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Sabina Pasic

W.G. Sebald and the Cinematic Imagination

Sabina Pasic

A dissertation

submitted in partial

fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2014

Reading Committee:

Richard T. Gray

Eric Ames

Richard Block

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Germanics

University of Washington

Abstract

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Sabina Pasic

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Professor Richard T. Gray

Department of Germanics

W. G. Sebald's references to films, film directors, and actors pervade in both his critical essays and in his prose fictions. Although there are many different films, cinematic metaphors, and allusions to cinema throughout his work, most of them stand in specific service to memory. This study thus explores the function of filmic images and intermediality more generally in Sebald's prose fictions. It looks at how his writing about film not only mirrors the workings of memory, but also how it produces new and hybrid memories. Sebald's books seek to mark off precisely this liminal space in which new memories are created, a space characterized by a dialectical synthesis of imagination and reality, past and present. The interplay between the polarities leaves the reader with a

sense of uncertainty about what is remembered and what is imagined to have been. This is a productive stage for Sebald, because it not only triggers our imaginative faculties but it also advocates for a critical engagement with the ways our memories are remembered and our histories are written. Filmic events in Sebald's writing access a space in his texts, which would have otherwise remained hidden.

Sebald's prose fictions contain evidence of both his fascination and uneasiness with the way the film medium transformed human identity and the nature of memory. His ambivalent relationship to film and technology more generally makes him a relevant figure whose work has been embraced by both academics and (visual) artists. His claim to be a "bricoleur"—a collector of pre-existing visual material—resonates with the present era's unprecedented ability not only to store huge digital archives, but also to click, drag, and recontextualize their contents across limitless formats. Always on the move, collecting, reporting, and speculating about images, Sebald suggests that we do not have to be slaves to spectacle but can use film and photography as instruments of thought. This study thus explores Sebald's use of the idiosyncrasies of the film medium to reflect on and explore the nature of memory.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my gratitude to Richard T. Gray whose unwavering support and guidance throughout this challenging process has helped me grow both as a critical thinker and an informed observer. This study would not have been realized without the motivation and inspiration from my friends in the writing colloquium and the professors in the Germanics Department. I am especially grateful to Richard Block, Eric Ames and Jane Brown for their generous feedback and support throughout the years. Many thanks go out to my brave readers and conversation partners, Doris Pfaffinger, Christina Riesenweber, Jan Hengge, Sunny Parrott, Rachel Koroloff, Megan Williams, and Frank Haller. Above all, I would like to thank my family and friends who always stood by my side, reminding me that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

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Introduction

In his prose fictions and essays, W. G. Sebald employs certain filmic techniques and themes to represent and underscore the underlying problematic of memory that plays such a prominent role throughout his texts. Considering that film is a fragmented and a fleeting medium, its association with memory in Sebald's work is of particular importance. Sebald not only integrates displaced segments from specific films (such as characters, titles, sequences, or single frames) into his work, but oftentimes he compares his protagonists to actors in silent films, thereby lending them a quasi-ghostly quality. Surrounded by flickering light, the contours of Sebald's characters are recognized briefly at the moment of their appearance, because immediately thereafter they vanish, only to reappear in another context—another cinematic frame. In such instances, the borders between present and past, dream and reality, memory and imagination collapse into a new space of possible variations, what I call a liminal space. Although film is an ephemeral medium, certain images and experiences find a rather firm foothold in our minds and in Sebald's prose fictions. It then follows that the transient nature of the filmic medium parallels the fleeting nature of our own processes of recollection. Similar to our fragmented memories of certain films, we do not remember past experiences and events in their entirety, from start to finish, but rather certain moments or figures stay with us, while others recede deeper into our mind, only to resurface unexpectedly many years later, triggered by an entirely different visual image. As they appear in Sebald's texts, the films not only reflect memory (or the structure of memory), but they also produce new memories that emerge in the liminal space.

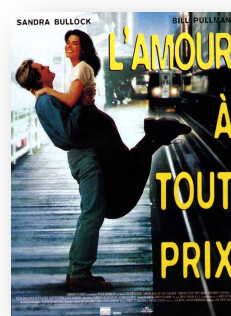
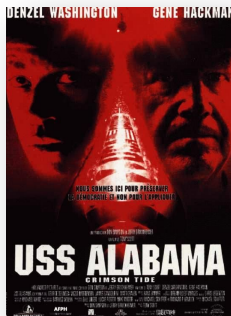
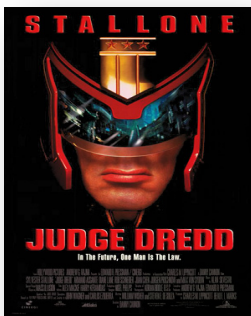
In order to demonstrate that film has both thematic and structural elements in Sebald's prose fictions, and to illuminate the kind of films he was interested in, this study explores how filmic notions figure in Sebald's texts and what function films have for him in recording and perceiving the past. In other words, how can films help us in the reading of Sebald's representations of memory and forgetting? What is it that makes certain episodes, images, and events "memorable"? Most importantly, what can Sebald's representation of memory tell us about the status of media in Sebald's self-consciously intermedial literary texts? I will argue that Sebald's prose fictions demonstrate how film not only reflects but also produces new and hybrid memories. His writing encourages scrutiny of the technological, aesthetic, and ideological dimensions of the everyday environment of an image, because images have come to replace our own personal memories. The notion of images substituting for personal memory corresponds to Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," which is conceived as a type of traumatic memory that is transmitted indirectly through stories, images, and objects, yet it assumes a life of its own.¹ While populating a world characterized by an excess of visual stimulations, Sebald's narrators experience precisely the type of mediated memory that Hirsch writes about.² Although Sebald sheds a critical light on the proliferation of visual media, for him the intersections between media and memory also present a ground for a

¹ In her essay "The Generation of Postmemory," Hirsch analyzes how second generations experience trauma. Even though they have not witnessed the (traumatic) events and experiences directly, they feel strongly impacted by them. She writes: "Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (106). In particular, Hirsch focuses on the memory of the Holocaust, and looks at the reliance on photography as a primary medium of trans-generational transmission of trauma.

² In his essay entitled "History, Narrative, and Photography in W. G. Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten*," Jonathan Long discusses the parallels between Sebald's notion of memory and Hirsch's concept of "postmemory."

creative act. It is precisely in this new space of memory production that hybrid models can emerge and break the established patterns of categorical perceptions of the world. By emphasizing alternative perspectives, Sebald advocates for both rational and imaginative engagement with history and its representation.

In Sebald's work we find traces of both admiration for and uneasiness with the film medium. For example, in his essay entitled "Kleine Exkursion nach Ajaccio," Sebald's affinity towards cinema is juxtaposed with his dissatisfaction with the projected images.³ During his two-week holiday on the island of Corsica, Sebald visits Ajaccio, of which he only knows that it was the birthplace of the Emperor Napoleon. After he spends the day (and much of the essay) exploring "vergangene und die vergehende Zeit," at the end of the day (and the essay) Sebald sits for two hours in a small restaurant (*Campo Santo* 7, 18). Over coffee he studies the advertisements in the local paper and wonders whether to go to the cinema, whereby the association of film with traveling comes to the foreground. He writes: "Ich gehe ja mit Vorliebe in fremden Städten ins Kino. Aber *Judge Dredd* im *Empire*, *USS Alabama* im *Bonaparte* and *L'amour a tout prix* im *Laetitia* schienen mir nicht das Rechte für das Ende dieses Tags" (18).



³ The essay first appeared in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in 1996, and in 2003 it was published again as a part of Sebald's posthumous prose in a book entitled *Campo Santo*.

By using European titles for mainstream cinema, Sebald lends the films the sheen of artistic quality. This in turn functions as an ironic gesture since these films were really intended to meet the box-office demands rather than to critically or visually stimulate their viewers. Furthermore, it is telling that Sebald misspells Dredd, and writes “Dread” instead, which further manifests Sebald’s critique of popular culture. Although Sebald does not disclose what films he would want to see, he indicates that Hollywood blockbusters (all of which came out in the year 1995) are of no importance to him. Considering that nearly all the movie theaters in the city are screening international blockbusters, the comment appears as a hidden critique of the homogenization of cinema.

Furthermore, Sebald’s proclamation about his fondness for going to the cinema while traveling echoes a statement he made much earlier in his writing career. In his 1972 essay “Das unentdeckte Land. Zur Motivstruktur in Kafkas Schloss,” he writes that “Kafka mit Vorliebe ins Kino gegangen ist” (83).⁴ Kafka’s novels and diary entries demonstrate that new forms of representation such as photography and cinema produced an uncanny effect on him because he was both fascinated with and terrified by cinema and photography.⁵ However, very little is known about specific films Kafka saw. Coming back to Sebald’s comment on his affinity with cinema, it stands as a stylized imitation of Kafka, because he also leaves his readers guessing as to which films he would want to see. Sebald is not interested in the mainstream cinema but rather, as we will see, in films

⁴ Sebald goes on to speculate that Kafka must have seen F.W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* that came out in 1922, a year in which Kafka was working on his novel, *The Castle*. He also suggests that the castle in the film served as a thematic background for Kafka’s novel (84).

⁵ In “Kafka im Kino” Sebald claims that Kafka’s novels contain traces of the uneasiness with the new medium, he writes “dass er ein undeutliches Grauen empfand von den mit dem beginnenden Zeitalter der technischen Reproduktion sich anbahnenden Mutationen der Menschheit, mit denen er wohl das Ende des von der bürgerlichen Kultur ausgebildeten autonomen Individuums heraufkommen sah” (200).

that correspond to his investigation of collective and personal histories.⁶ Of particular importance are films that promote wandering and challenge the notions of linearity and plot-driven narratives. This is why Sebald's peripatetic narratives share many affinities with road movies. In other words, he seeks out films that inspire movement because movement inspires writing. More importantly, movement represents memory, or the movement of memories, their transition from past into present, from dreams into reality and vice versa.

So what does Sebald's affinity for particular kinds of cinema tell us about the representation of memory? The filmic instances in his work figure as motivators or descriptors of the past and of character. Indeed, certain films generate memories, but they also become memories in their own right, and at times, the imagined cinematic and remembered life-spanned images cannot be distinguished from one another, which creates a sense of uncertainty because they exist in the liminal space where the borders between past and present, memory and imagination, real and representation cannot be determined. For Sebald, film embodies a ghostly character and ghosts represent re-emergent memories, or new memories that are created from old ones. Films and memories are thus like ghosts who keep returning. More specifically, by referencing films, Sebald's texts themselves acquire ephemeral qualities and become hybrids that operate between media. By employing certain films and film qualities, Sebald engages associations and perspectives that cannot be communicated by the text or his inserted still images alone. His narrators explore the representation of memory in twentieth-century visual culture by looking at film as a document of history and investigating how it

⁶ Sebald was interested in film in his student days and during his academic career. He was particularly drawn to the Weimar cinema and in 1982 he compiled his own seminar on 'German Cinema in the Twenties,' in which the first film on the list was *Der Student von Prag*.

contributes to the construction of our memories. He peels back the many layers of significance that the film medium has acquired over time by evoking and reworking films that stand in service to memory, and by exploring different ways in which film induces not only personal, but also collective memories.

Sebald's prose fictions are characterized by an informed interest in particular kinds of cinema, yet the use and function of films and filmic images in Sebald's writing has remained largely unexplored. The intermedial relationship between image and text, as well as Sebald's use of photography and painting, has been well documented. Scholars in general, when discussing the function of Sebald's images, approach them from the standpoint of photography and its many theories.⁷ However, looking at the images and text passages that contain cinematic scenes (even if they may not necessarily be influenced by actual films) will shed new light on the function of images and intermediality more generally in his texts. The fact that Sebald intentionally combined, merged, and synthesized images (photographs as well as paintings) with prose has produced new hybrid forms, and questions about the correspondence of image to narrative "reality" continue to be posed. This study will first approach the problematic of textual representation through the impact of film and filmic image on Sebald's writing, and then examine how filmic narrative structures figure in Sebald's texts and what function films serve. My aim is to examine Sebald's experimentation with binaries such as documentary and fiction, memory and imagination, past and present, issues that dominate his works and condition his application of cinematic allusions. Underlying Sebald's prose fictions are both the synthesis of these seemingly contradictory modes of

⁷ J.J. Long, "History, Narrative and Photography in W.G. Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten*"; Heiner Boehncke, "Clair obscur. W.G. Sebalds Bilder"; Carolin Duttlinger, "Traumatic Photographs: Remembrance und the Technical Media in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*."

discourse, and the resulting impossibility for the reader to distinguish between the historical record and its literary representation. He does not view the uncertainty between documentary and fiction to be a problem that must be overcome, rather he advocates for the dialectical synthesis of the two. Only by examining the liminal space that is created as a result of this interplay can we begin to approximate how our memories and our histories are constructed.

Victor Burgin, a conceptual artist, a writer, and a scholar, has theorized about this liminal space that characterizes our process of recollection. His book *The Remembered Film* sets up a conceptual framework that mirrors Sebald's informed dialogue with film. Burgin's study explores how we experience images and films and how they affect our memories. The leading question is: "What does it mean to be marked by an image?" (28). Unlike most books on cinema that focus on the inside life of the film (such as the narrative structure, setting, technique, actors' performances, etc.), Burgin is one of the few scholars who explores the "off frame," that is, the life of the film beyond its viewing. In other words, he investigates what happens to films and filmic images once the screening is over, once they leave the theater together with the viewers and assume lives of their own. In today's media-saturated world we encounter films through posters, reviews, trailers, television, and online clips, and we may be able to experience a film without actually watching it. Burgin calls this expanded space beyond the film's showing on the screen the cinematic heterotopia.⁸ Film is everywhere, and it is always displaced and fragmented because it no longer belongs to the context in which it originated. In Burgin's words:

⁸ Burgin borrows from Foucault's notion of heterotopic place, which can encompass a number of mutually incompatible places. See Foucault "Of Other Spaces."

The narratives have dropped away, like those rockets that disintegrate in the atmosphere once they have placed their small payloads in orbit. Detached from their original settings each scene is now the satellite of the other. Each echoes the other, increasingly merges with the other, I experience a kind of fascinated incomprehension before the hybrid object they have become. (59)

The notion of hybridity here is important because it points to the interplay between all the established categories of perception such as past and present, memory and imagination, documentary and fiction. Films circulate in their fragmented form not only through the landscape of pop culture but also through the interior landscape of the mind. On one hand the cinematic heterotopia is the Internet, newspapers, and media, on the other it is the visual subconscious of our own mind. According to Burgin, the longer the filmic fragments are separated from their origin, the more they interlace with our own memories. Thus the proliferation of contemporary media runs parallel to our own inability to remember on our own without any memory aids. He writes: “The sequence breaks apart. The fragments go adrift and enter into new combinations, more or less transitory, in the eddies of memory: memories of other films, and memories of real events” (67-68). Burgin draws from Freud’s concept of “screen memory,” in which a repressed memory is replaced by another related image, perhaps taken from photography or cinema. The filmic images not only intertwine with our memories, but they stand in for memories as defense mechanisms in the process of repression. Burgin also refers to a history research program in which sociologists conducted interviews to determine how we remember and “found an almost universal tendency for personal history to be mixed with recollections of scenes from films and other media productions” (68). Our memories

are thus impacted by the cinematic heterotopia, they are non-linear in structure and they defy any diachrony.

Burgin distinguishes between two types of filmic memory that alternate between voluntary associations, which we conjure up when we try to remember films, and involuntary ones that resurface unexpectedly. Burgin coins the term “sequence image” to further explain the sudden invasion of past into present. While the concept of “image sequence” refers to a linear arrangement of still images, a “sequence image” is a different mixture of moving and still images derived from individual and cinematic memories and it is by nature non-linear. It is a fragment of a remembered film whose elements constitute perceptions and recollections. Yet it is neither daydream nor delusion, but rather “a fact—a transitory state of percepts of a ‘present moment’ seized in their association with past affect and meanings” (21). “Sequence image” is thus a hybrid network existing between past and present, imagination and reality. Burgin explores precisely this passage of displaced segments from films through memory, their transition from past into present. He also demonstrates how the remembered film can become the grounds for a creative act, because when we remember we make films on our own from the material at hand, that is, from the images that are stored in our memories. In that regard, the process of remembering is similar to the artistic technique of bricolage, whereby a work of art is created from a diverse range of materials that happen to be available. The method of bricolage is particularly relevant for Sebald who identifies his own method with Lévi-Strauss's “savage thought.”⁹ As is often the case with Sebald's

⁹ In an interview with Sigrid Löffler, Sebald explains, “Ich arbeite nach dem System der bricolage- im Sinne von Lévi-Strauss. Das ist eine Form von wildem Arbeiten, von vorrationalem Denken, wo man in zufällig-akkumulierten Fundstücken so lange herumwühlt, bis sie sich irgendwie zusammenreimen” (“Wildes Denken” 137).

prose fictions, Burgin's work remains open-ended and fragmented much like his conception of the remembered film, or of the "sequence image." He reminds us that "the telling of a memory, of course, betrays it. Both in the sense of there being something private about the memory that demands it remain untold (secreted), and in the sense that to tell it is to misrepresent, to transform, to diminish it" (16). Even if our memories have the same point of origin, every individual will remember this origin differently: "Consciousness may be synchronized in a shared moment of viewing, but the film we saw is never the film I remember" (110). Memories are highly mediated and ultimately subjective, and we have to be aware of this construction.

Considering that filmic memories figure prominently throughout Sebald's work, he anticipates the cinematic heterotopia Burgin writes about. Of particular importance is Burgin's conception of the "sequence image" that suspends the distinction between moving and still images, and between past and present. As already mentioned, filmic memories evoke a sense of the uncanny because they are interlaced with personal memories, indeed they often replace them. The questions are: Why are certain scenes or images absorbed by and stay with Sebald's narrators? How and why do they create associations between filmic images and sequences that otherwise have no apparent connection? How are his narrators marked by filmic fragments and what implications do these imprints have on memory and its representation?

