-reflexive underscoring of narrative construction by the protagonist and its doubling by way of the narrator generates awareness of, indeed, calls into question all narratives in his novels.

Sebald's narrators do not quite experience or exemplify LaCapra's concept of "empathic unsettlement," as has been suggested³¹⁸: at no time do the protagonists in Sebald's novels actually describe the Holocaust in explicit detail by "reliving" or testifying to their traumatic memories – though Austerlitz does suffer mental breakdowns at the moments memories of his prewar childhood return to him –; rather, they convey their difficulties in remembering the past. In this way, no traumatic experience (secondary trauma) can be said to have an effect on the narrators who listen to these stories. Nevertheless, the narrators serve as a reflection of the process of the psychotherapeutic relationship and show outward symptoms of identifying too much with their analysands, which is suggestive of "empathic unsettlement," but which is, in fact, the meta-reflective moment for the reader, who should recognize the inappropriateness of this relationship.

Nonetheless, the texts generally keep the reader at one level of remove – they do not allow the reader to be "present" for long in the embedded narrative, and, indeed, they continuously remind the reader of his/her position as an outsider looking in at the narratives from a meta-cognitive perspective. This differentiation of narrative levels is blurred for up to several pages at a time – no declarative markers such as "sagte Austerlitz" – as the grammatical tense and mood fluctuate, transporting the reader into the conversation, as if s/he were actually listening to the Jewish protagonists. However, this effect is consistently ruptured by declarative interjections, which has the effect of destroying the illusion of being there in the moment and destabilizing the narrative as a whole. The disruption of the reading process also gives the reader pause to consider his/her own role as an outsider and not a witness. Thus, the reader only ever encounters

³¹⁸Cf. Fuchs 41-67.

the protagonists' testimonies in smaller chunks, which prevents a sympathizing or identification with the Jewish survivor-protagonists.

The narrative instance in *Austerlitz* helps provide a separation from the narrator and the traumatized protagonist (Austerlitz), thereby reducing the likelihood of unethical identification – a sympathetic or sentimental act of claiming to understand the horrors the victim has suffered – between the German narrator and the Jewish Holocaust survivor.³¹⁹ Indeed, the ethical and moral implications of Sebald's work have often been cited and examined in the secondary literature.³²⁰ By employing a fictive "autobiographical" narrator within the frame story, Austerlitz is granted authority to speak with the Jewish voice.³²¹ Sebald's novel, when viewed through this perspective, creates an ethical narrative situation by virtue of its extensive, autobiographical narrative monologues by the Jewish protagonist, Austerlitz, whose story-within-a-story (already distanced) is further removed from co-option by a third-person narration.

Sebald's novels' ethical depiction of Jews and Jewish suffering radically departs from that of his literary predecessors. Whether it is Günter Grass's "token Jews" (*Scheinjuden*), Wolfgang Koeppen's apologia and universalizing of suffering, Alfred Andersch's vicarious expiation of his personal guilt and forgiveness through his Jewish protagonist,³²² or Peter Weiss's documentary fiction sans emotions (in the testimony of

³¹⁹For a differing viewpoint in which the narrator and protagonist are rather similar, bordering on identical, yet simultaneously different, see Garloff.

³²⁰Long, 18-19. Long cites several articles in this regard (Ceupens; Fuchs; and Taberner).

³²¹As Genette notes, "the "autobiographical" type of narrator, whether we are dealing with a real or a fictive autobiography, is, by the very fact of his oneness with the hero, more "naturally" authorized to speak in his own name than is the narrator of a "third-person" narrative" (Genette, *Narrative* 198).

³²²Alfred Andersch, one of the founding editors of *Der Ruf* and also the Gruppe 47, published a novel shortly after the Frankfurt-Auschwitz trials in 1966, *Efraim*, in which the protagonist, George Efraim, a German Jew who survived the Holocaust as a war correspondent, finds himself on a quest to uncover any traces of his boss's half-Jewish daughter, whom he left behind in Germany during WWII. Sebald harshly criticized Andersch for his opportunism during the Third Reich and how he attempts to write apologia for his transgressions in the guise of his novels. See Sebald, "Andersch" 118-40. Sebald reads Andersch's work biographically, seeing characters as representative of Andersch and his Jewish ex-wife, thereby drawing the