This study brings Sebald's *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, *Die Ausgewanderten*, and *Austerlitz* into a dialogue with three filmmakers: Wim Wenders, Werner Herzog, and Alain Resnais. Sebald and his narrators remember moments from their films, and hence their work assumes a privileged place in his fictions. The comparison between Sebald's

literary texts and the works of these directors is not only triggered by the instances in which their films appear in Sebald's texts, but more importantly by the salient affinities between these artists. They all advocate for open-ended, non-linear, and imaginative stories. The filmic themes that predominate Sebald's narratives are divided into three chapters that engage different dimensions of film, namely technological, aesthetic, and ideological. These dimensions are each further represented by three motifs that reflect Sebald's appropriation of certain filmic qualities: the double, the mirage, and the labyrinth. In what follows, I will sketch brief outlines of the main chapters of this study.

CHAPTER I: DOUBLE TECHNOLOGY

The starting point of my investigation is Sebald's book review of Hanns Zischler's documentation entitled *Kafka geht ins Kino* (1996), published under the title "Kafka im Kino," because it contains the most obvious allusions and references to film. Kafka is an important historical figure for both Sebald and Zischler, since this writer witnessed the advent of cinema and his writing can thus reveal what impact early cinema had on literature and on our perceptions. Both Zischler's study and Sebald's text suggest that Kafka was uneasy with the new medium, that he felt both a certain sense of alienation and of identification when confronted with moving images. In this regard, Kafka's ambivalent relationship to cinema (and photography) illuminates the structural model underlying Sebald's first prose fiction, *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, because it also reveals traces of the uneasiness with the filmic medium. Furthermore, before addressing Zischler's book or Kafka's relationship to cinema itself, Sebald begins the book review with his own reception of Wim Wenders's film *Im Lauf der Zeit*, without at first telling

us that one of the protagonists in the film is Hanns Zischler himself. Wenders's film is a three-hour-long black-and-white road movie that pays homage to the now forgotten form of entertainment, the silent era of film. The film has specific affinities to Sebald's *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, namely, aimless wanderings, male-male friendships, and a return home at the conclusion. My first chapter thus explores the affinities between Sebald's road journey and Wenders's cinematic travels, and it looks at the ways in which their characters creatively manipulate their respective media as means of challenging the present consumer-driven society. Their works pay tribute to the silent era by critically reflecting on the present. In other words, they employ the past (silent film) in order to reflect on the present (homogenized cinema industry). The technological advancements of the medium that start with the introduction of sound and then continue with color, 3-D, and CGI have also led to the decline in the value of production, as well as in oversaturation with visual images. We can no longer tell the difference between the real and the imagined, and we can no longer remember on our own. More importantly, the technological perfection of the medium is somehow at odds with our own imperfections.

The meandering structure of "Kafka im Kino," along with its speculative nature, and a critical angle on popular culture align perfectly with Sebald's *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, because the book also intertwines documentation with speculation, while it drifts from one subject to another. The four narratives that constitute the book are held together by the wandering, intradiegetic narrator, who is on a continuous search for new images and stories filled with seemingly banal details. The first three sections establish parallel journeys between the narrator's travels in Italy with those of Stendhal, Casanova, and Kafka, while the last story recounts a trip that the narrator made to his childhood home in

a town he calls W. in southern Germany. His search is connected by motifs such as the recurrence of the year 1913 (and its variations), allusions to Kafka (or Kafka's characters) and the invasion by the shadowy figures of the past. While on the road, the narrator often encounters doubles, ghosts, and revenants, which tend to resemble actors in (old) movies, and thus lend the narrative a certain atmosphere of undecidability between lived experience and cinematic representation. His focus on traveling and the passing of time, and on the fleeting nature of characters and images recall some of the main characteristics of early films. The idea of capturing movement is an early impulse of cinema that was frequently depicted through trains, cars, city traffic, chase scenes, etc. Much like the silent film, Sebald's works aim to affect the reader physically. His writing charts a territory that, like the celluloid film, exists on the margin between actuality and imagination. Furthermore, the undecidability between what really happened and what was imagined remains, and through its constant affirmation it starts to shape a discourse of its own. I argue that it is precisely via cinematic themes and metaphors, as well as through specific references to films, actors, and directors, that Sebald can access this liminal space.

CHAPTER II: MIRAGE AESTHETICS

The second chapter aims to illuminate how Sebald's second prose fiction, *Die Ausgewanderten*, uses filmic instances as a springboard to engage the notions of uncertainty and hybridity in his works. Though not immediately apparent, these filmic elements convey the uncanny in Sebald's work and create an atmosphere in which the barrier between dream and reality, past and present, imagined and lived experiences,

between the dead and the living cannot be determined. Not only do Sebald's texts evoke a sense of uncertainty when he incorporates imaginary elements into his at times documentary prose, but also when he manipulates facts, that is, when he recontextualizes documents and integrates them into different, at times opposing backgrounds. Sebald's narrator constructs his stories by exploiting certain meta-texts and by stressing visual associations rather than logical conclusions. Sebald sets out to demonstrate that documents, indeed documentaries, are just as fantastic as works of fiction.

Similar to the structure of *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, *Die Ausgewanderten* is made up of four stories that are held together by an intradiegetic narrator. His mission is to chronicle the lives and memories of four European emigrants who seem to occupy a liminal space in their exile. They are outsider figures, or better: hybrids, who cannot come to terms with their forgotten or suppressed pasts and thus live like hermits in their present. Through their troubled pasts the narrator explores and cultivates his own. In the second story we find a textual reference to Werner Herzog's *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle* that serves to support the prominent theme of remembering. Although Herzog's film appears merely as a passing remark in *Die Ausgewanderten* its relationship to Sebald's narrative demands closer attention. Herzog's film essentially represents an ultimate social outsider, Kaspar Hauser, a foundling from nineteenth-century Germany. The film critically reflects on Hauser's process of assimilation, which operates according to the principle of exclusion rather than inclusion, logic rather than imagination and creativity. Hauser emerges as a hybrid figure who does not fit into any pre-established categories and therefore remains an enigma to this day. Herzog advocates for open-ended stories filled with uncertainties between polarities because they engage our imaginative

faculties. As we will see, Herzog's mode of narration about this historical figure provides a thematic and structural anchor for Sebald's narrative.

In particular, Hauser's three open-ended dream visions, in which he recalls mirage-like landscapes, also find textual resonance in Sebald's text. *Die Ausgewanderten* is populated by mirages and hybrid figures whose stories defy conclusions, even if they end or begin with the protagonist's death. A strong sense of uncertainty thus dominates throughout, because the protagonist's stories continue after the writing process is complete. Considering that outsiders and hybrids permeate both Sebald's and Herzog's work, the suggestion is that they are not interested in solving mysteries but in maintaining them. Their mission is to remove the linear narrative structure and play down the prominence of logical articulation because they block the magic of uncertainty. This is why Sebald and Herzog focus on outsiders and hybrids, because through their perspective the artists can explore what lies beyond the categorical perceptions of the world. Both Sebald's and Herzog's bodies of work rely heavily on found footage, and on the embellishment of found material, whether documentary or fictional. Herzog's quest for new images and historical perspectives that occupy the realms of documentary and fiction often result in meta-documentaries. As such, Herzog's cinematic techniques align perfectly with Sebald's narrative mode and thematic interests.

CHAPTER III: LABYRINTH IDEOLOGY

The final chapter of my study explores how *Austerlitz*, Sebald's last published prose fiction, employs metaphors of architecture and time to reflect on the nature of memory. Of particular importance is how the narrator and Austerlitz himself employ

films to illustrate the process of remembering. They are interested in films that reflect on architecture to explore our conceptions of time, place, and recollection, whereby certain architectural structures such as fortresses, labyrinths, and monumental buildings model certain forms of memory-writing. In *Austerlitz* we encounter works that use the idiosyncrasies of the film medium to represent the mechanisms of memory on screen or in a text. More specifically, two films by a French film director, Alain Resnais, appear in Sebald's text. Resnais's fixation on and exploration of places and space, like *Marienbad* and *the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris*, has parallels to Sebald's text as well. Indeed, Sebald restages architectural settings from Resnais's films in his own narrative. The question is: what function do films seek to record in Sebald's work, more specifically the films that employ documentary themes not in their traditional roles as objective sources, but rather to self-reflect on the very process of documenting and representing? Sebald himself is concerned with the process of composing, that is, *how* a particular story or an account is narrated or constructed. What matters to Sebald is not only the individual film, or film as an art form, but also the impact of the cinematic medium and the way it shapes an audience's perceptions and memories.

Austerlitz shares many themes and motifs with Sebald's two other prose fictions, such as travel, architecture, photography, time, film, male friendships, history, and memory. Unlike the other books, *Austerlitz* does not have different sections, but rather it is one long unraveling narrative. The book chronicles labyrinthine memories of a Jewish exile, Austerlitz, as he begins to recollect his arrival to England on a *Kindertransport* at the age of four. His true origin remains a mystery to him until his retirement age when his memories of his past life gradually re-emerge. An unlikely pair of film references frames

Austerlitz's process of recollection: Nazi propaganda and French New Wave cinema.

While researching the fate of his mother, Austerlitz is at first certain that he will recognize her face in the 1944 Nazi pseudo-documentary film about Theresienstadt, *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt* (351), but when he finally obtains a copy, he cannot discern anything from the fleeting images. His search continues and twenty pages later Austerlitz references New Wave cinema. He mentions seeing Resnais's *Toute le mémoire du monde*, a short documentary film about the preservation of history and memory in the Paris Bibliothèque Nationale (372). Furthermore, prior to mentioning the Nazi Propaganda film he makes numerous allusions to another film by Resnais, *L'année dernière à Marienbad*. (297-311). These filmic references, along with their architectural settings, are also pivotal moments in Austerlitz's process of recollection. Resnais's films explore the nature of memory and experiment with form to illustrate the processes of recollection. Of particular importance is an image of a labyrinth that not only characterizes Resnais's film but recurs in Sebald's text as well. It stands as a metaphor for memory and its workings, as well as a commentary on ideological dimensions of institutionalized memories that are housed in archives and libraries. Both Resnais and Sebald show how the preservation of memories also leads to their confinement, that is, how maximizing access also interferes with it. The suggestion here is that the stringent categorization of our knowledge and memories parallels the extreme forms of logic employed by the Nazis. Unlike Resnais's films, Nazi propaganda films mask and manipulate the content by presenting false memories. The juxtaposition of Nazi propaganda and New Wave films thus points to the difficulty of representing the past.

This is precisely Sebald's main concern in *Austerlitz*: how to represent (traumatic) memories that emerge in the liminal space.

Chapter 1

Processing Documents: Speculative Solutions in W. G. Sebald's *Schwindel. Gefühle.* and Wim Wenders's *Im Lauf der Zeit*

Hidden within W. G. Sebald's review of Hanns Zischler's book, *Kafka geht ins Kino* (1996), is his personal homage to the art of cinema. Even though Sebald often makes references to film directors, actors, and movie-going, in no other work does he devote as much attention to the medium of cinema as he does in this short book review, which appeared under the title "Kafka im Kino." Here he offers reflections on the influence of film on Kafka's perception, as well as on his own movie-going experience with Wim Wenders's *Im Lauf der Zeit* (1976). In fact, the book review starts out with Sebald's reception of Wenders's film, and only on the third page do we find out that Zischler is not only one of the actors who plays in *Im Lauf der Zeit* but also the author of the book under review. The film introduces Zischler's book, which documents Kafka's *Kinoerlebnisse* and inspires Sebald's own writing on cinema. Sebald's encounter with *Im Lauf der Zeit* emerges as a passing remark, but a deeper look exposes that this particular film shares thematic and structural affinities with Sebald's own interests and techniques. The film's backdrop is the decline of the German independent film industry in the postwar era and the subsequent yearning for the early days of cinema. On one hand, the film acts as homage to the silent era, on the other hand, it delivers critical commentary on the postwar cinema industry. Considering Sebald's own frequent reference to silent films in his prose and his critical stance on mass media and popular literature, the possible

connections between Wenders's film and Sebald's prose fiction demand scholarly attention.

Several layers are at play in Sebald's book review: his reference to Wenders's film, his musings on Kafka's (documented as well as imagined) relationship to cinema, and his theoretical postulations regarding the nature of the cinematic medium. Zischler's use of Kafka's travel diaries to document the writer's subjective reaction to the images (especially cinematic ones) taken at the turn of the century is not Sebald's only concern, for he deviates from Zischler and engages in his own reflections on the medium. At first glance, it appears that we are following Sebald, who is following Zischler's book on Kafka, but this trajectory is much more complex. Kafka's importance for Sebald is manifold, but in this case the significance relates to Kafka's witnessing of the advent of cinema, and the way in which his writing shows how moving pictures influenced his perspective and style. In other words, Sebald analyzes the effect of cinema or reflects on film in general by employing Kafka as a mouthpiece. For instance, on two separate occasions, namely in *Schwindel. Gefühle.* and in "Kafka im Kino," he wonders if Kafka saw Stellan Rye's *Der Student von Prag* (1913), even though he is well aware that such an encounter is not documented (166, 201); or in his book review he projects the impossible encounter between Kafka and Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (1935) (207). In all these instances he departs from Zischler and to a certain extent from Kafka, all the while establishing his own familiarity and relationship with the cinematic medium. When Sebald is speaking about Zischler, Kafka, or Wenders, he is always also talking about himself. The book review thus serves as a springboard for Sebald's proclamations on the nature and history of a particular kind of cinema. For the purposes of this chapter,

“Kafka im Kino” acts as a *foil* through which to approach the enigma of Sebald’s own relationship with cinema (or the camera). It thereby sets the stage for an understanding of how the filmic medium functions in his prose writing.

In particular, the analysis of *Im Lauf der Zeit* will serve here to illuminate Sebald’s first prose fiction, *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, where the film functions as a locus of imagination rather than as a transparent device of historical testimony. Sebald’s *Schwindel. Gefühle.* becomes a literary instantiation of the Wenders-like road movie. What connects Sebald’s journeys and Wenders’s cinematic travels is that they both appear to be random. As we shall see, Wenders’s film has detailed and specific affinities to *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, namely aimless wanderings, male-male friendships, theme of suicide, parallel journeys, and a return home at the conclusion. The comparison is not only informed by the instance in which Wenders’s film surfaces in Sebald’s book-review, but more importantly by the salient affinities between the works of these two figures more generally. In nearly all of their works the act of composition takes itself as a subject, which indicates that the notions of self-reflection and metafiction play an integral part during the writing/filming process. Sebald and Wenders attempt to capture the process of documenting and to expose *how* a particular story or an account is narrated or constructed. Underlying their narratives is a similar concern, how to narrate our personal and collective memories, and how to document the unremembered and bring it back to memory. Along the way they posit a sense of nostalgia for the past and offer a critical angle on the present state of consumer-oriented society. Sebald’s narrative approach and Wenders’s cinematic techniques are aligned by their tendency to couple the pursuit of a personal subject matter with a self-reflective dialectic that questions the very nature of

their narrative/cinematic method or process. Their focus on modes of enunciation reveals the inadequacy of language and of images to authenticate the past, and brings issues of the limitation and “constructedness” of human speech and visual representation to the fore. As will be shown, Wenders’s and Sebald’s characters productively manipulate their respective media as their means of protest. This chapter explores correspondences between Wenders and Sebald that tell us about the status of media in the digital age.

The discussion will first focus on Wenders’s film *Im Lauf der Zeit* in order to extract some of its affinities to Sebald’s work, and second, on Sebald’s reflections on this film in his book review, “Kafka im Kino.” Only then can we turn to illuminate how Sebald’s *Schwindel. Gefühle.* incorporates certain cinematic techniques that also characterize Wenders’s road movie.

Im Lauf der Zeit

Sebald’s reflections on the influence of cinema on Kafka’s writing in “Kafka im Kino” are coupled with the memory of his own *Kinoerlebnis* of Wim Wenders’s film *Im Lauf der Zeit* (1976). Wenders’s film is a nearly three-hour-long black-and-white road-movie, which contains themes common to most of Sebald’s work: photography, silent film, traveling, suicide, chance encounters, male friendships, and homecoming. As the title suggests, the film’s main concern is to document the passing of time. The centrality of time is further reflected through the film’s most obvious characteristic: its length. In his own work, Sebald tends to explore time past and time passing and frequently employs the phrase “Im Lauf der Zeit,” or the variation thereof in *Die Ausgewanderten*: “Im Verlauf der letzten Jahre“ (30), “die Zeit [nimmt] wieder ihren Lauf,” (310), in

Schwindel. Gefühle.: “im Verlauf des Vormittags,” (158), “dem Verlauf der Zeit,” (167), “den Lauf der Dinge,” (172), in *Logis in einem Landhaus*: “im Lauf der Zeit,” (99), in *Unheimliche Heimat*: “dem Verlauf der Zeit” (96). The emphasis on time and transience highlights the constant process of development whereby our perceptions continually evolve as we focus on times past or times passing as a flow of images. In addition to referring to travel, the notion of “Im Lauf der Zeit” represents the concrete “running” of time in the form of the film frames as they move on the film reel. This analogy combines peripatetic travel, film, and writing. In other words, history and memories are not static but rather are constantly changing in time based on their interrelations, like the game of “moving pictures” Austerlitz plays (175-76).¹⁰ In Sebald’s view, the process of passing time is most successfully captured on film.

Just as Sebald’s stories are often a series of episodes related in a paratactic fashion, so too Wenders’s film is constructed as a chain of episodically ordered individual events. *Im Lauf der Zeit* has no grand narrative, but many stories and chance encounters that are based on the contingencies of being on the road. Choosing to tell a story in episodes highlights the uniqueness of each event. Since an episode is by definition only a fragment of a larger, ongoing process, it emphasizes lack of closure. There are many directors and writers who employ the episodic narrative structure and allow their stories to develop on the road, while traveling. The uniqueness of both

¹⁰ Austerlitz’s game of “moving pictures” is expressed as follows: “Austerlitz sagte mir, dass er hier manchmal stundenlang sitze und diese Photographien, oder andere, die er aus seinen Beständen hervorhole, mit der rückwärtigen Seite nach oben auslege, ähnlich wie bei einer Partie Patience, und dass er sie dann, jedesmal von neuem erstaunt über das, was er sehe, nach und nach umwende, die Bilder hin und her und übereinanderschiebe, in eine aus Familienähnlichkeiten sich ergebende Ordnung, oder auch aus dem Spiel ziehe, bis nichts mehr übrig sei als die graue Fläche des Tisches, oder bis er sich, erschöpft von der Denk- und Erinnerungsarbeit, niederlegen müsste auf der Ottomane” (175-76). Austerlitz’s relationship to cinema and the function of cinema in Sebald’s last published prose fiction will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter III.

Sebald's style of writing and Wenders's way of filming lies in their attention to detail and their emphasis on the constructedness of memory and representation. Both Wenders's filming and Sebald's writing become acts of documenting the fleeting nature of passing time; they capture events unfolding in time, but also, and more importantly, stress the necessity of reconstructing or filling out the narrative, because their narratives are microcosmic fragments that stand in relation to a macrocosmic whole that continues when the writing and filming is finished. The audience is also invited to take a "parallel journey" that has personal significance. Both Wenders and Sebald employ strategies that involve the reader; they make the audience think by deploying "gaps" in the narrative structure to illustrate the fragmentary nature of experience and of memory.

Of particular importance to Sebald is Wenders's thematization of the friendship between two men while travelling, a recurring theme in Sebald's own work. As we will see in *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, the narrator's visit with the poet Ernst Herbeck develops on the road. Their friendship is characterized by their differences (unlike Sebald, the poet does not edit his work), as well as their correspondence (they both use materials at hand and are bricoleur). The thematization of male friendship is also evident in Sebald's stories of Henry Selwyn, Ambrose and Cosmo, Max Aurach, and Austerlitz, all largely structured around their outsider status and coincidental encounters. Similarly, the friendship between Bruno and Robert in *Im Lauf der Zeit* results from a chance encounter: one morning, in a failed suicide attempt, Robert drives his Volkswagen at full speed into a river, where Bruno happens to be parked overnight. The suicide attempt is another linking motif to Sebald's "emigrants," and also to the figure of Jäger Gracchus, a

motif that permeates *Schwindel. Gefühle*.¹¹ The scene is not tragic, but rather comical. Bruno, laughing, watches as Robert climbs out and reaches the shore. Robert's emergence from the water marks his new beginning, for he does not just find dry clothes in Bruno's traveling van, but also a friend. To some extent, the film is built on the contrast between the protagonists. Bruno lives in a van and drives from town to town, repairing film projectors in run-down movie houses. Robert, recently separated from his wife, is a linguist and a speech pathologist for children. Bruno is a transitory figure who removes himself from social and domestic structures, while Robert, obsessed with newspapers, is haunted by the need to express everything in print (the only medium through which he can confront his father). This is similar to Kafka, because he too could only confront his father through a "letter," the infamous "Brief an den Vater." As different as Bruno and Robert are, they have much in common: they (along with Wenders) belong to the same generation, they are both men in limbo fixated on machines (such as cars, motorcycles, radios, projectors, the printing press) and they are alone. It is precisely their isolation and exclusion from society that unites them. The two decide to travel together along the border between Western and Eastern Germany in Bruno's travelling van. Towards the end of the film, they return to their hometowns, but the desire to go back is inspired by something or someone they see along the road. Therefore the return becomes a passing-through; it is as accidental as is their whole encounter. In the last story in *Schwindel. Gefühle*, "Ritorno in Patria," Sebald's narrator decides to visit his hometown after his aimless wanderings. Important to note here is that there is a significant difference between aimless journeys and a return home. Both Wenders's film

¹¹ Three out of four "emigrants" in *Die Ausgewanderten* commit suicide, while the fourth emigrant is saved by the intervention of contingency. See Chapter II.

and Sebald's *Schwindel. Gefühle.* perform this transformation from "road" journey to homecoming. For both Sebald and Wenders, it is the journey that matters, not the destination, unless that destination is home, then the significance changes.

On a structural level the film depicts another type of return, that is, the return to photography, the technical precursor to cinema. Wenders exploits the power of still over moving pictures to fix an image in the viewer's mind. Robert, shortly before he drives his car into the river, tears up a photograph of a family house. The camera zooms in on the photo and we see the front entrance of a house surrounded by trees but no people. We are left to speculate what this photo actually represents, for Wenders does not provide a commentary. Instead, we see another image attached to the car's stereo depicting mountaintops engulfed by trees and covered by snow, suggesting perhaps that now that he left the familiar (house) behind, he embarks upon the unknown, into the solitude and isolation of nature. These images are not there merely to advance the film's narrative; they also allude to different contexts and involve suggestions that diverge from those conveyed by the film. Wenders's insertion of still photographs is similar to Sebald's captionless images that at times reflect, but just as often push forward his narratives. In fact, the entire film is literally a journey inspired by images and memories. This is significant because Sebald's book-review begins with black-and-white images, or rather his memory of them.

The photographic image becomes one of the main themes in *Im Lauf der Zeit*. The inspiration for the film was Walker Evan's "Foto-Reportage," or rather Wenders's memory of it:

Walker Evans hatte während der Depression im Auftrag der Farm Security Administration den Süden der Vereinigten Staaten bereist. Seine Fotoserie zeichnet sich durch einen einzigartigen Stil aus, es ist wirklich eine Arbeit über den Begriff Depression. Da jene Region, die wir im Innern von Deutschland durchquerten, dieses Niemandsland zur ostdeutschen Grenze, für mich auch ein Gebiet der Depression war—jedermann ging weg, es war eine Region ohne Hoffnung, hatten wir den Eindruck, eine Art Bericht anzufertigen, ähnlich dem von Walker Evans. (*Die Logik der Bilder* 119)

The key words in this passage are “Begriff” and “Niemandsland,” because they encapsulate Wenders’s film aesthetics. The latter term indicates that Wenders, much like Sebald, is interested in abandoned and forgotten places, as well as in rescuing them from oblivion. The notion of “Begriff” concerns Evans’s images themselves. The figures, places, and subjects Evans encounters and documents on his travels seem to be representative of the greater context within which they exist. In other words, they are representations of types rather than objective documentations of a historically determined place. This is why Wenders comments that Evans’s images capture a “Begriff” of depression rather than merely illustrating a place and time. This is precisely Wenders’s concern: to move from particular to general. His subjects become themes, that is to say, the subject embodies a particular development or a representation of that theme. The film thereby becomes a meditation on ideas in conflict, and these conflicts suggest the form that the film might take. A similar pattern of documentation is present in Sebald’s meditations on Kafka, or any other historical figure or event. Rather than relying only on documented events and encounters, Sebald creates networks of possible encounters and

speculations that inform the general profile of Kafka's life, which itself then becomes representative of a larger historical context: the year 1913 and the atmosphere preceding the "Great War." Sebald thus represents history not in generality, from above, but from below, on the example of an individual representative, like Stendhal (for Napoleon and the wars of liberation) and Kafka (for the period before the Great War). Similarly, the protagonists in *Im Lauf der Zeit* tell us more about the conditions of the German film industry in the 1970s.

Wenders's use of images and memories as motivators for the film's narrative is analogous to the way he uses the present situation to reflect on the past. Another source of inspiration for the film was Wenders's expedition itself. Before he started shooting *Im Lauf der Zeit*, he drove the length of the East German/ West German border several times. The original idea was conceived during an *Autobahnfahrt*. Wenders was driving along for miles behind two trucks and observing the drivers, "Da habe ich mir gedacht, dass es LKW-Fahrer sein könnten, die in meinem Film diese Reise durch Deutschland machen" (*Die Logik der Bilder* 24). Later, Wenders located 80 cinemas on a special map between Lüneberg and Passau, from which, after a 14-day journey, only 12 were still open. Before he started filming, Wenders took two more journeys along the border to explore the old cinema houses and landscapes surrounding them. When he finally started filming, "Es gab die Geschichte für die ersten Drehtage. Für den Rest gab es eine Route mit Fixpunkten: ein paar Dorfkinos in Niedersachsen, Hessen und Bayern" (*Die Logik der Bilder* 25). Wenders's journey is almost serendipitous, like the stations of Sebald's travels. For example, the movement of Sebald's narrator in "All'estero" follows a similar pattern: he not only retraces Kafka's famous itineraries but also revisits the locations he

visited seven years ago in an attempt to record his present experiences and to find out what happened in the past. Both Sebald and Wenders use the past to reflect on the present and vice versa, thus creating parallel journeys and patterns of doubling.

Wenders organizes the entire film according to spatial dimensions that become evident in the opening images, where titles identify the format and the location of filming (“schwarz/weiß,“ “Breitwand – 1:1,66,“ “Originalton,“ and “gedreht in 11 Wochen, zwischen dem 1 Juli und dem 31 Oktober 1975, zwischen Lüneberg und Hof entlang der Grenze zur DDR”). The opening credits emphasize the technical aspects of the film. While raising our awareness of the medium itself, the credits also function as a protest against the standardization of film and highlight the poor production conditions out of which *Im Lauf der Zeit* is generated. The emphasis on location indicates that the narrative mechanism is not a script but rather a journey of historical chance playing out along the border and its still operating cinema houses. It is the location that drives the narrative and plot, rather than the narrative playing out against the backdrop of a (chance) location. The film’s heavy focus on images of the landscape (such as the road, the small underpopulated villages, and the abandoned cinema houses) reinforces the theme of travel and chance, but also the consequences of historical events. In this part of Germany the border turns center into margin. This apparent serendipity lends the film a certain documentary quality in that the two characters react to what they find along the itinerary, rather than to what is prescribed in the screenplay.

In fact, Wenders did not have a full screenplay but rather a manuscript consisting of three pages. He decided to make *Im Lauf der Zeit* “einen Reisefilm, in dem ich ganz nach Belieben das reinnehmen kann, was mir unterwegs gefällt, bei dem ich die Freiheit

hätte, während des Films die Geschichte zu erfinden” (*Die Logik der Bilder* 23).

Wenders’s voyage prior to making his film parallels Sebald’s pilgrimage in *Die Ringe des Saturn*. *Im Lauf der Zeit* is both a film about Robert and Bruno’s journey and Wenders’s journey through the same landscape. It is as if Robert and Bruno are merely reenacting Wenders’s diary entries from his own investigation of the location. As Wenders claims, “Im Grunde stellt man fest, dass man von dem gelenkt wird, was man vorher gesehen hat; wenn nicht, ist man verloren in der Überfülle dessen, was es zu sehen gibt” (*Einstellungen* 92). This statement points to the necessity of filtering the events in memory, for otherwise one is over-stimulated by the wealth of material. The emphasis on the duality of past and present corresponds to the inseparability of document and imagination, memory and forgetting, as well as to the ambiguity between the narrator and the characters (all of which are characteristics of Sebald’s prose fictions). Sebald often follows in the footsteps of the writers he admires, such as Kafka, Herbeck, Nabokov, Grillparzer, and Walser, thus creating parallel journeys.¹² In *Schwindel. Gefühle*, Sebald retraces Kafka’s footsteps and reconstructs his visual experiences. The idea of reconstructing parallel journeys at distinctly different points of historical time is central to the affinities between the two artists. Both Sebald and Wenders take the reader/viewer on a journey, while taking notes and in turn exposing the narrative as constructed. In other words, we see the processes behind their productions, which in turn not only raises our

¹² In his essay on Robert Walser, “Le promeneur solitaire,” Sebald writes: “Ich habe immer versucht, in meiner eigenen Arbeit denjenigen meine Achtung zu erweisen, von denen ich mich angezogen fühlte, gewissermaßen den Hut zu lüften vor ihnen, indem ich ein schönes Bild oder rein paar besondere Worte von ihnen entlehnte, doch ist es eine Sache, wenn man einem dahingegangenen Kollegen zum Andenken ein Zeichen setzt, und eine andere, wenn man das Gefühl nicht loswird, dass einem zugewinkt wird von der anderen Seite” (139).

awareness of how memories and histories are re-structured, but also suggests that the immediacy of an experience or an event can never be fully retrieved.

Wenders highlights the process of composition through the film's crucial attribute, its length—i.e., its representation of passing time. The sense of duration also comes from the types of events projected on the screen. It is as if Wenders wanted to capture actions that are usually expelled from films, such as the time it takes to walk from one point to another, or the process of a daily task. The static camera creates the effects of a still image in the middle of the film, allowing the viewer to pause for reflection. Although the camera is expressive, the subtle acting and lack of dialogue maintain the detachment from characters.¹³ The silence between the characters is visually rendered by long tracking shots on the road, whereby the frame is often desolate with long, static shots of an empty countryside or with extreme long-shots that depict façades. Wenders's frequent employment of long takes also allows space for reflection and gives the viewer a sense of agency in that he/she has more time to interpret what is projected on-screen.

Wenders uses cinema as a tool to critically reflect on the state of German film in the 1970s. The film establishes a link to the beginning stages of the cinematic medium as well as to its decline—i.e., the silent era and the state of German film after WWII. As we shall see, this is also what Sebald accomplishes in *Schwindel. Gefühle.* and in “Kafka im Kino.” Although a fictional story, *Im Lauf der Zeit* portrays the present as a document of a non-existent place—i.e., the border between East/West Germany. Wenders was not interested in making a documentary film. He noted, “Es sollte um alles in der Welt nicht aussehen wie ein Dokumentarfilm. Deswegen haben wir die Kamera auch wesentlich

¹³ When Bruno and Robert first meet they do not exchange any words. It is not until the 27th minute of the film that they introduce themselves to each other.

öfter auf Schienen gestellt oder mit dem Kran gearbeitet als sonst” (*Die Logik der Bilder* 26). However, the fact that the film was shot in black-and-white indicates that the director was concerned to create a certain effect. Wenders is convinced that “Vielen Filmen würde es gut tun, wenn sie in Schwarz/weiß gedreht wären. Ich finde Schwarz/weiß realistischer als Farbe” (*Die Logik der Bilder* 27). Considering that Sebald incorporates degraded black-and-white photographs in his texts, Wenders’s quote resonates with Sebald as well. Although Wenders claims that he had no intention of making a documentary film, it is significant that his remark is directed at the film’s aesthetics rather than the effect. He is not interested in documenting facts, but more in creating concepts around facts and meditating on a given subject. Wenders films in abandoned areas that are usually ignored as film locations, the same way he depicts actions and events that are excluded from films. The documentary quality of *Im Lauf der Zeit* is exemplified by Wenders’s concern with recording and preserving images of the disappearing small town cinema houses. Focusing on outsiders, obscure locations, and seemingly banal details exposes the untold and forgotten layers of the past (such as the decline of small cinema houses in the 1920s and 1970s). This is the central connection to Sebald’s personal linkages with places and past events.

Wenders frames his fictional film with two documentary episodes that lament the current state of film, thus exposing the self-referential nature of the medium as well as lending the film a sense of urgency. Wenders’s concern with preservation of a unique perspective is embodied in the pre-credits interview conducted by a fictional character (Bruno) with an actual cinema owner and former silent movie pianist. The latter provides historical background to German cinema by reminiscing about accompanying Fritz

Lang's *Die Nibelungen*, and by looking at the changes made with the advent of talkies, the arrival of the Third Reich, and the system of block booking after WWII.¹⁴ At the end of the film, an elderly woman, who is also an actual cinema owner, muses about the cinematic medium as an art of seeing. She says: "Der Film ist die Kunst des Sehens, hat mir mein Vater gesagt. Und deshalb kann ich diese Filme nicht mehr zeigen, die nur noch Ausbeutung sind von allem, was man in den Augen und Köpfen von Menschen überhaupt noch ausbeuten kann." Her comment points to a commercialization of cinema in an effort to homogenize media in the period following WWII. She keeps her cinema house ready to open, but will not do so until there is something worth showing. "So wie es jetzt ist, ist es besser, es gibt kein Kino mehr, als dass es ein Kino gibt, wie es jetzt ist." Wenders's dissatisfaction with projected images runs parallel to Sebald's criticism of popular literature. One thinks in particular of his essay "Luftkrieg und Literatur," in which Sebald asserts that postwar German literature failed to respond to the atrocities committed during the war. Instead, he accuses certain writers and film directors of fictionalizing, trivializing, and mythologizing the theme of destruction.¹⁵ Both Wenders and Sebald advocate for works that stimulate minds, present questions, or advance some underlying concerns.

Wenders expands his criticism of the corporate imperialism of the German film industry through his representation of Bruno's visit to a cinema showing a sex film and his dissatisfaction with the projected image. Not only is such a film being financed and

¹⁴ It is important that the silent movie pianist makes a distinction between silent film and the introduction of sound. For him, film lost its language and originality with the advent of sound.