the unidentified victims) in its attempt to capture the historical atmosphere of the Nazi period, all of these authors, I suggest, appropriate the figure of the Jew for purposes other than restoring their identity and subjectivity, though certainly Weiss's identity as half-Jewish complicates his position and the understanding of his literature.³²³ Sebald's work, on the other hand, contains Jewish protagonists who are not objectified or appropriated, and are, in fact, subjects in their own right. There is neither an attempt to project a German perspective into the figure of a Jewish protagonist (as is the case with Andersch's title character in *Efraim*), nor an explicit description of the suffering and pain of Jewish characters (thus avoiding a fetishistic or voyeuristic gaze) in Sebald's writing. A clear example of this is in the second narrative of *Die Ausgewanderten* ("Paul Bereyter"), in which the part-Jewish teacher commits suicide, and the narrator attempts to – but is not able to – glean the specific reasons why he takes his own life; he cannot gain

conclusion that Andersch sought to gloss over his personal history with characters who generally succeed where he did not, or else show compassion and understanding when and where he had not in reality. This kind of reading I find problematic, with the possible exception of his autobiographical novel, *Kirschen der Freiheit*, and, ironically, it is exactly this kind of interpretation of Sebald's work that seems to appear regularly in the scholarship on Sebald's novels. I would argue that reading Sebald's work biographically is also unproductive precisely because such an approach does not take the fictional aspects of his work into full consideration. I endeavored in this dissertation to avoid such an interpretation in order to reveal the methodical writing in Sebald's Holocaust fiction that has heretofore been, in many ways, ignored. His discussion of *Efraim* cites the unbelievability of the central character, stating "daß Andersch unwillkürlich in die Seele seines jüdischen Protagonisten einen deutschen Landser hineinprojiziert, der dem Juden nun vormacht, wie man mit seinesgleichen am besten verfährt" ("Andersch" 142-143). Sebald's criticism of Andersch's work is mostly concerned with exposing a revisionist and apologetic approach to writing Jewish figures – on the surface they appear Jewish, but are, in fact, characters with little depth whose sole purpose appear to be to aid in a working through of Andersch's own troubled past.

³²³I do not mean to oversimplify, especially as regards Peter Weiss' work (Weiss, *Ästhetik*), which Sebald wrote about and may have been influenced by. Sebald, in fact, defends Weiss as one of the "few authors...[who] managed to find the linguistic gravity of language for the subject and make the literary treatment of genocide something more than a dutiful exercise marked by involuntary infelicities" (cf. Sebald quoted in Bigsby, "Restitution" 97-98). See also Helmut Schmitz' comments in this regard (*Terms* 296, 315-6 [endnote 23]). In *Luftkrieg*, Sebald writes, "[*The Aesthetics of Resistance*] . . . which [Peter Weiss] began when he was well over fifty, making a pilgrimage over the arid slopes of cultural and contemporary history in the company of pavor nocturnus, the terror of the night, and laden with a monstrous weight of ideological ballast, is a magnum opus which sees itself . . . not only as the expression of an ephemeral wish for redemption, but as an expression of the will to be on the side of the victims at the end of time."

access to Bereyter's experiences nor his suffering, and explicitly abstains from this presumption. The description of his death is succinct and lacking any explicit details; the manner of his death is emphasized for its irony, not for its violence.

There is also a sense of a common humanity underlying Sebald's characters that does not trivialize or relativize the horrors of the Holocaust, but, instead, remains vigilant in breaking down barriers of identity and establishing empathetic links so as to restore subjectivity to the Jewish figures. This is not to be confused with identification with victims of the Holocaust. Rather, because we cannot gain access to their inner thoughts and feelings (i.e., gain knowledge about their experiences), we, as readers, are spared the problem of unethical identification with Jewish characters, according to Lyotard.³²⁴ For example, the depiction of the affective side of Austerlitz's story – the dramatic pauses, nervous ticks, et cetera – clues us in to the traumatic nature of his experiences, but disallows the ability of the reader to understand what Austerlitz is going through or produce feelings of “empathic unsettlement,” and sidesteps the whole question of representing the atrocities. However, a very salient point in any discussion of Sebald's novels is the fact that the Jewish figures are, point of fact, the constructs of a non-Jewish German, albeit one who takes extreme care to differentiate and create distance between himself and such characters.

There is also, as Jean-François Lyotard points out, a tension between ethical writing and the depiction of facts: “The passage from the ethical phrase to the phrase of knowledge is done only at the price of forgetting the former” (Lyotard 111).³²⁵ “Facts” imply an objective, i.e., objectifying gaze (imposition of the ‘I’ on the ‘you’, to borrow

³²⁴See Lyotard 111.

³²⁵Cf. Lyotard cited in Gerd Bayer, 271. Lyotard is in dialogue with Levinas' “ethics as first philosophy” and idealism, insofar as ethical transcendence cannot be said to exist, and defends Levinas' point regarding the “call of the other,” not as an obligation per se, rather as that to which the 'I' responds without seeking knowledge of the “other,” and thus objectifying him/her.