¹⁵ In his essays "Zwischen Geschichte und Naturgeschichte: Über die literarische Beschreibung totaler Zerstörung" (1982) and "Luftkrieg und Literatur" (1999), Sebald illustrates how postwar literature failed to react to the collective experience of the destruction of German cities. The main premise of both texts is Sebald's assessment on the one hand of the inability of postwar German writers to come to terms with the destruction of their cities, and on the other their "rückhaltlose Fiktionalisierung des Themas der zerstörten Stadt" ("Luftkrieg und Literatur" 63).

screened, but it is exhibited poorly. According to Bruno, the film is out of focus, it is too dark in the middle, and it is also badly framed. When he enters the projectionist's booth and catches him pleasuring himself, the projectionist angrily departs and Bruno edits a loop of film material consisting of women's breasts, a burning house, and a woman being raped in the mud as the voiceover states: "Härte, Aktion, Sinnlichkeit. 90 Minuten Film wie ihn kein Fernsehen..." Bruno is operating here under the principles of bricolage; his film is a product of materials at hand. Furthermore, his restructuring of elements is a way of "re-membering." The repetition of images and voice-over creates a disorienting effect because it only turns in circles. The quote serves as a negative metaphor for the situation of German cinema in the 1970s. Wenders criticizes both the American or American-influenced action and porn-film ambiance that cinema owners were forced into due to the major distributors' system of block booking.¹⁶ This is also echoed in a now often quoted statement made by Bruno: "Die Amerikaner haben unser Unterbewusstsein kolonialisert."¹⁷ The film is therefore a commentary on the condition of the German film industry in the 1970s and a tribute to silent cinema. It is a film about cinema both as a way of seeing and as a declining industry. In other words, Wenders expresses nostalgia for film before Hollywood commercialized and homogenized film production and exhibition.

Since both characters are outsiders and work with mass media (print, film), the film is a commentary on its status as well as its effects. *Im Lauf der Zeit* describes a

¹⁶ Wenders's dissatisfaction with the projected images was expressed as follows, "From production through to distribution, the same brutality was at work: the lovelessness in dealing with images, sounds and language, the stupidity of German synchronization, the meanness of the block and blind booking system, the indifference of advertising, the absence of conscience in the exploitation of cinema owners, the narrow-mindedness in the shortening of films and so on" (*Logik der Bilder* 53).

¹⁷ Wenders's concerns about the abuse and corruption of images, particularly in connection to the American film industry, would become a recurring theme in films such as *Der amerikanische Freund* (1977), *Der Stand der Dinge* (1982), *In weiter Ferne so nah!* (1993) and *Am Ende der Gewalt* (1997).

certain standstill in which the movement of the characters is circular—i.e., futile. Bruno's profession shapes his isolation, and as long as he maintains his work, he will not be able to break out of the vicious circle. His desire to rehabilitate cinema has driven him to the outskirts of society and to desolate landscapes where cinema houses stand only as an echo of the past. Robert also feels detached from his work and is haunted by the past. His life moves in circles: at one point he rides a bicycle in a circle, and later practices with a hula-hoop shortly before departing to visit his estranged father. The return home to the father represents another circle, perhaps the fundamental circle. He expresses to Bruno his yearning for a certain kind of writing that used to be, a writing that stands as a symbol of his own situation:

Es gab eine Tinte, mit der man die alte Schrift auslöschen und im selben Zug etwas Neues schreiben konnte. Ich musste immer wieder das Selbe denken und niederschreiben, selbst wenn ich zwischendurch aus dem Traum aufgewacht war. Abstrakte Wiederholungen, Abläufe, Wege, die ich gleichzeitig erlebte und aufzeichnete. Das heißt: das Träumen war ein Schreiben, im Kreis. Bis ich im Traum auf die Idee kam, eine andere Tinte einzuführen. Mit der neuen Tinte konnte ich auf einmal etwas Neues denken und sehen und schreiben. Es hat sich alles gelöst.

Robert describes two different kinds of ink, one that is based on repetition and separation of thinking and writing, and the other, the new ink, that aligns the act of experiencing with that of note-taking, thereby erasing the difference between thinking and writing. In other words, with the new ink he is able to think, to see, and to write at the same time. Such an im-mediate production echoes Sebald's own peripatetic style of writing. Bruno

responds with a dismissive comment: “Das glaube ich nicht. Du steckst noch in der Tinte.” As if inspired by the sudden outpouring of emotions, Robert temporarily parts ways with Bruno to visit his estranged and aging father, an owner of a declining print shop. Similar to the old cinema houses that Bruno visits, the father’s print shop is run down and the newspaper comes out only three times a week (as opposed to every day). The visit turns into a confrontation when Robert demands his father’s silence and repeatedly expresses an urge to talk about the father’s mistreatment of his mother. Yet words fail him, and as his father notices, Robert says nothing in three hours. The only way he can communicate is to use his father’s printing press to compose a special edition of his father’s newspaper, blaming him for his mother’s suicide. The headline reads, “Wie Frauen achten können.” It is only the medium of the printing press that allows Robert to express what he cannot say “immediately,” that is, in direct confrontation with his father. This process of rewriting one’s own history is analogous to the movement of a postwar generation toward confrontation with the choices made by their fathers during WWII. Wenders’s film therefore has a twofold mission: to critically reflect on the present state of media and to examine what led to their downfall.

While for the rest of the film Wenders does not rely heavily on editing, in this particular sequence he uses a gradual transition from one image to another to link Bruno’s actions in the projectionist’s booth to those of Robert in the print shop, thus connecting the two channels of representation. While Bruno is editing his own film from the footage of the sex flick he could not stand watching, Robert is printing a special edition for his father using his father’s own medium. After Bruno projects his film on the screen, he proclaims, “Jetzt sitz ich auch in der Tinte,” echoing the comment he directed

at Robert earlier in the film. Bruno's editing of the film does not lead to consolation but rather leaves him ambivalent. Similarly, when Bruno asks Robert whether he is now satisfied with his special edition of the newspaper, the latter does not provide an affirmative answer. Wenders views language, as well as images, as tools for manipulation and as sources of singularized vision and perspective. Bruno and Robert creatively manipulate these media (print, film) as their means of protest against the onslaught of meaninglessness in visual and print representations. They are models for Wenders and Sebald (respectively).

The end of WWII also saw the birth of mass media and the subsequent defacement of the individual. The introduction of television in the 1950s, color broadcast in the 1960s, and finally the videocassette in the 1970s, replaced public screenings with private ones. The availability and omnipresence of visual representations based on entertainment, propaganda, and commercials resulted in the decline of theater attendance and the demand for independent and art cinema. Furthermore, the technological advancements of the medium, which start with the introduction of sound and then continue with color, 3-D, and CGI, have also led to the decline in the value of production. In reflecting on the demise of media, both Sebald and Wenders take into account the role technological development plays. Most importantly, the perfection of the technological age is somehow at odds with our own imperfections. This is important because it explains Wenders's use of black-and-white film, and Sebald's tendency to degrade the quality of the images he reproduces. The absence of color thus re-engages imagination in their works.

A strong impression of yearning for the early days of cinema runs throughout the film. For instance, the sense of nostalgia is evoked in a scene where Robert and Bruno are working behind the screen while repairing the sound system in a children's theater. Robert accidentally turns on the lights, illuminating Bruno's silhouette on the screen, and thus forces the latter into an impromptu slapstick double act. An enthralled audience of children views this act as a shadow play. The scene ends when their silent show ends. This episode serves not only as homage to early stages of cinema, when the audience was still enthralled with the projected images, but also as a commentary on the bleak state of cinema in Germany. Despite the film's negative portrayal of the German film industry, the shadow play in the children's theater suggests that the enthralled audience must not only be returned to the silent era, but that we must reinvent the images that are projected.

Im Lauf der Zeit covers six and a half days in three hours, and there is no recognizable ending. Wenders's film is an experimental narrative that reflects on the process of storytelling based on its use of documentary style. The episodic stories do not lead to conclusions but often to more questions. Without any indication as to where they are going, Bruno and Robert simply part ways with the acknowledgment that something must change. Robert boards the train, indicating reintegration into society, and Bruno tears apart the list of cinema houses that need service and thus signals his resignation. As accidental as their encounter, their separation suggests continuation rather than an end. The uncertainty of their future merges with the uncertainty about the future of cinema. We can only speculate as to what will happen to them, for the film provides no clear answers. Similar to the cinema owner who keeps her cinema ready to open in case she finds something worth showing, *Im Lauf der Zeit*, with its open ending, leaves room for

hope. In their searches for new uses of traditional media, Wenders's characters protest against the homogenization of media and thus represent the necessity of change.

“Kafka im Kino,” or Sebald goes to the Cinema

Zischler's study and Wenders's film provide platforms for Sebald's own investigation into the impact of film not only for Kafka but for his own writing as well. Zischler was working on a television movie about Franz Kafka in 1978 when he noticed periodic references to films in Kafka's diaries and letters.¹⁸ His curiosity about Kafka's *Kinoerlebnisse* subsequently exposed a lacuna in scholarship on the subject.¹⁹ Although Zischler is not the first scholar to reflect on the importance of film for Kafka, Sebald finds his meticulous research on the impact of early European cinema on Kafka groundbreaking. According to Sebald, Zischler's study stands as an exception to the “Geklapper” of academic “Redundanz,” otherwise characteristic of scholarly research on Kafka (196). Indeed, Sebald finds Zischler's focus on factuality exemplary. In his book,

¹⁸ In 2002, after nearly three decades of researching Kafka's relationship to cinema, Zischler made an essay film, *Kafka va au cinéma* (Kafka geht ins Kino) not so much as an illustration to his Kafka book, but as another dimension of the process of memory and forgetting. The film begins with the voice-over commenting, “Hinter Kerkermauern sind die großen Archive; was sie bewahren, ist kostbar, fragil, vom Verfall bedroht.” We see the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the Cinémathèque Française in Paris as great houses of forgotten scripts and silent films. Zischler refers to the film as a palimpsest, a work in which many views are interwoven, and none of them can be separated from the other.

¹⁹ In the past decade more and more studies have emerged that examine Kafka's relationship to the then new medium, most notably Peter Andre Alt's monograph *Kafka und der Film*. According to Alt, Kafka's affinity with cinema is not extraordinary but rather it is in the cinema where Kafka feels at home, because “das Lichtspieltheater” is nothing but a workshop for narration. “Zum einen ist das Kino präsent in Kafkas Geschichten über die Motive, über die exotischen und die bewegungsverliebten Bilder, zum anderen ist das Kino ein Lehrmeister für das Erzählen,” writes Alt. “Es zeigt, wie man Bewegung darstellt und nicht zuletzt ist das Kino ein Medium, das die Verknüpfung der Bilder, die Übergänge, die Verbindungen zwischen den Motiven vermittelt und Kafka deutlich macht, dass das herkömmliche Erzählen eine Modernisierung erfahren kann. Das ist eine wichtige Prägung.” Focusing on acceleration and deceleration, Alt investigates the relationship between traffic and film, brings forth examples of chase scenes that read like film scripts, and presents the double as a motif that belongs not only to literature but also to cinema.

Zischler employs Kafka's travel diaries to reconstruct the writer's reaction to images (especially cinematic ones) taken at the turn of the century. His study reveals that Kafka's references to films consist of brief and cryptic diary entries in which he provides no information as to which films may have had an impact on his writing. *Kafka geht ins Kino* thus recreates the aesthetic context of early film because images from billboards, still photographs, film posters, diary entries, letters, and postcards make up the material on which his study is based. Although Zischler does not engage in critical analysis of Kafka's novels to illustrate his findings, there is nevertheless a creative impulse at work in his book. As Sebald points out, Zischler presents both verifiable and speculative connections ("nachweisliche und mutmaßliche Beziehungen") to images taken during the early twentieth-century; he intersperses the documentary material with his own unsubstantiated observations (195). Sebald's book-review employs three elements that also characterize Zischler's book: the duality of seemingly contradictory modes of exposition; homage to the silent film; and the assertion of a personal, subjective perspective. The interplay between document and its interpretation characterizes Sebald's book-review, which wanders from films Sebald himself viewed to films Kafka may or may not have seen. This is why Sebald's book-review reads much like an essay, in the sense that it deviates from Zischler's documentation and Kafka's visual experiences to explore and expose Sebald's own personal involvement with the material.

Not only is the first word of Sebald's book-review "Film," but film is from the outset closely associated with time and memory. Sebald opens with an evocative statement about the fleeting nature of films without providing an explanation. He then alludes to certain black-and-white images that are still replaying in his mind:

Filme, weit mehr als Bücher, haben so eine Art zu verschwinden auf Nimmerwiedersehen, nicht bloß vom Markt, sondern auch aus der Erinnerung. An manche aber denkt man noch nach Jahrzehnten, und zu diesen seltenen Ausnahmen gehört für mich eine Ballade in schwarzweißen Bildern von zwei Männern, die beide nicht recht wissen wohin. Ich habe sie mir angeschaut in einem Münchner Kino im Mai 1976 und bin danach, bewegt, wie man das nach dergleichen Erlebnissen leicht ist, durch die laue Nacht nachhause gewandert in meine Einzimmerwohnung im Olympiapark. (193)

The kinetic nature of Sebald's statement is amplified by his association of film with wandering, which implies that his memory of the film unfolds not only in the course of time but also along the way. What is more, the juxtaposition of "bewegt" and "gewandert" creates interplay between emotion and motion. In addition to the emotional and physical implications of the word "bewegt," the term also refers to "bewegte Bilder," thus drawing a direct parallel between film, travel, and writing.²⁰ Cinema, by generating an emotional effect in the viewer, inspires movement, and movement in turn inspires writing. This notion of mobility also applies to the peripatetic structure of Sebald's texts and to his narrators who walk about aimlessly as they think. Similarly, when Sebald writes in "Kafka im Kino" that the two characters in Wenders's film "wissen nicht recht wohin," he indicates that their journey itself is the story—that the story develops as they travel and that traveling is an end in itself, aimless. This notion of meandering without a

²⁰ Film and traffic (or traveling) is an old paradigm. In his book *Grammophon, Film, Typewriter* Friedrich Kittler aligns filming with driving: "Bei hundert Stundenkilometern, wenn sie nur am motorisierten Verkehr teilnehmen, wird der Alltag notwendig zu Kino" (228-29). Early silent films often featured chase scenes, *Großstadt* traffic and especially trains. Paul Virilio, who theorized generally about cars with regard to camera movement, in *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, wrote about technology as it has developed in relationship to speed and power. He aligns the Western cultural obsession with moving at high speeds with watching moving light images on the screen (Chapter 2).

goal or firm direction, and thereby opening oneself to chance and serendipity, is precisely what connects Sebald's journey and Wenders's cinematic travels. Sebald does not disclose what he means by "dergleichen Erlebnissen." It remains unclear whether his nightly excursion is in response to *Im Lauf der Zeit* or to the act of movie-going, or perhaps both.²¹ It is however apparent that this particular film has left a lasting impression on him. In fact, the third sentence quoted above informs us that his memory of the film is based on a cinematic experience that occurred two decades earlier, and thus raises the question as to why *Im Lauf* in particular stays in his memory. Indeed, he presents it as the exception to the rule that movies recede from memory quickly. In other words, what is easily forgotten (film) has returned for Sebald in this particular instance. This is also the goal of his texts, to recover the unremembered and return it to memory.

The uncertainty between memory and invention, between narrative reality and imagination are not only decisive themes in Sebald's texts, but they also function as a structural device. The way Sebald discusses Wenders's film in "Kafka im Kino" demonstrates the structural importance of film in Sebald's work. As if miming the opening credits of a film, Sebald builds anticipation in the reader by discussing Wenders's *Im Lauf* without at first mentioning that Zischler plays one of the leading roles in the film. Much like a camera that first sets the scene and then zooms in on its subject, Sebald starts out with a general statement about the nature of the filmic medium and then focuses in by providing specifics (such as place, month, and year). He briefly mentions the protagonist, Bruno Winter, but then diverts the reader's attention to Robert Lander, a character played by Zischler. Sebald writes, "Doch nicht darum geht es hier, sondern um den zweiten Mann." Although he begins with *Im Lauf*, he subsequently claims that

²¹ From now on in this chapter *Im Lauf der Zeit* will be abbreviated *Im Lauf*.

neither the film nor Zischler really interest him; instead, his attention is drawn to Zischler's description of Kafka's relationship "zu der seinerzeit noch ganz neuen kinematografischen Kunst" (194-95). Even if Sebald asserts that he is circumventing the subject, he is in fact in the middle of it. It is precisely Wenders's film that serves as a prologue to the review of the book, which documents Kafka's *Kinoerlebnisse* and inspires Sebald's own proclamations on both the nature and the history of cinema. The structural importance of *Im Lauf* for Sebald lies in the way in which Wenders employs documentary elements within a fictional setting, and thereby challenges the boundaries between the document and its interpretation. The fictionalization of documents functions as a tool for social and/or political commentary.

The sequences he remembers from Wenders are also typical Sebald narratives about male friendships. Two scenes in particular are still present in his mind, namely Robert's flight through the air, and Robert and Bruno's motorcycle ride through the countryside. This moment in which Robert lifts off the ground during his suicide attempt replays in Sebald's mind. He writes: "Einen ewigen Augenblick lang segelt der Käfer durch die Luft, als hätte er das Fliegen gelernt. In meiner Erinnerung sehe ich ihn segeln noch heute" (194).



His comment implies movement and continuity, he still envisions Robert sailing through the air. What Sebald is describing here is an arrested moment in time that expands into infinity, like a still image. The power of a still over a moving picture to fix in the mind is vindicated by Sebald's comment that certain images from *Im Lauf* are still replaying in his head. Perhaps Sebald's lasting impression of Robert's flight is due to the fact that this suicide attempt leads to a rebirth and adventure. According to Sebald's memory, "[sie] erleben diverse Abenteuer, von denen mir eine Motorradfahrt über eine leere Landstraße noch gegenwärtig ist, eine sehr schöne beinahe schwerelose Sequenz" ("Kafka im Kino" 194). In this filmic sequence, Bruno drives the motorcycle while Robert sits in the sidecar "und hat eine Sonnenbrille auf, wie man sie früher bei der UV-Bestrahlung tragen musste" (194). The emphasis here lies on the word "schwerelos." Gravity for Sebald is a metaphor for time, that is, for the past and coming to terms with the past. In this particular sequence there is no such gravity, and this is why it represents a transition into weightlessness. As we will see in *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, Sebald's narrator assigns "schwerelos" images to the silent era, suggesting that just like the silent films, they belong to the past. Both scenes in Sebald's retelling are relevant due to their emphasis on travel and chance, and also because they serve as turning points in the film. The first scene marks Robert's new beginning and the second one occurs right after Robert confronts his father and embarks upon another journey with Bruno to the house in which Bruno grew up. Both scenes are thus instances of homecoming or returning to the past.

Sebald intersperses his recollections of the film with signs of narrative uncertainty such as, "glaube ich," "soweit ich mich entsinne," and "wenn mich nicht alles täuscht," suggesting that genuine cinematic representation is different from the memory of his

experience of it (193, 194). The emphasis here is on Sebald's uncertainty with regard to recalling the past, since he is not referencing the film as such but rather his memory of the film. These are also typical phrases in Sebald's narratives. In *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, the narrator can only report "soviel mir erinnerlich ist" (21). In *Die Ausgewanderten*, he sprinkles his recollections with phrases such as, "wie ich mich erinnere, oder wie ich mir vielleicht jetzt nur einbilde," and later, "wenn mich nicht alles täuscht" (36, 51). Recollecting past moments is similar to remembering film, neither of which can definitively reconstruct either the cinematic representation or the "facts" of past experience. The tension between the necessity to document and the difficulty of doing so functions as an underlining current that advances the narrative. Sebald uses film to recover the un-remembered.

This dialectic between memory and forgetting is also evident in Sebald's transition from films in general ("Filme, weit mehr als Bücher") to specific black-and-white images still replaying in his mind ("eine Ballade in schwarzweißen Bildern"). By breaking the cinematic medium down into one of its main component parts—photography—he establishes an interplay between the fleetingness of film and the duration of printed images or still shots. The media film and photography are both intimately associated with time; film captures time in passing, while photos or still shots visually arrest a moment that has already passed.²² Considering that actual filmic experiences cannot be stabilized (the way a photograph or an image can), because film's motion is temporal and exists only in the present, Sebald suggests that film functions as a metaphor for the process of recollection. The film flickers from one idea or image to

²² In his *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes claimed that photographs announce our own death, in that they signify a presence that "has been there" (12).

another, thereby illustrating our own inner associative logic of remembrance, which distorts and recontextualizes our memories in forgotten other realms of our past. The act of recollection, like the director's cut, is highly subjective, because it is always an interpretation. The flickering film thus becomes representative of the process of recollection.²³ This suggests that our memories are more often triggered by what we see on the screen (visual associations) than by abstract attempts to conjure them up. For Sebald's narrator, images serve as a foundation for his travels to the places that are repositories of memory.

According to Sebald, *Im Lauf* details the decline of the German film industry through its character Bruno and through the places that have become an echo of the past, namely the cinema houses. He writes:

Seine Stationen sind Lichtspielhäuser, in die fast niemand mehr kommt. Als Hommage an die Frühzeit des Kinos, in der das Publikum gebannt auf die zitternden Streifen starrte, war das Leben Brunos am Rand einer betriebsblind gewordenen Gesellschaft gemeint, als Nachruf auf eine verschollene Form der Unterhaltung und als Rückblick in die Jahre nach dem letzten Krieg, während derer viele der entlegeneren Orte in der deutschen Provinz von ebensolchen reisenden Kinounternehmen bespielt worden sind. (193-94)

For Sebald, *Im Lauf* embodies an epoch in which movie-going is "eine verschollene Form der Unterhaltung." He incorporates Wenders's film to reflect on the present's overdose of visual stimulations. Whereas audiences were enthralled ("gebannt") by the early stages of the cinematic medium, Wenders's film reacts to a society in the 1970s that is blinded by

²³ The connection between still image and film is most clearly evidenced in a story entitled "Henry Selwyn" in *Die Ausgewanderten*. The narrator recalls his memories of Dr. Selwyn's slide show during an encounter with Herzog's *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle* (29).

routine. By referencing the film that pays homage to the now forgotten entertainment of silent cinema, Sebald presents a similar protest against popular film and literature.

Sebald addresses the discrepancy between past and present through an examination of the impact of the cinematic medium on the audience. Even though he emphasizes the difficulty of such an endeavor, Sebald makes numerous proclamations of its importance throughout his book review:

Überschwemmt von visuellen Reizen, wie wir heute sind, ist es schwer für uns, die Faszination zu verstehen, die Kinobilder zu Kafkas Zeiten ausüben konnten auf diejenigen, die bereit waren, ganz sich einzulassen auf den Illusionismus einer in vielem noch primitiven, von den Richtern des guten Geschmacks für minderwertig gehaltenen Kunst. (196-97)

This passage points not so much to early audiences as victims of cinematic illusion—after all, they were ready to abandon themselves to the projection of cinema—but rather to the over-stimulation with visual imagery of Sebald’s contemporary audiences. Sebald underscores the overdose of visual culture that prevents us from understanding the way of seeing that was unleashed with the advent of moving pictures. The juxtaposition of *Faszination* with moving images of the past and *Überschwemmung* with images of the present emphasizes a loss that occurred along the way, a loss grounded paradoxically in the excess of overstimulation. It is not that the cinema has been forgotten or has vanished, but that the way of seeing it provides and what can be gained by it has come to be taken for granted. In other words, we have lost the naiveté of early audiences to regard film as magic. In his essay film about Kafka and visual culture, Zischler claims that we forgot that cinema is an illusion. He reminds us: “Das Kino ist eine ziemlich reibungslose

Bewegungssillusion. Wir haben uns rasch an sie gewöhnt” (*Kafka va au cinéma* 2002). We must be aware of the medium as medium, as is true of silent film, black-and-white film, and degraded photocopies. The necessity of our awareness of the medium as a medium is precisely what Sebald’s writing underscores.

Rather than a document of historical testimony, film for Sebald is a locus of imagination. Sebald paraphrases Zischler’s argument by saying that images for Kafka provided a screen that allowed imagination and reality to enter into a space of mutual inspiration: “Sie waren ihm offenbar Ersatz für ein Leben, das er nicht haben konnte, ein substanzloses Futter, aus dem er in seinen Tag- und Nachträumen fortlaufend die fantastischsten Szenarien entwickelte, in denen er mal für mal selber zu einer bizarren Kinofigur wird” (202).²⁴ It is not only Kafka who assumes the role of an actor, but his reader does so as well: she experiences his diaries as cinematic flashbacks. When Sebald writes in “Kafka im Kino” that Kafka’s diary entries contain cinematic sequences (“Kafkas Tagebücher sind voller Erlebnisberichte, in denen Alltägliches, genau wie im Kino, vor unseren Augen sich auflöst in Bilder ohne Gewicht”), this remark also pertains to Sebald’s own writing (203). His narratives are in a sense “Erlebnisberichte,” or accounts by the narrator that are interrupted by a wide array of personal, subjective images, such as dream sequences, hallucinations, and long-forgotten memories that surface in the text. As such, Sebald’s narratives unfold in time much like films, and they appear as carefully edited film sequences. Sebald reconstructs Kafka’s experience with cinema, using cinema as metaphor for imagination and, much like Kafka, becomes a cinematic writer, a creator of sudden, haunting images. By using Kafka as a mouthpiece,

²⁴ In his book *Kafka und der Film*, Alt comes to a similar conclusion. He writes: “Das Sehen eines Films bedeutet für Kafka die Möglichkeit, die Arsenale der Phantasie zu füllen, und impliziert zugleich eine Simulation der Selbstvergessenheit, die das Schreiben konditioniert” (36).

Sebald and Zischler capture a transition from a nineteenth- to a twentieth-century mode of seeing, whereby new forms and techniques of representation emerge, namely the conflation of cinematic and literary language. It is in the cinema that these writers seek inspiration and refuge and then translate their experiences into their own works. Kafka's writing offers a glimpse into how literature responded to moving pictures.

Kafka's reaction to modern technological devices of communication and representation is one of both fascination and suspicion, and as such corresponds to Sebald's own proclamations with regard to cinema. In "Kafka im Kino" Sebald claims that Kafka's novels contain traces of the uneasiness with the new medium, he writes "dass er ein undeutliches Grauen empfand von den mit dem beginnenden Zeitalter der technischen Reproduktion sich anbahnenden Mutationen der Menschheit, mit denen er wohl das Ende des von der bürgerlichen Kultur ausgebildeten autonomen Individuums heraufkommen sah" (200). "Mutationen der Menschheit" translates visually into proliferation of doubles. The trope of the doppelgänger, itself a response to the emergence of the technological apparatus, was transported from an extraordinary realm into an ordinary one due to cinema. Sebald remarks: "War der Doppelgänger in der Zeit der Romantik, in der erstmal die Furcht vor den Apparaten sich rührte, noch eine spukhafte Ausnahmerecheinung, so ist er jetzt überall" (200). Sebald links the proliferation of doppelgänger figures in early cinema to the nature of the medium itself, to the fact that the cinema, like photography, is a machine for the reproduction of copies. Sebald draws from Walter Benjamin's "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit," in which Benjamin observes that with the advent of photography, reproduction in detail was achieved and the work of art becomes repeatable and

transitory. Sebald, as if quoting Benjamin, writes, “Die ganze Technik der fotografischen Abbildung beruht schließlich auf dem Prinzip der vollkommen modellgetreuen Verdoppelung beziehungsweise der potentiell unendlichen Vervielfältigung [...]” (200). It is precisely this reproduction that renders both the original and the copy artificial. What is more, after the original ceases to exist, its copy lives on by replacing it. While photographs announce our death, the early cinematic images produce an uncanny effect in that they figure as a true expression of our future: a “transzendente[r] Blick, der gerichtet scheint auf ein Leben, an welchem der tragische Held keinen Anteil mehr hat” (202). This is why Kafka would have both identified with the images projected on the screen and felt alienated by them. Upon recognizing his doppelgänger on the screen, Kafka would have been puzzled by the fact that he exists both here and there. More importantly, how can he exist if his doppelgänger denies him? Sebald suggests that in cinema one can repeatedly experience one’s own death.

Early cinematic images are imbued with transience and death, but their ghostly character is not so much dependent upon portraying doubles and revenants as due to the fact that these fantastic elements began to move, and thus became more uncannily mimetic, more real than real. In Sebald’s words:

Gespensisch überhaupt sind die frühen Kinofilme, nicht nur weil sie mit Vorliebe von Persönlichkeitsspaltung, Doppel- und Wiedergängern, außersinnlicher Wahrnehmung und anderen parapsychologischen Phänomenen handeln, sondern auch aufgrund der technischen Gegebenheit, dass die Schauspieler durch den noch völlig unbeweglichen Bildrahmen aus- und eingehen wie Geister durch eine Mauer. (201-02)

The emphasis here lies on the technical qualities: the new medium introduced movement to the otherwise static world. Depicted people and objects emerged from the depths of the cinematic screen toward the audience, only to disappear from their field of vision. The double was freed from the confines of the photographic frame by cinema; it is a copy that has assumed its own image by becoming a self-referential representation of early cinema itself. Sebald's alignment of the film medium with a ghostly, supernatural existence, that is, with its ephemeral and evanescent nature, corresponds to the way he conceptualizes our processes of remembering and forgetting. In Sebald's prose, ghosts are connected to suppressed memories but also to the desire to know something about them. The association of film with ghosts, and ghosts with memories, suggests that cinema is fleeting, just like figures and episodes in Sebald's prose. Before we can recognize the contours of the characters that roam his work, they vanish, only to reappear again in another form and context (for example, allusions to Kafka and Nabokov appear in all four of Sebald's prose fictions). Each new figure or event pushes the prior ones further away, instigating forgetfulness. Cinematic images are thus fantastic, that is to say that in cinema the distinctions between original and reproduction, imagination and actuality dissipate into a state of ambiguity. We can no longer tell what is real, because when technology imitates life, it replaces it. The remorseless march toward technological perfection has also resulted in a *Schwindel* of perception: we are dizzy from deception. Sebald uses cinematic images in his work to evoke feelings of the uncanny, to access a space beyond the categories of past and present, memory and imagination, and dream and reality (however defined).

Sebald's appraisal of Zischler's study is in fact a validation of his own imaginative remarks on Kafka and film, which appeared before Zischler's *Kafka geht ins Kino*, namely in his first work of prose fiction, *Schwindel. Gefühle*. (1990) and his short essay "Via Schweiz ins Bordell. Zu den Reisetagebüchern Kafkas" (1995). *Schwindel. Gefühle*. consists of four seemingly independent texts related to one another by the ever-present narrator/wanderer who documents what he encounters as he travels from city to city, from one figure to another. The book persistently fluctuates between narrative reality and a dream-like imaginary world. The somnambulistic structure of the narrative is related more closely to the movement of the intradiegetic narrator, who also is a character in the text: toward what he encounters, experiences, dreams, hallucinates, and finally documents along his journeys. The narrator's journey through landscapes of human memory is intertwined with his travel through texts. By combining fragments derived from letters, diary entries, and autobiographies the narrator explores the realm of literary figures (such as Stendhal, Kafka, Casanova, and Grillparzer) and tries to reconstruct their biographies. An overarching premise that unites all four narratives is the reenactment of Kafka's journey to Riva in 1913. Even so, *Schwindel. Gefühle*. has no recognizable plot, rather, the narrative is connected by allusions to Kafka (or Kafka's Jäger Gracchus), the invasion by the shadowy figures of the past, and motifs such as the recurrence of the year 1913 (and its variations). The last story ends with a futuristic framework, the year written below the text's final lines, "2013," draws a parallel to the first (Napoleon's defeat in 1813), and third story (Dr. K travels to Italy in 1913) and establishes a network of historical coincidences. The scenes from different time periods

overlap, allowing for continuous transitions, but more importantly suggesting an understanding of time that is non-linear.

What allows the narrator to easily maneuver across the spectrum of themes and techniques is the spontaneous nature of his travels. In the second story entitled “All’estero,” the narrator traces his encounters with shadowy figures as he travels from England to Vienna via Venice to Verona. His aimless wanderings drive the narrative forward:

Hätte man die Wege, die ich damals gegangen bin, nachgezeichnet, es wäre der Eindruck entstanden, es habe hier einer auf einer vorgegebenen Fläche immer wieder neue Traversen und Winkelzüge versucht, um aufs neue stets am Rand seiner Vernunft, Vorstellungs- oder Willenskraft anzugelangen und zum Umkehren gezwungen zu werden. (39-40)

Of particular importance are the visual connotations invoked by this passage. If one would indeed trace and translate his aimless wanderings into lines upon a surface, it would result in an imprint without beginning and end. These acts of tracing and translating in this case allude to the processes whose origin is masked by unrecognizable features. The narrator’s attempts to cross the arbitrary lines result in his inability to get lost and to move beyond the well-defined city center.²⁵ The narrator’s “Kreuzundquergehen” stands for the illusion of getting lost, and also mimics the structure of the narrative that moves from one episode to another, from one character to another, establishing new connections and creating a network of repetitions and variations. The

²⁵ John Zilcosky, in his article “Sebald’s Uncanny Travels: The Impossibility of Getting Lost,” argues that Sebald undermines the traditional travel narrative (in which the traveler must get lost before finding one’s way), by revealing that in today’s uncanny world it is impossible to really lose one’s way. Sebald’s narrators, unable to get lost, are also unable to return home and thus wander through the disorienting terrain.

aimless wanderings lead to exhaustion and ultimately to hallucinations in which the narrator encounters those who had long since departed or been forgotten. The narrator thus feels overwhelmed by a vague sense of apprehension that manifests itself in feelings of vertigo: “Die Konturen von Bildern, die ich festzuhalten suchte, lösten sich auf, und die Gedanken zerfielen mir, noch ehe ich sie richtig gefasst hatte” (42). Any attempt to confront the memories and try to document them is superseded by the overdetermination of images and their relationships to several different elements. More importantly, the aimless wanderings illustrate the process of remembering and documenting: it is never a linear progression but rather advances in all directions without leading to conclusions.

Schwindel. Gefühle. is populated by ghosts of the past that appear in the form of documents (images) and texts found during the narrator’s research, all of which lend the narrative an atmosphere of the uncanny. By means of storytelling the narrator documents someone else’s troubled past while discovering and cultivating his own. The development of the narrator is communicated through the dynamic of self-reflection and identification with the fictional figures. For example, his recollections and reconstructions of Kafka’s diary entries emerge as different scenes that depict places visited by Kafka, and these locations become more familiar to the narrator than any other. This is why Sebald writes, in reference to Kafka’s travel diaries: “Vieles ist mir an diesen Aufzeichnungen so nah, als spielte ich selber eine Rolle in ihnen.”²⁶ Similarly, in “All’estero” the narrator plays out Kafka’s diary entries. He enters the same train station in Desenzano that Kafka visited, and when he goes to the Pissoir, he imagines Kafka looking into the same mirror, “Beim Händewaschen schaute ich in den Spiegel und fragte mich, ob Dr. K., der, von Verona herüberkommend, gleichfalls an diesem Bahnhof ausgestiegen sein musste, nicht

²⁶ “Via Schweiz ins Bordel, zu den Reisetagebüchern Kafkas,” 178-79.

auch in diesem Spiegelglas sein Gesicht betrachtet hatte” (99). The narrator thereby becomes Kafka’s double. Kafka’s diary entries serve as a trigger for the narrator’s stories to emerge, until he indeed becomes an actor assuming a role. More importantly, Sebald’s recreation of Kafka’s journey to Italy invokes parallel journeys, even parallel lives, that reflect a pattern of doubling (on a larger scale), and this is one of Sebald’s themes.