Lyotard's terminology), which interferes with an ethical representation of the "other" through a violation of his/her subjectivity. Essentially, the alterity of the "other," I contend, needs to be upheld, which necessitates a theory or philosophy of ethics, yet does not require – indeed, it excludes – a historical approach to portraying reality "as it really was."³²⁶

Sebald's work consistently demonstrates a commitment to ethical writing (an "ethics of responsibility," if you will), as it reiterates and problematizes this "questionable business of writing" (*DA* 345). For example, the narrator, sitting in his hotel room (Great Eastern Hotel) after visiting with Austerlitz in the bar downstairs, attempts to write down what he recalls of their conversation in his hotel room: "wo ich dann bis gegen drei Uhr an einem...Sekretär gesessen bin...um in Stichworten und unverbundenen Sätzen soviel als möglich aufzuschreiben von dem, was Austerlitz...mir erzählt hatte" (146). This particular passage is a precursor to Austerlitz's explanation of his inability to write in 1950s Paris, which, as I indicated earlier, reflects the narrator's own apprehension in writing about the Holocaust however indirectly. These examples show the self-reflexivity interspersed throughout the novels, which consistently draws the reader's attention to not only the difficulty of this kind of ethical writing, but also the narrator's precarious position as a non-Jewish German who feels compelled to accurately record the Jewish protagonist's "testimony."

³²⁶Employing Emmanuel Levinas' concept of an "ethics of responsibility" can open up a new reading of Sebald's texts and situate his literary project within the discourse of Holocaust literature and the ethical representation of the Nazi atrocities. However, this is beyond the scope of the present study to meticulously investigate.

VERGANGENHEITSBEWÄLTIGUNG? THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF CLOSURE IN SEBALD'S NOVELS

The debate as to whether the Holocaust can be represented or not draws attention, in the German context, to the perpetrators' and bystanders' perspectives, but, ironically, obfuscates the underlying victims' voice that the discourse of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is supposed to be coming to terms with.³²⁷ The novels of W.G. Sebald have been described in many ways, including melancholic *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*; however, the discussion of “coming to terms with the past” is anathema to what I consider Sebald's work accomplishes – this term denotes the perpetrator perspective and its historical domination of the discourse in Germany on the Holocaust.

Unlike in the case of autobiography with its implicit teleology (i.e., the author is the end-result of the experiences narrated about in the book), Sebald's novels do not end with any noticeable sense of closure. *Die Ausgewanderten* ends as the narrator, looking at pictures in an exhibition about concentration camps, describes a photograph that does not appear in the text, hence denying a sense of completion in the act of reading – the description hangs in the imagination of the reader, intimating that the work of memory

³²⁷Helmut Schmitz argues a similar point, which I would like to acknowledge as a major contribution in the direction this study takes (*Terms* 287). Schmitz points to Klaus Briegleb regarding reason as the factor that prevents the post-1990s German discourse on the Nazi past from including the victims' experience(s) (287-8). It is worth quoting at some length what Schmitz writes, as it concisely lays out an issue that I will address throughout this dissertation. Referring to his book's focus on the “perpetrator literature,” he states:

In a similar way to public discourse, post-1990s German literature is by and large concerned with an appropriation and historicisation [sic] of the legacy of German fascism from a perspective of responsibility. [...] The critical 'ownership' of the legacy of National Socialism, however, still entails a relative sidelining or abstraction of the victims, even in those works that...most acutely reflect the difference between victim and perpetrator perspectives. Due to the incompatibility of victim and perpetrator experience, the establishment of a perpetrator perspective and the creation of a national subtext imply a relative forgetting of the particularities of the Nazi genocide. (287)

However, I would like to point out that this is not a recent development; rather, it originates in the immediate aftermath of WWII in Germany in the form reparations (ownership of responsibility, after a fashion) followed by the blending together of victims' identities and silence.

continues. *Austerlitz* also ends without finishing the story of the protagonist, who departs to continue his search for his – presumably dead – father.