In fact, the entire book is populated by doubles that are often expressed via cinematic metaphors. In “All’estero,” for instance, there are three references to silent film in particular. On one occasion, the narrator refers to actors in silent films in order to describe his uncanny encounter with two men who attempt to rob him, “Ich aber sah die beiden Angreifer seltsam zappelnd, als seien sie einem der ersten Filme entsprungen, im Zwielight zwischen den Kolonnaden verschwinden” (124).²⁷ The emphasis here is on the word “verschwinden,” because it corresponds to Sebald’s conception that cinematic images disappear in the moment when they appear, that they are not rememberable. The narrator evokes the transient nature of cinema as a way to describe the atmosphere in his text. As is often the case with his protagonists (the “emigrants,” as well as Austerlitz), the deeper his involvement with their histories, the further he is from documenting them. The narrator often provides his protagonists with entire biographies, but this gesture does not bring him closer to them. Instead, both the narrator and the reader at the end have more

²⁷ A similar understanding of figures in silent films appears again in “Campo Santo.” Sebald tells us about an encounter between a certain Dorothy Carrington and Jean Cesari, an enlightened man familiar with the principles of scientific thinking, who introduced her to the mysteries of his native Corsica, namely his conviction of the real presence of ghosts. When he was asked in what form the ghosts appeared and if one might meet dead friends and relations among them, Cesari claimed that “auf den ersten Blick sehen sie aus wie normale Leute, aber sowie man genauer hinschaue, verwischen sich ihre Gesichter und flackerten an den Rändern, gerade wie die Gesichter der Schauspieler in einem alten Film” (34). The idea of their faces blurring and flickering at the edges, just like the faces of actors in an old movie, recalls Sebald’s description of Walser’s figures that are “umgeben von einem zitternden, schimmernden Schein, die ihre Umrisse unkenntlich macht” (“Le promeneur solitaire” 145).

questions than answers, suggesting that neither textual nor visual representations can capture the essence of an event or an experience.

The connection between difficulty of representation and silent film comes up again as the narrator leafs through Veronese newspapers from the year 1913 and experiences recorded events as if they were scenes from silent films: “Allerhand Stummfilmszenen begannen sich nun vor mir abzuspielen” (133). He proceeds with a list of different events and newspaper ads and expounds on what might have occurred on these occasions. The narrator in a sense identifies the news with the effect filmic images have on a viewer, that is, they are fleeting and mysterious: “Laut- und schwerelos waren sie, die Bilder und Nachrichten von damals, leuchteten kurz auf und verlöschten gleich wieder, jedes und jede von ihnen ein eigenes ausgehöhltes Mysterium” (136). Important to note is that for the narrator, these scenes from the past are both weightless (“schwerelos”) and hollow (“ausgehöhlt”), that is, they exist outside of our conception of past and present and they are open to interpretation, and as such their meanings can never be stabilized. Much like filmic images, and memories themselves, they flicker before our eyes before we get a chance to stabilize them. The connection between silent cinema and yearning for times past is also evident when one of the narrator’s conversation partners, Salvatore, who has lived in Verona for more than thirty years, expresses nostalgia for the times in which he would go to the opera. For now, he refuses to go to the opera until there is something worth seeing. Instead, he listens to the opera that re-plays in his mind in a form of a silent film: “Ich höre gewissermaßen eine lautlose Oper. *La spettacolosa Aida*, eine phantastische Nacht auf dem Nil als Stummfilm aus der Zeit vor dem großen Krieg” (149). Salvatore is referring here to a summer festival of opera, namely Verona

Arena Festival, which coincidentally inaugurated its tradition with the staging of Aida in 1913. Salvatore's response to the opera parallels the reflections of the female movie owner in Wenders's film. She keeps her cinema open in case there is something worth showing, but until then she refuses to screen Hollywood blockbusters. The problematic of dissatisfaction of projected images is transposed here to a different medium, from film to opera. In all these instances, Sebald uses silent film to reinforce the notion that before we took cinema for granted, it had the capacity to produce "schwerelose" images that inspire imagination. The notion of *Schwindel* stands in direct opposition to the concept of *Schwerelosigkeit*. The suggestion here is that the feelings of vertigo are generated by patterns of doubling, overdetermination of images, and oversaturation with visual culture that values technological perfection over artistic creativity and imagination.

As the narrator wanders through the streets in search of memories, the pervasive mood of silence and emptiness serves as a backdrop for meaning to emerge in the space between doublings and variations. The narrator in "All'estero" traces his encounters with revenants (such as Dante, Ludwig II von Bayern, Kafka's doppelgänger) as he travels from England to Vienna, Venice, and Verona, not only to re-trace famous itineraries of Kafka, but to examine his memories of the same trip he undertook 7 years ago as well. He repeats the journey from "Wien über Venedig nach Verona [...] um meine schemenhaften Erinnerungen an die damalige gefahrvolle Zeit genauer zu überprüfen und vielleicht einiges davon aufschreiben zu können" (93). Sebald's narrator functions as a cinematic director, a traveling camera with consciousness. We see what the narrator perceives; we see his research and personal experiences that are interrupted by dreams, hallucinations, and photographic reproductions. There are 87 images in *Schwindel*.

Gefühle. and they consist of reprints of photographs, paintings, drawings, maps, tickets, ads, postcards, pages from day planners, diaries, newspaper articles, pages from the author's passport, stills from a movie, and images with an uncertain status—i.e., they might not be photographs.²⁸ Sebald's reenactment of Kafka's travels and his insertion of black-and-white photographs reflect documentary impulses. Similar to a documentary film, in *Schwindel. Gefühle*. we visit places where certain events took place, in this case Kafka's journey to Italy and the narrator's reconstructions not only of Kafka's encounters but of his own experiences while following in Kafka's footsteps. However, documents and images only form the basis of the narrator's imagistic wanderings. Frequently the narrator drifts into the world of imagination when he muses about Kafka's visual encounters, for Kafka is no longer present to speak for himself. It is precisely this notion of *seeing* coupled with *uncertainty* that is at stake here.

The visual rhetoric of the text is further amplified by the narrator's frequent employment of verbs that connote vision (such as, *sehen, schauen, erblicken, betrachten*) and certain structural techniques (such as montage and zoom) that lend his narratives a cinematic character. The text seems to acquire a sort of kinetic disposition via the figuration of an observing narrator who records witness accounts and reconstructs them through montage rather than plot.²⁹ An example of synthesis between cinematic and literary language can be found in "All'estero." The narrator, unable to fall asleep, is suddenly overcome by sleep shortly before dawn, and upon closing his eyes he witnesses

²⁸ The layout of Sebald's book is in that regard very similar to Zischler's.

²⁹ Muriel Pic, in his essay "Sebald's Anatomy Lesson," makes the connection between the cinematic montage and literary montage explicit by saying: "The practice of literary montage bears witness especially to a particular notion of time which emerges in the twentieth century with the cinematic process from which literary montage, whether manipulating text or images, borrows its model of composition. Montage in turn supposes disassembly, decomposition, a form of destruction; all literary montage is a second destruction."

an illuminating spectacle: “Unter meinen geschlossenen Lidern begann es zu leuchten” (126). He describes his visions and his dream that appear to him in the camera obscura of his soul: “*Ecco l’arcobaleno*. Sehet, es wölbt sich der Regenbogen am Himmel. *Ecco l’arco celeste* [...] Es träumte mir von einem weiten grünen Kukuruzfeld [...] als gäbe es nichts Natürlicheres auf der Welt” (127). Precisely in this instance we witness the conjunction of cinematic and literary language that gives way to imagination. The narrator is not merely inserting Biblical allusions when he writes “Sehet,” and “*Ecco*,” but more importantly, he is appealing to the reader’s visual senses by offering flashbacks of his dream and these instances are only united by montage. The reader, upon recognizing the image in the text, also becomes an observer, and thus a part of a network of referents established by the narrator. The task of the reader/viewer is then to make connections and fill the gaps by creating associations and discovering the referent, that is, the observer is also in the text.

Rather than focusing on plot-driven narrative or on documented facts, the narrator engages more in speculative assertions. This is most evident in his reconstructions of Kafka’s aimless wanderings. Sebald is not only interested in Kafka’s documented encounters, but rather in creating both visual and historical contexts within which to explore Kafka’s travel experiences. In the particular case of the third story, entitled “Dr. K.s Badereise nach Riva,” the narrator muses about Kafka’s reception of *Der Student von Prag* (1913), while repeatedly asserting that there is no evidence that Kafka ever saw the silent masterpiece (167). Sebald’s story is therefore an imaginative reconstruction of what Kafka (or as Sebald’s narrator calls him, “Dr. K.”) may have seen during his month in Italy in 1913. The centrality of seeing is evident throughout the story. For example,

Sebald's "Dr.K." "leidet an Sehstörungen," "glaubt sich von jedem Blick durchschaut," "schaut auf die Gasse hinab," "die Leute blicken ihm nach," Kafka "betrachtet den Plafond" and imagines seeing an angel, where in reality it is just a wooden figurine. There are numerous instances where "Dr. K." wanders aimlessly through Italian cities and the narrator speculates what he might have seen. For example while in Verona, the narrator wonders: "Vielleicht waren es die vom August her noch an allen Ecken der Stadt zu sehenden Anschläge der *spettacoli lirici all'Arena*, die von seinen Augen immer wieder entzifferten Großbuchstaben AIDA [...]" (165). Considering that Salvatore's recollection of the opera's premiere in 1913 occurs only several pages earlier, his account then both informs and anticipates the narrator's research on Kafka's cinematic travels. Furthermore, the repetition of *Aida* in Sebald's text suggests that Sebald's interest goes beyond a particular figure or an event, and expands into the historical context, which conditions and influences the lives of his subjects. The narrator's imaginative speculations, coupled with claims of narrative unreliability, give further evidence for the insufficiency of facts to authenticate experiences: "Wie Dr. K. die paar Tage in Venedig in Wirklichkeit zugebracht hat, wissen wir nicht" (163), "Wir wissen also, wie gesagt, nicht, was er in Wirklichkeit alles gesehen hat" (164), "Dass er das von Pisanello gemalte schöne Wandbild [...] angesehen hätte, dafür gibt es nirgends einen Anhaltspunkt" (165). The narrator's emphasis on the "nicht wissen" indicates that he is not primarily interested in Kafka's documented encounters, but in many imaginary encounters that inform the general profile of Kafka's life and personality. This is similar to the notion of "Begriff" that Wenders employs. The instances of narrative speculation in Sebald's text are a prime example of how the narrator shapes the documentary material (Kafka's diaries and

letters) by using his own itinerary to fill in the gaps of Kafka's itinerary. Considering that there are more speculations regarding Kafka's visual experiences in Sebald's text than there are documented ones suggests that the facts cannot bring us closer to Kafka, but creatively reconstructing the visual context around Kafka's itinerary may help us better understand his experience.

In order to establish the visual context for Kafka's travels in 1913, the narrator often employs cinematic techniques. The way a camera zooms in on its subject, so too Sebald's narrator magnifies his evidence. For example, while the narrator is wondering what "Dr. K." might have seen in the theaters, a reprinted photograph of townspeople gathered in the market square shows them wondering where the Deputy Secretary from Prague is. Ironically, "Dr. K." is reclining on the grass down by the lake (169). The text informs us that we have no record of how long people continued their watch, and "wann sie enttäuscht wieder auseinandergegangen sind" (170). But Sebald offers us another glance by inserting a zoom-in of the gathering, thereby inviting the reader to take a closer look, this time through a magnifying glass. We see the townspeople returning our gaze. More careful observation reveals a few other figures that have been omitted from the previous photograph. The inclusion and exclusion of the figures alerts the reader to the slippery nature of representation (of history), for not all traces left by the past survived, and not all evidence is documented. This echoes an episode from "All'estero" in which the narrator pockets a postcard and subsequently examines every square inch of it through a magnifying glass (138). He then proceeds to describe the fine features revealed under the microscope: the pale light, deep shadows, tombs, and the perspective alignment of the walls, all of which seemed very familiar to him. The dynamic of inclusion and

exclusion also functions as a kind of *Schwindel* of perception. Considering the double meaning of the word *Schwindel*, the suggestion here is that the doubling of meaning can lead to vertigo. *Schwindel* can then also stand for deception of the first sight, a phenomenon that may occur while watching films because it is the director who decides how to frame his subjects and how long we can observe any given frame or sequence. By employing the zoom technique, Sebald stresses the manipulative nature of visual representation, but also the ways in which this technique can be employed to raise awareness of that same manipulation. Sebald's project is then to document what has not been documented, or has been long forgotten. It is precisely the fear of forgetting and erasure from history that marks the narrator's quest for memories and images.

The case in point is the narrator's encounter with the outsider poet Ernst Herbeck, who, much like Kafka and Sebald himself, associates wandering with writing and vice versa (the surrounding text informs us that "er hatte sich nachts in den Straßen von Wien herumgetrieben," and also that his suit is marked "mit einem Wanderabzeichen am Revers").³⁰ He thus represents another parallel journey, another *doppelgänger* figure. It is then appropriate that their encounter is spontaneous and develops on the road, while traveling. The friendship between the narrator and Herbeck, who meet on the road and talk while wandering, echoes the relationship between Robert and Bruno in Wenders's film, which is also characterized by a friendship that unfolds while being on the road. Like many other Sebaldian characters, Herbeck enters the narrative quite unexpectedly.

The narrator's decision to visit Herbeck was inspired by a never-ending dream:

³⁰ Ernst Herbeck spent more than half of his life as a resident of the psychiatric hospital Klosterneuburg in Gugging near Vienna. He attained a considerable degree of fame after his poems were published by his psychiatrist Leo Navratil in 1966. In 1981, Dr. Navratil opened a *Künstlerhaus* (a special residence where selected patients lived and focused their energies on artistic activities) in Gugging where the poet continued his artistic endeavors.

Am nächsten Morgen, als ich erwachte nach einem tiefen, traumlosen Schlaf, [...] war es mir als hätte ich während der Stunden meiner nächtlichen Abwesenheit ein breites Wasser überquert. Eh ich die Augen aufmachte, sah ich mich die Gangway eines großen Fährschiffs herunterkommen, und kaum hatte ich festen Boden unter den Füßen, fasste ich den Entschluss, mit dem Abendzug nach Venedig zu fahren, vorher den Tag aber noch mit Ernst Herbeck in Klosterneuburg zu verbringen (44).

Interesting to note is that Klosterneuburg is also the place where Kafka died. It remains open for discussion why the narrator feels as if he crossed a wide stretch of water during his nocturnal wanderings, but it is safe to assume that it serves as an allusion to Kafka's Jäger Gracchus who otherwise haunts the whole book.³¹ Martin Klebes argues that Sebald's references to that particular motif of the endless voyage "undermines the notion that a definite historical meaning may be attached to the infinite journey" ("Infinite Journey: From Kafka to Sebald" 128). Klebes's analysis seeks to demonstrate the ambiguity of Jäger Gracchus in Kafka's story and thus in Sebald's book, in support of the idea that Sebald's project questions the reliability and permanence of biographical and historical forms of memory. It is then appropriate that Jäger Gracchus's never-ending journey serves as a backdrop for the narrator's never-ending vision (dream), and for the entire episode with Herbeck. It remains ambiguous at what point the narrator's vision ends and the narrative "reality" begins.

The narrator builds anticipation in that he establishes his itinerary, mentions Herbeck in passing, yet he introduces the narrative with the story of an outsider poet. The

³¹ In the last story, "Il ritorno in patria," the narrator experiences a similar feeling when he comments, "bald kam es mir vor, als befände ich mich in einem Kahn auf der Fahrt und überquerte ein großes Wasser" (195).

account is continuously interrupted by the narrator's memories, fragments of his imagination, and details about the landscape and objects they encounter. For example, as they climb the shady path to Burg Greifenstein, an image showing a miniature fortress-like cactus holder interrupts the sentence and stands in as an illustration of the medieval fortress mentioned in the text (47). While the narrative emphasizes vision, the reader is constantly deceived and therefore led to suspect that nothing is as it seems or the way it once was. When they reach the vista, they soon realize that "die Aussicht vom Greifenstein inzwischen auch nicht mehr dieselbe ist," they are confronted with a sight, "dem die Erinnerungskraft nicht mehr lange gewachsen sein wird" (49). The landscape they encounter is a sad appearance of a once memorable sunset, and the present view threatens to extinguish the memory of how it has been experienced previously. The juxtaposition of before and after, and the narrator's inability to negotiate between the two, results in a displacement of memory. The images that are stored in memory do not correspond to experience. His mission is then to remember the unremembered and to record traces of history that would otherwise remain obscured.

The encounter with Ernst Herbeck represents precisely the narrator's attempt to pay homage to an unremembered figure in history and thereby commemorate his legacy.³² However, despite the relatively lengthy episode with Herbeck, we do not learn much about him, instead we learn more about what they see and encounter along the way. Herbeck is a quiet companion; he communicates in gestures and thus appears like a silent film star, who relies on pantomime rather than words. There is a certain theatricality

³² Not only did Sebald visit the hospital where Herbeck resided in the beginning of the 1970s and again in the 1980s, he also published two essays on Herbeck, "Eine kleine Traverse: Das Poetische Werk Ernst Herbecks" (1981), and "Des Häschens Kind, der kleine Has: Über das Totemtier des Lyrikers Ernst Herbeck" (1992).

associated with his presence, and the narrator himself feels “als wären wir miteinander in einem Theaterstück” (51). Furthermore, Herbeck’s gestures, particularly his manner of greeting and parting, remind the narrator of “jemanden, der lange Jahre beim Zirkus gewesen war” (57). The story of Herbeck ends here, and the association between the schizophrenic poet and the circus is not illuminated. In his analysis of Herbeck’s poetry, Sebald presents Herbeck as a performer with almost Chaplinesque qualities, behind whose facade a much deeper and darker side demands our attention.³³ The mystery that surrounds Herbeck can be further demonstrated through an image that interrupts the text depicting a man’s torso, with its head cut off from the photo, making the identification impossible (46). The first assumption would be that the image depicts the poet himself. The narrator, however, creates another parallel story by referring to his grandfather: “Auf dem Kopf hatte er einen kleinen Hut, eine Art Trilby, den er später, als es ihm zu warm wurde, abnahm und neben sich hertrug, genauso wie mein Großvater das beim sommerlichen Spaziergehen oft getan hatte” (46). The image that appears in the text can thus serve to illustrate both Herbeck and his grandfather, for it is the gesture that unites these figures. However, several years later in an essay on Robert Walser, Sebald reveals his source.³⁴ The image really depicts Walser during one of his walks, and as such it reinforces the network of doubles. Similar to Wenders, who allows images to diverge from the setting or to exist independent of the dialogues, Sebald does not make the connection of images and the text explicit, but rather leaves their relationship open. In

³³ In his essay “Eine kleine Traverse: Das Poetische Werk Ernst Herbecks,” Sebald writes: “Hinter dem Künstler Alexander, der nicht viel anders als Chaplin in der berühmten Warenhausszene am Rand eines Abgrunds demonstriert, wie leicht doch das Rollschuhfahren ist, wirbt eigentlich der mit sehr viel schwereren Dingen umgehende Langzeitpatient Ernst Herbeck um unsere Aufmerksamkeit” (137).

³⁴ In his essay on Robert Walser entitled “Le promeneur solitaire. Zur Erinnerung an Robert Walser,” Sebald includes a series of images depicting Walser during his infamous wanderings. One of them is almost identical to the one reprinted in *Schwindel*. Whenever he looks at these photographs of Walser, Sebald believes “den Großvater vor mir zu haben” (136).

that respect, Sebald's narratives unfold in time much like films, and are brought to a stand-still via captionless images that arrest the flow of the text, allowing the reader to pause for contemplation and reflection. While this might be true of many photo-texts, particular to Sebald are his captionless images that at times interrupt sentences, even words, while their status in the text often remains uncertain. This in turn leaves the reader to further contextualize and create meaning(s). More importantly, recontextualization of documents leads to critical engagement with the past and requires an (inter)active reader/viewer.

The significance of Herbeck's method of writing and his role as a poet, according to Sebald, is that it exposes the artificiality of art and artists. Herbeck's poetry originated as a medical experiment in communication. From there it developed into a dialogue between the patient and the doctor, and essentially resulted in a literary product. Dr. Leo Navratil writes that "das Eigenartige bei der Entstehung dieser Dichtung liegt darin, dass Ernst Herbeck nicht spontan schreibt, sondern jedes Mal zum Schreiben aufgefordert wird."³⁵ At times Herbeck's drawings turn into words and then back into drawings. Sebald highlights the poet's uncontaminated, raw vision when he writes: "Größer ist wahrscheinlich nirgends in der Literatur die Entfernung und größer auch nirgends die Nähe. Die Gedichte Herbecks zeigen uns die Welt durch ein umgekehrtes Perspektiv."³⁶ Sebald comments that the literary work corresponds to its audience, and as such does not offer the author the same feelings as the act of writing does: "Das Schreiben ist notwendig, nicht die Literatur." According to Sebald, Herbeck is much closer to the act of writing itself than most writers, and his ability to write spontaneously without editing

³⁵ Herbeck, *Alexander, Ausgewählte Texte 1961-1981* 114.

³⁶ "Des Häschens Kind, der kleine Has: Über das Totemtier des Lyrikers Ernst Herbeck" 172.

and revising challenges conceptions about art and the artist: “Die höfliche Vorführung, die Herbeck als Dichter zu geben bereit ist, impliziert in ihren Gesten ebenso wie die qualitative Differenz zwischen seiner symbiotisch erlebten Poesie und der mimetisch bloß nachgemachten einen kritischen Kommentar zur Unechtheit der künstlerischen Existenz und des Kunstwerks” (“Das Poetische Werk Ernst Herbecks” 137). The immediacy of Herbeck’s poetry production and the way he formed metaphoric associations with recombined language fragments—i.e., the language that was already at hand—had great influence on Sebald’s visual language.³⁷ Herbeck thus represents a protest against homogenized artistic production and offers us an alternative model.

Sebald associates Herbeck’s method of writing with bricolage, a process whereby a work is constructed from a diverse range of things that happen to be available. Sebald is referring here to Claude Lévi-Strauss’s anthropological concept, which the latter applied to his analysis of mythological thinking. Sebald justifies his use of the term by stating that “in der Schizophrenie menschheitsgeschichtlich ältere Formen der Äußerung wieder zutage treten” (“Das Poetische Werk Ernst Herbecks” 138). Sebald takes Herbeck’s “kombinatorische[s] Modell” a step further by introducing the concept of demontage, “in der etwas, das fertig schon vorliegt, umgefertigt und verschrieben wird, bis die Antwort in eine Frage und das Bild in ein Rätsel sich verwandelt” (139). The same holds true for Sebald’s own methods of writing. Indeed, he often referred to himself as a bricoleur.³⁸

What unites Sebald und Herbeck is the concept of preexisting material as the matter of

³⁷ This is not to suggest that Sebald himself is an outsider artist, primarily because he does not write on the spot without revisions and editing.

³⁸ In an interview with Sigrid Löffler, Sebald explains, “Ich arbeite nach dem System der bricolage- im Sinne von Levi-Strauss. Das ist eine Form von wildem Arbeiten, von vorrationalem Denken, wo man in zufällig-akkumulierten Fundstücken so lange herumwühlt, bis sie sich irgendwie zusammenreimen” (“Wildes Denken” 137).

artistic creation. This act of combination and restructuration is similar to what Bruno does with the film he makes, and also to Robert's use of the moveable type of his father's printing press. In the latter's case, the typesetter becomes a kind of bricoleur who makes meaningful combinations out of pre-existing material. In both instances restructuring of elements is a form of "re-membering." In other words, memory enacts re-structuring like the bricolage of Lévi-Strauss. However, the way Sebald's narrator collects the stories and images "at hand" and mediates these textual/visual instances would suggest that this is an ironic gesture, for the immediacy is nonexistent: Sebald's self-reflexive use of temporality complements his search guided by planned contingency. In Sebald's text, documents form a basis for his fantastic excursions, and the fictional elements color the documentary material, ordinary becomes extraordinary, and unremembered is brought back to memory.

The last story is the best demonstration of the narrator's urge to document stories and memories that have fallen victim to amnesia. In "Il ritorno in patria" (*Return to Homeland*), we witness the ultimate preservation of memory, because the narrator for the first time in three decades journeys back home to extend the limits of his own memory. This episode thus performs a transformation from aimless wanderings to homecoming. The narrator decides to leave Verona and return to England, but resolves "zuvor aber noch auf gewisse Zeit nach W. zu fahren, wo ich seit meiner Kindheit nicht mehr gewesen war" (187). The return home, just like his visit to Herbeck, is sudden and characterized by emptiness and silence. Upon the narrator's return to his hometown W., he finds "alles von Grund auf verändert" (202). The nodal point of his memories appears to be the multifunctional Engelwirt (in which the narrator lived with his family on the

first floor some thirty years earlier). In his memories, it is associated on the one hand with senseless drinking in a smoke-filled bar, and on the other with a large function room (with enough seating for half of the village) that yielded its space to weddings and funerals, but more importantly, to the newsreels and feature films shown there. In its present condition the Engelwirt has not only been rebuilt from the foundations up, but it ironically offers refined hospitality to its patrons. This juxtaposition of past and present becomes a means for storytelling as well as a point of (dis)orientation for the narrator. We find out more about the past, for the present is not recognizable. The characters he seeks out are all in some way connected to, or associated with the Engelwirt. Their memories of how it was before are fading and the narrator is overcome by the urge to record them. The Engelwirt is thus a museum of memories and images that are threatened with extinction.

The narrator's attempt to recollect and record his memories can be best demonstrated in a passage that functions as a carefully edited film sequence. Sebald's narrator recollects his childhood memories by enumerating various highlights from different feature films and newsreels that were shown after WWII in the Engelwirt, and he presents them in a single action-packed sentence:

Man sah diese Panduren durch ein lichtiges Birkengehölz und die Indianer über eine endlose Ebene jagen, *man sah* den verkrüppelten Geiger am Fuß einer Gefängnismauer eine Kadenz herunterreißen, während sein Kompagnon die Eisenstäbe seines Zellenfensters durchsägte, den General Eisenhower *sah man* aus Korea zurückkehrend einem Flugzeug entsteigen, dessen Propeller sich langsam noch drehten, den Klosterjäger, dem ein Bär mit der Tatze die Brust aufgerissen

hatte, *sah man* zu Tal wanken, und *man sah* Politiker vor dem Parlamentsgebäude aus dem Rücksitz eines Volkswagens herausklettern, und in fast jeder Wochenschau *sah man* auch die Ruinenhaufen von Städten wie Berlin oder Hamburg, die ich lange nicht mit der in den letzten Kriegsjahren erfolgten Zerstörung, von der ich nichts wusste, in Verbindung brachte, sondern für eine sozusagen natürliche Gegebenheit aller größeren Städte gehalten habe. (204; italics added)

Sebald's narrator emerges as a filmmaker who collects diverse images and arranges them in such a way that they produce new meanings and illustrate the workings of memory. Hidden in this passage is Sebald's own commentary on the function of cinema. What then can we learn from this memory-montage? The passage begins with the fictional sequences (the cavalry irregulars, Indians, the crippled violinist), proceeds with real historical events (General Eisenhower, politicians), and finally ends with images from the war as experienced by the narrator himself (the mountains of rubble). Everything is in the state of motion (jagen, herunterreißen, durchsägen, entsteigen, drehen, wanken, herausklettern) except for the last image of total destruction—i.e., the end result of WWII. The variations of *man sah* to *sah man* highlight the public nature of the event. Towards the end of the sentence the narrator's voice emerges and shifts the events into the private sphere. The narrator still sees these scenes, they have shaped how he perceived history (as a "natürliche Gegebenheit") and it arguably has influenced that half of the village seated in the darkened function room. Did they know the difference between fiction and documentary, or did the documentary footage appear just as fictional or vice versa? For example, General Eisenhower and politicians getting out of the

Volkswagen frame the incident with the hunter. It remains ambiguous whether the hunter is part of the archival footage, or whether he functions as a commentary on the politicians or the General.³⁹ The postwar documentary and the feature films function as a “technological memory bank” as well as a transitional point that allows the narrator to maneuver easily from fictional to documentary sequences, from imaginary to public, from inside to outside.⁴⁰ Such alignment of events—i.e. their combination in the form of bricolage—not only creates new meanings and functions, but also reveals the hidden correspondences between selected materials.

That the function of film has both historical and imaginative/associative qualities for the narrator, is demonstrated when he refers in passing to Federico Fellini’s film *Amarcord* (1973) as a way to revive his childhood memories. The narrator’s return to his hometown after thirty years of absence is interspersed with episodes that at times resemble dreams and hallucinations, but more often consist of reminiscences from his childhood, which he is able to recall down to the most banal details. For example, in an episode in which he lists people who lived and worked in the building that he used to frequent with his grandfather, the narrator refers to a film character in an effort to describe Valerie Schwarz, “die trotz ihrer geringen Körpergröße eine Brust besaß von Ausmaßen, wie ich sie später nur noch einmal, und zwar an der Trafikantin in Fellini’s *Amarcord*, gesehen habe” (253). This passing remark suggests that the narrator’s

³⁹ It is ironic that General Eisenhower appears in the same sentence as the bombings of Berlin and Hamburg. During WWII Eisenhower (as General) had supreme command of all operational Allied forces; he was responsible for planning and supervising the liberation of Western Europe and the invasion of Germany.

⁴⁰ In his *The Return of History as Film*, Anton Kaes refers to cinema as a “technological memory bank,” he writes: “Images, fixed on celluloid, stored in archives, and reproduced thousand of times, render the past ever-present. Gradually but inexorably, these images have begun to supersede memory and experience [...] Cinematic representations have influenced –indeed shaped—our perspectives on the past; they function for us today as technological memory bank” (ix).

associations are not only drawn from the film but are also replaced by the film character, because the image of Fellini's "Trafikantin" now stands in for Valerie Schwarz.⁴¹ In fact, the "Trafikantin" becomes her double. Although a fleeting remark, there lies a deeper significance in Fellini's style of filmmaking, as it reveals affinities with Sebald's own narrative composition and echoes Sebald's discussion of Wim Wenders's film as described in "Kafka im Kino." The question is: What is the relationship between memory and invention, remembrance and imagination in respect to Fellini's *Amarcord*?

The most obvious affiliation between Fellini and Sebald is evident in the word "Amarcord" itself, the Emiliano-Romagnolo dialect phrase, which comes closest to *mi ricordo* (I remember). This is significant because it serves as a reference to the process of recollection, a constant theme in Sebald's work. Fellini's *Amarcord* (1973) is a quasi-autobiographical story about the inhabitants of a seaside town based on Fellini's hometown Rimini in 1930s Fascist Italy.⁴² The film was made thirty years after Fellini left his hometown, and making a film about it is in a sense a homecoming. This is similar to Sebald's narrator, who also returns to his hometown thirty years later to find everything changed from the ground up. The emergence of Fellini's film in Sebald's text is thus a form of doubling, repetition. The same way Sebald's representation of his hometown is a combination of memory and invention, so too is Fellini's film based on a memory of his hometown and filled with characters, indeed fragments and caricatures, that appear against a grotesque background, as in a dream. Much like Sebald's hometown

⁴¹ Similarly, in *Austerlitz* the narrator's memories are experienced as if they were scenes in a specific film. When he encounters Austerlitz for the first time, the narrator is reminded of the hero Siegfried in Fritz Lang's 1924 film *Die Nibelungen* (14).

⁴² Before he made the film, Fellini wrote an essay "La mia Rimini" (1967) about his (imaginary) hometown. The essay provides a window onto the process whereby Fellini's reminiscences about his childhood made their way onto the screen. Many of the stories recounted in this essay appear in *Amarcord*, lifted almost directly from the page.

in “Ritorno,” Fellini’s Rimini emerges out of fragments of memory, oscillating between what is imagined to have been and what once was. In that respect, the film highlights the relationship between memory and invention, between the world represented (remembered) and a world created (imagined). All of Fellini’s films have similar sources: the circus with its clowns and animals, the Variety Theater, comic books, and silent film comedies. *Amarcord* itself is like a circus composed of performances whose links are neither logical nor motivated by the narrative. At times, the characters speak directly to the camera, which records the events and actions in the town. Much like in Sebald’s prose fictions, there is the figure of a documentarian who reports and comments on the events that are seen. It then follows that Sebald’s narrator performs the duties of a director; he sets the scene and identifies the characters whose words and actions are to be witnessed by the reader. In this instance, he casts Fellini’s “Trafikantin” as Valerie Schwarz. She becomes her filmic double. However, rather than rendering the events as true, the presence of the narrator/reporter emphasizes the artificiality of representation. This is due to the fact that the narrator is constantly interrupting the narrative flow, thereby calling attention to media, the mediator, and to the narrator’s role as an instrument that both documents and constructs the events and experiences of the characters. The act of embellishment therefore dominates in Fellini’s film and Sebald’s prose, emphasizing the subjectivity not only of memory, but more importantly, of its representation.

The significance of Fellini’s film in respect to Sebald’s narrative does not only lie in their thematic and structural correspondence; the film also calls to mind Sebald’s movie-going experience in “Kafka im Kino,” with Wim Wenders’s film *Im Lauf der Zeit*.

Considering that *Schwindel. Gefühle.* and “Kafka im Kino” are thematically parallel texts, it is no coincidence that Sebald selects two films from the same time period (1973 and 1976, respectively) and from two directors who have much in common. Fellini’s personal derivation of all his work, and more importantly his visual fantasy, have redefined the art of filmmaking in the postwar period. Fellini is known for first drawing his ideas, thoughts, and dreams and then translating them into films. Fellini’s sketches formed the basis for his films in the place of screenplays, to which he never adhered anyway. The visual image as a trigger for writing also parallels Herbeck’s and Kafka’s method of composition. This is similar to Sebald’s narrator in “All’estero,” who also refers to the process of writing about his encounter with Salvatore as “Aufzeichnen seiner Erzählung,” and he traces (“nachzeichnen”) his previous journey to Italy in order to come to terms with his past (151). Fellini’s visual fantasy implies close collaboration between inspiration and creation, and as such plays a role in both Sebald’s and Wenders’s work. In fact, Wenders belongs to the generation of filmmakers who were greatly influenced by Fellini’s style of filmmaking.⁴³ Sebald thus creates a network of doubles and associations between writers (Kafka, Herbeck, Zischler) and filmmakers (Wenders, Fellini), who are all united by travel and writing/filming, but more importantly by imagination.

Sebald’s proclamations regarding the status of the cinematic medium in the late twentieth century, coupled with his careful selection of films from the 1970s, would suggest that he is attempting both to situate himself in film history, and to rescue these films from obscurity. If Kafka witnessed the advent of cinema, Fellini and Wenders witnessed the commercialization and commodification of cinema. The technological

⁴³ Wenders’s *Lisbon Story* (1994) is a silent homage to the influence of Fellini and his work. Fellini died during the filming of *Lisbon Story*, and his departure is marked by two quotations (“Ciao, Federico!”) that frame the film.

advances that followed WWII also impacted the art of filmmaking. What these film directors have in common (along with Herzog and Resnais) is their dissatisfaction with the projected image. Sebald was convinced that our oversaturation with visual culture, propagated through mass media, has eroded our personal experiences and detached us from our faculties of imagination. Sebald oversaturates his texts with visual representations to raise awareness of the fleeting and manipulative nature of images, whether moving or still. We rely on images to tell our stories for us, to the point that we can no longer think or remember without them. Sebald's captionless black-and-white images interrupt sentences, at times single words, and they do not always serve as triggers for stories to emerge behind them, but more often they stand in for memories, or they diverge from stories communicated by the text. The way Sebald inserts images in his texts raises more questions than it provides explanations. This is a productive stage for Sebald because it forces the reader and observer to think and see on their own, and to continue this process after writing, reading, and viewing are finished.