In a sense, the first section of *Austerlitz* serves as the “overture,” in which the themes of what is to come are foreshadowed, and, indeed, it is where the narrative will end. However, unlike an opera or symphony, whose musical themes presented in the overture and are resolved in the final scene or movement, *Austerlitz* resists closure, favoring instead a thematic circularity. On the last page of this “overture” or first “chapter,” the narrator comments about how he was confused as to Austerlitz’s heritage or roots as explained to him, noting also the latter’s apparent anxiety as “er das abgewetzte Brillenfutteral, das er stets in seiner linken Hand hielt, so fest umklammerte, daß man das Weiße sehen konnte unter der Haut seiner Knöchel,” an observation that is echoed at the end of the novel (50, 419). On one of the final pages of the novel, the narrator describes his reading of Dan Jacobson’s novel, in which Jacobson presumably describes his Jewish grandfather’s – Heschel’s – legacy in the form of material inheritance, including “einem abgewetzten Brillenfutteral” (419).³²⁸ This intertextual reference and textual repetition ties the narrator’s first and last encounters with Austerlitz together in a moment of déjà vu. We are reminded of Austerlitz’s anxiety and search for familial traces, as Jacobson sets out to discover his grandfather’s roots. Given that, according to Jacobson’s novel, Heschel, a rabbi, died in 1920 of a heart attack, yet his wife and nine children emigrated to South Africa where Dan subsequently grew up, the biographical parallels to Austerlitz are not only striking – emigration, Jewish identity –, they suggest a kind of circularity. Jacobson, as suggested by the narrator, is on the search

³²⁸Dan Jacobson, *Heshel's Kingdom*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1998.

for traces of his grandfather's past in Lithuania,³²⁹ but finds virtually no evidence of his family's prior existence in the stark and unsettling landscape of their former homeland.

This open-endedness transgresses against the reader's horizon of expectations in the traditional understanding of narrative as possessing an appreciable plot that resolves itself at the close of the story. Indeed, the reading process is ruptured, confounding narrative "desire" to model a whole story, which is unattainable in reality (Brooks 218-36). That is, our lives cannot be shown to have a beginning and end from our own point-of-view – this exceeds our ability to report what we can know, although this could occur in literature as "paralepsis" (Genette, *Narrative* 197). The lack of closure at the end of *Austerlitz* reflects the fact that history is still present in the memories of Holocaust survivors and that, for them, there is no *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. On the formal level, the novel depicts elements of trauma such as belatedness, contingency and coincidence/association (triggers of traumatic recall), which elude fatalistic or teleological readings of the text, and which mirror themes found in much of Holocaust literature. Precisely in its refusal to provide a sense of closure, Sebald's work constitutes a site of resistance in the discourse on forgetting or moving on from the past.

Indeed, this approach represents a major corrective in German Holocaust discourse because of its restoration of preeminence to the victims' perspective and voice after the pre- and, especially, post-unification emphasis of "perpetrator" experience, i.e., suffering.³³⁰ Sebald's fiction resists public pleas for "privatizing" *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, as Walser had called for in his *Erfahrungen* (the spark that ignited the so-called Walser-Bubis debate). As Bernard-Donals and Glejzer hypothesize

³²⁹Lithuania is also the birthplace of Dr. Henry Selwyn from *Die Ausgewanderten*, whose family was massacred in the Holocaust. This, I argue, adds another level of circularity to *Austerlitz*.

³³⁰To be absolutely clear, the Germans were not all "perpetrators," but I refer here to the side of Holocaust discourse that is not made up of victims of Nazi persecution.

in the introduction to their co-edited volume,³³¹ “the creation of a subaltern Jewish subject,” as depicted in various literary works, disrupts (German) cultural memory and Jewish history and memory, and, furthermore, the elision of the specificity of individual experiences deviating from historical narratives echoes the intentions behind the “Final Solution” (11-12). Such a subject resists integration into collective memory and, therefore, marginalization, and is represented, I argue, by Aurach, the Jewish child refugee/emigrant in *Die Ausgewanderten*, and Austerlitz, the Jewish *Kindertransport* survivor-protagonist in *Austerlitz*.³³² Sebald’s literature is not important simply due to its novel depiction of traumatic memory or melancholic tone; rather, it models a wholly unique, anti-*Vergangenheitsbewältigung* approach to the Nazi legacy, which deserves more critical attention than it has yet received.

³³¹Bernard-Donals and Glejzer, *Witnessing* 3-19.

³³²Ann Pearson indicates that Sebald’s fictions often resemble the narratives of real people he met/knew (“Remembrance”). Most of Sebald’s characters are composites – in some way – of individuals the author has met in his travels and daily life; some are more fictionalized than others.

Conclusion

SEBALD'S LITERATURE AS RESPONSE TO SHORTCOMINGS IN (GERMAN) HOLOCAUST FICTION

What should have become apparent in my preceding argument is that Sebald's work was in dialogue with not only Holocaust discourse but also literature, specifically Holocaust fiction. This is of critical importance precisely because I argue that his novels have not as of yet – to my knowledge – been seen as a result of a confrontation with postwar German literature's lack of an ethically responsible approach to depicting Jewish characters and their suffering by non-Jewish German authors, excepting its avoidance entirely.

From *Die Ausgewanderten* to *Austerlitz*, there are several indicators that Sebald's writing was in dialogue with the critical discourse and debates on the Holocaust. First, there is a change in emphasis on the type and number of Jewish characters, from a prewar emigrant (Selwyn), one-quarter Jewish German (Bereyter), non-Jewish German friend of a Jew (Adelwarth) and the Holocaust survivor (Aurach) in the earlier novel, to the exclusive story of a Jewish Holocaust survivor (Austerlitz), which allows the later novel more time and freedom to work out complicated considerations of writing about Jewish suffering from the non-Jewish German perspective. Second, the intertexts used in the later novel deal more with atrocities and catastrophic/apocalyptic events (Joseph Conrad, the Bible, Jean Améry, Jacobsen) compared to those found in the earlier work (Kafka, Hölderlin, the Bible). Third, in *Austerlitz*, there are few if any images “missing” from the text – that is, unlike in *Die Ausgewanderten*, descriptions of photos sans the images themselves do not occur in the text. Fourth, the earlier novel spends a lot of time describing family and relationships, especially those of non-Jewish people, whereas the later novel devotes the vast majority of its attention to a Holocaust survivor who has no

family left that he can find, thus underscoring the obliteration of life by the events of the Holocaust. Fifth, the narrator's voice is much more apparent in the earlier work, inserting comments and qualifying statements, framing diary entries, testimony and other life stories, and accounting for a large part of the narrative's length.³³³ In *Austerlitz*, however, the unnamed narrator rarely "speaks," acting instead as a passive witness to the protagonist's story, which coincides with the idea of heteropathic identification. Sixth, whereas in the earlier novel there is a focus on oral history and personal writing, in the later novel it is history in the sense of archives, academic, i.e., architectural history and blurring the lines between the real and fictional that is the focus. This reliance on documentation and historical discourse is directly related to the shrinking number of survivor-witnesses in the nearly ten years between the publication of both novels, as well as the still general absence of Holocaust memoirs written in German. Finally, the level of mediation of the Jewish protagonists' voices changes dramatically between the two novels, moving from second-hand knowledge for the narrator about the protagonists to direct testimony from Jewish survivor to non-Jewish German, which, as I have already shown, is more complex in nature.

Leaping from one thought to the next – even mid-sentence –, Sebald's writing performs a contingent, intertextually rich narrative mimicry of the inconsistent and manifold experiences of Holocaust survivors, as evidenced in the wealth of survivor literature. In its addressing of specifically German difficulties in writing fiction about the atrocities, Sebald's work needs to be read through an interpretive lens that takes into consideration the pervasive themes of guilt and "coming to terms with the past" in contemporary German literature about the Nazi past. Further, when read in light of the

³³³ See also Aliaga-Buchenau, whose discussion of a dialectical strength of presence of the narrator and protagonists – and their converse as absence – in *Die Ausgewanderten* brought my attention to the very pronounced shift of emphasis away from the narrator in *Austerlitz*.

unreliable nature of the German narrator, a wholly other critical, i.e., meta-critical reading practice is invoked, in which the reader confronts a postmodern destabilization of the narrative and subversion of the redemptive potential often espoused in American Holocaust survivor memoirs. Moreover, the texts resist narrow readings/interpretations, resulting in ambivalence in meaning, while approaching Jewish suffering without (overly) identifying with the victims, or appropriating the Jewish voice. In this way, it creates critical and meta-reflexive distance to its Jewish survivor-protagonists and their testimony, and casts doubt upon endeavors – particularly by non-Jewish Germans – to explicitly represent the Holocaust, calling instead for portrayals, that I deem to be ethical, of the effects of the atrocities upon the victims. The narrative structure (form) reflects thus the multiplicity of stories (content) of the Holocaust without succumbing to tropes or unethical appropriation of any one story.

In terms of future research on Sebald's novels, my work generates questions regarding the ethics of postmodern explorations of the Holocaust. Certainly, this topic has been taken up in the American context; however, in connection with the fraught and sometimes ambivalent German relationship to its past – especially in terms of the *Opfer-Debatte* – non-Jewish German authors, I suggest (in contrast to Günter Grass), will need to more explicitly examine and continue to work through their relationship to Jewish suffering – as inheritors of the burden of guilt caused by those who inflicted said suffering and misery upon millions of innocent Jews.

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