This is why accessing the "technological memory bank," as Sebald's narrator often does, results in displacement of memory rather than precise recollection, and things now appear more incomprehensible to the narrator than ever:

Je mehr Bilder aus der Vergangenheit ich versammle, sagte ich, desto unwahrscheinlicher wird es mir, dass die Vergangenheit auf diese Weise sich abgespielt haben soll, denn nichts an ihr sei normal zu nennen, sondern es sei das allermeiste lächerlich, und wenn es nicht lächerlich sei, dann sei es zum Entsetzen. (231-32)

The more he travels, the tighter the network becomes, and nothing makes sense. The narrator's "Kreuzundquergehen" becomes an unreadable surface inscribed with incoherent juxtapositions, and the gap between memories and present experience only grows wider. The questions that resonate at the end are concerned with the limitation, the nature, and the purpose of writing and of art in general. The narrator functions as a documentarian who has never before had so much evidence at his disposal, and yet has never had so much reason to doubt what the evidence shows. Evidence is everywhere, but this leads to more questions, not to clarity. The difference between past (everything that happened) and history (the events that were recorded) runs parallel to the difference between the remains of the past (that which is not documented) and evidence. Not everything in the past has left traces, and not all traces have survived. This is similar to the workings of memory, or more importantly to forgetting. We want permanence, but the nature of existence is change. Sebald uses cinematic techniques and examples to emphasize the fleeting nature of memory and history. Recollecting the past is similar to remembering film, neither of which can definitely recreate the memory of the past events and experiences.

Remembering not to Forget

Sebald and Wenders constantly draw our attention to different media (such as film, television, radio, photography, print, and painting) and channels of representation from which the writer or filmmaker collects various fragments. Such selection and reorganization of documents not only creates new meanings, but also reveals the hidden correspondence between selected materials. The subversion of documents through fiction

is Sebald's and Wenders's commentary on how one interacts with a (traumatic) past. This is also what Austerlitz's game of "moving pictures" exposes:

Austerlitz sagte mir, dass er hier manchmal stundenlang sitze und diese Photographien, oder andere, die er aus seinen Beständen hervorhole, mit der rückwärtigen Seite nach oben auslege, ähnlich wie bei einer Partie Patience, und dass er sie dann, jedesmal von neuem erstaunt über das, was er sehe, nach und nach umwende, die Bilder hin und her und übereinanderschiebe, in eine aus Familienähnlichkeiten sich ergebende Ordnung, oder auch aus dem Spiel ziehe, bis nichts mehr übrig sei als die graue Fläche des Tisches, oder bis er sich, erschöpft von der Denk- und Erinnerungsarbeit, niederlegen müsste auf der Ottomane. (175-76)

Austerlitz talks about trying to discover the "family resemblances" in the photos, and that is precisely what Wenders and Sebald seem to be doing as well in their juxtapositions. Furthermore, this is precisely what this chapter is trying to accomplish through the juxtaposition of Wenders and Sebald: revealing the family resemblances in their work that this juxtaposition exposes. Sebald and Wenders are concerned with the experience of time (its association with pastness and transience) and the attempt to remember, to repeat and re-present the past. Film cannot be captured in writing because one medium cannot be translated into another; any representation of the past is like a ghost. Memories float like mirages before our eyes, while making films of their own. Memory continually fabricates new versions of past events in order to suit the immediate interests of someone recollecting in the present.

The dialectic between the necessity of remembering and the difficulty of doing so remains intact until the very end. Sebald and Wenders are not interested in bridging the gap between actual and imagined experiences, between fact and fiction, between presence and absence; rather, their works are invested in exploring the gap between them. There are no definite answers, and there is no single *Zusammenhang*, but there are reflections, questions, and various interrogations of the records and our own responses. It is then precisely this open-ended quality of Sebald's and Wenders's work, the way in which the documentary material is embellished with imaginary elements, that allows them to easily maneuver across different temporalities and different worlds of past, present, and future.

Chapter 2

Remembering and Re-visioning in W. G. Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten* and Werner Herzog's *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle*

Outsider figures pervade W. G. Sebald's and Werner Herzog's respective works. In both his prose fictions and critical essays, Sebald's references and allusions to writers, directors, and actors form an intricate web of associations, yet a recurring characteristic that connects many of these diverse figures is their marginal status in society, and the resulting alternative models that their works embody. The figures he writes about include, for example, the anarchist surrealist filmmaker Herbert Achternbusch, the schizophrenic poet Ernst Herbeck, the Austrian-Jewish Holocaust survivor Jean Améry, the Swiss writer Robert Walser, and the mysterious foundling Kaspar Hauser.⁴⁴ They all represent outsider figures who turned against the prevalent conceptions of culture and literature, while revealing alternative ways of seeing and moving beyond categorical perceptions of the world. The notion of exploring unconventional perspectives is present in Herzog's films, which often deal with the lives of marginal figures, such as visionaries, emigrants, scientists, vampires, and aliens, to name but a few.⁴⁵ Yet nowhere is the

⁴⁴ In 1988, Sebald edited a book entitled *A Radical Stage: Theater in the 1970s and 1980s* (a collection of papers delivered at a colloquium held at the University of East Anglia), for which he also wrote an introduction, and a paper entitled "The Art of Transformation: Herbert Achternbusch's Theatrical Mission." Sebald's narrator in *Schwindel. Gefühle.* visits Ernst Herbeck during his travels through Europe. In the beginning of the 1970s and again in the 1980s, Sebald himself visited the hospital where Herbeck spent most of his life. Sebald also published two essays on Herbeck's poetry, "Kleine Traverse: Das poetische Werk Ernst Herbecks," and "Des Häschens Kind, der kleine Has: Über das Totemtier des Lyriker Ernst Herbeck." His essay on Jean Amery, entitled "Mit den Augen des Nachtvogels," presents the writer as one of the few in the sea of silence to write about atrocities committed during WWII. He also wrote an essay on Robert Walser, "Le Promeneur Solitaire," in which he identifies very closely with the writer. Finally, Sebald wrote an essay on Peter Handke's play *Kaspar*, entitled "Fremdheit, Integration und Krise. Über Peter Handkes Stück Kaspar."

⁴⁵ The role of outsiders is present in almost every film due to Herzog's interest in the marginality and banality of human existence, but perhaps most evident in features such as: *Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* (1972),

figure of an absolute social outsider more strongly expressed than in *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle*, Herzog's film on Kaspar Hauser. Considering the explicit overlaps between Herzog's and Sebald's interest in outsider figures (Achternbusch and Hauser), it is no coincidence that this particular film appears in Sebald's second prose fiction *Die Ausgewanderten*. The questions are: why such insistence on outsider figures in Sebald's and Herzog's work and what can they tell us about the nature of remembering and re-visioning more generally?

In nearly all of his prose fictions, but most notably in *Die Ausgewanderten: Vier lange Erzählungen* (1992), Sebald contemplates alternative perspectives on identity, time, and memory as means of challenging established norms and traditions. *Die Ausgewanderten: Vier lange Erzählungen*, as the subtitle indicates, is composed of four stories that are titled according to the names of characters they portray: "Dr. Henry Selwyn," "Paul Bereyter," "Ambros Adelwarth," and "Max Aurach." In each story there is no single master narrative but there are many narratives and, in fact, many narrators, who are gathered to unravel stories within stories and create different layers of first-person narration. The intradiegetic narrator is present throughout each story as he chronicles both the lives and the unraveling memories of four European emigrants who leave their homeland and now feel like foreigners in the world. Dr. Henry Selwyn, a Lithuanian Jew, immigrates to England with his parents in 1899 at the age of seven. Paul Bereyter leaves Germany in 1935, because he is banned from teaching by Nazi racial laws, to pursue a teaching assignment in France, but then returns to Germany to serve in the Army during WWII. Ambros Adelwarth emigrates from Germany to America before WWI, but travels

Stroszek (1976), *Herz aus Glas* (1976), *Nosferatu* (1978), *Woyzeck* (1979), *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), as well as in his more recent documentaries: *The White Diamond* (2004), *Grizzly Man* (2005), *The Wild Blue Yonder* (2005), *Encounters at the End of the World* (2007).

extensively. Finally, Max Aurach boards the *Kindertransport* from Germany to England in 1939 at the age of 15.⁴⁶ These men are in different ways forced to leave their homelands, start a new life, and often assume new identities. What unites them is a sense of displacement that they experience and one that intensifies after they start confronting their forgotten or suppressed memories. Sebald's emigrants are not only perceived as outsiders in society, but they themselves feel like outsiders in their own skin. In other words, they fear that once they recognize their past lives, they will annihilate their present selves and vice versa, that the present will expunge the past. Due to their inability to cope with memories that come back to haunt their present lives they remain liminal figures, foreigners abroad and strangers at home.

This chapter approaches the notions of remembering and revisioning through the impact and the function of film on Sebald's writing. Of particular interest are instances in which the narrator employs certain films while conjuring images of the past. In fact, filmic images often haunt Sebald's narrator, the way memories do, which points to certain parallels between the way we remember a film and our own processes of recollection. In Sebald's book the process of remembrance is characterized by the oscillation between imagined and real experiences, and the sense of uncertainty that is the result of the past coming to an uncanny life in the present. This is why references and allusions to films in *Die Ausgewanderten* often evoke a sense of the uncanny and as such access a space beyond the categories of past and present, memory and imagination, and documentary and fiction. Most notably, in *Die Ausgewanderten* we find a textual reference to Herzog's cinematic work that serves to support the prominent theme of

⁴⁶ The subject of Sebald's last published prose fiction, *Austerlitz*, experiences a similar fate, for he too was sent on the *Kindertransport* to England in 1939. The third chapter focuses on *Austerlitz* more closely and the way the film medium is used to describe the protagonist and structure the narrative.

remembering, and, more importantly, of re-visioning the past. The narrator directly addresses a dream sequence from *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle* (1974), as a trigger for his own memories of a slide show he witnessed several years previously. The narrator does not explicitly name the film or the director in question, but considering that he identifies one of the characters in the film, cites the lines from its protagonist, and describes the dream footage, there is little doubt of the film's origin.⁴⁷ At first glance, it appears that the link between Herzog's film and the slide show is the narrator's visual association between the two different media, or the association of film with remembering more generally. However, as we will see, Herzog's film has a wider thematic and structural significance that resonates throughout *Die Ausgewanderten*.

In Herzog's film, Kaspar Hauser represents a figure of an outsider among the civilized, and he also appears as a visionary. The film contains three dream sequences in which Hauser assumes the role of the narrator to recount mirage-like landscapes. This is also how he appears in Sebald's text. The narrator specifically refers to one of Hauser's dreams, but the other two visions, along with desert caravans and mirages, resonate throughout *Die Ausgewanderten* as well.⁴⁸ Whether actual or constructed, Sebald's interest in marginal figures in *Die Ausgewanderten* parallels Herzog's focus on the malleability of our perception, as seen through the lens of an outsider figure. Sebald's emigrants are liminal figures, hybrids who emerge and operate in the space between real and imagined, past and present. As we will see, Sebald borrows and refunctionalizes

⁴⁷ The scholarship has also acknowledged Herzog's Kaspar Hauser in Sebald's text. See for example, Carol Jacobs "What Does it Mean to Count? W. G. Sebald's *The Emigrants*" (918), Diane Blacker *Reading W. G. Sebald: Adventure and Disobedience* (116), Mark Richard McCulloh *Understanding W. G. Sebald* (30), Klaus Bonn "W. G. Sebald's laufende Bilder: Der Film und die Worte" (176).

⁴⁸ Mirage is an inverted reflection of distant objects resulting from the interaction of hot and cold air, "an optical phenomenon, esp. in the desert or at sea, by which the image of some object appears displaced above, below, or to one side of its true position as a result of spatial variations of the index of refraction of air" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).

meta-cinematic techniques common in Herzog and applies them as meta-textual operations for his narrative as a way of highlighting this hybridity of his protagonists. This chapter examines the themes of remembering and re-visioning in Sebald's text and in Herzog's film, and it asks how the notion of the uncanny contributes to a new reading of these elements and narratives.

According to Freud's essay "Das Unheimliche," the uncanny arises due to the return of repressed memories, or from something that is familiar and established in the mind that becomes alienated through the process of repression.⁴⁹ Freud defines the uncanny as something fearful and frightening that leads us back to what is familiar and well-known, as a reminder of our other self. The experience of the uncanny in literature depends on the ambiguity between real experiences and imaginary occurrences, and on the fusion of objective and subjective narrative styles.⁵⁰ In other words, the experience of the uncanny is created when the realistic frame of the narrative is ruptured by fantastic events, and when this rupture is also narrated with the detail of objective narration. Freud's conception of the uncanny is precisely at the center of both Sebald's and Herzog's respective works. This chapter focuses on three uncanny elements that lend their works a sheen of the symbolic: 1) their insistence on hybrid figures who become representatives of alternative models that operate beyond the categorical perceptions of real and imaginary; 2) their emphasis on a sense of uncertainty between past and present, memory and imagination, dream and reality; and 3) their employment of the image of a

⁴⁹ The notion of "das Unheimliche" was first identified by Ernst Jentsch in his 1906 essay "On the Psychology of the Uncanny," where he defines the uncanny as being a product of "intellectual uncertainty." While Freud accepts Jentsch's postulation, he criticized his belief that Olympia is a central figure that embodies the uncanny in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandman*. Instead he believed that the fear of losing one's eyes is a more striking instance of the uncanny in Hoffmann's tale.

⁵⁰ Freud, "Das Unheimliche," 217

mirage and a desert caravan as means of evoking a sense of continuity between these otherwise disparate domains. Of particular importance is how this problem of uncertainty between the real and the imagined is at the basis of the "mirage," of the issues of memory and recollection, of "documentary fiction" in Sebald's writing, and of cinematic technique in Herzog.

In order to explore the thematic and structural importance of Herzog's *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle* for Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten*, it is necessary to outline the main premise of the film and Herzog's contribution to the account of this mysterious figure of Kaspar Hauser. In what follows, the discussion will first focus on Hauser's role in society and his three dream visions, and second on Sebald's refunctionalization of these sequences in *Die Ausgewanderten*. The question then is not whether Sebald and Herzog have constructed and fictionalized their purportedly "documentary" narratives or their characters, but why--and more importantly--in what manner they accomplish this.

Kaspar Hauser's Desert Caravan

Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle deals with the historical life of Kaspar Hauser, a young man held captive in almost total isolation of a darkened cell for the first 16 years of his life and then freed into a nineteenth-century German town without any concept of social interaction or civilization, and without a personal history. Much has been written on the life and death of Kaspar Hauser, and many accounts focus on the criminal case behind Hauser's imprisonment, his release, and his murder.⁵¹ Herzog, by contrast, explores the philosophical aspects of the story, which revolve around the reaction of

⁵¹ See for example, Anselm von Feuerbach's *Kaspar Hauser, ein Beispiel eines Verbrechens am Seelenleben* (1832), Philip Henry Earl Stanhope's *Tracts Relating to Caspar Hauser* (1836), Jacob Wassermann's *Caspar Hauser oder Die Traegheit des Herzens* (1908).

society when introduced to their pre-cultivated self in the form of an outsider, or an uncanny double. The title itself, *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle*, points to the difficulty of individuality in a world that breeds conformity. When he appears for the first time at the town's square, a man approaches him with questions that to this day remain unanswered: "Was wollen Sie hier? Wo wollen Sie denn hin? Sind Sie fremd in dieser Stadt? Woher kommen Sie denn?" We see that the society does not have the language or conceptual framework to accommodate Hauser's alien behavior. The villagers first take Hauser to a barn where he lies next to horses.⁵² Since Hauser does not belong to any established category, he poses a threat to society. His next location is therefore a cell in a tower, where Hauser again finds himself behind bars. Even when Herr Daumer takes Hauser under his wing, and when Hauser adapts to the general habits of nineteenth-century Germany, he feels anxious in this role. He cannot conform to the norms of society and therefore remains a hybrid creature, a cross between the primitive and the civilized who cannot be fully integrated. In this regard, Hauser is a model emigrant figure who has to adopt to a new culture and leave behind his previous life, his past and memories. Unable to walk and to speak but a few pre-rehearsed sentences, Hauser sees the world from a different perspective, while we see the world through Hauser's eyes. What is unique about Herzog's version of Hauser's story is the sense of perspectivism and experimentation with perceptions, most vividly illustrated from the radical standpoint of an absolute social outsider.

⁵² Brad Prager elaborates on the association between Hauser and horses in Herzog's film. He writes, "The visual analogy between him and horses continues, and is made particularly evident by the cut to the horse standing above him. Later Herzog makes a point of the irony in all these juxtapositions, as Kaspar is ultimately proven more noble and less animalistic than those from whom he learns about language and civilization" (*Aesthetic Ecstasy and Truth*, 65).

The film's emphasis on perspectivism and its depiction of an individual's struggle against society are further accentuated by Herzog's casting choice and by the life of the "actor" who played Hauser, Bruno S.⁵³ In the film's audio commentary, Herzog explains that Bruno S. was not a professional actor, but rather a street musician and performer from Berlin whose personal history is not unlike that of the historical Kaspar Hauser. Bruno S. was rejected by his mother, and he spent nearly 20 years locked away in mental institutions and jails. Early in his life, due to regular beatings, he abandoned speech entirely. In many ways Bruno S. plays himself, that is, he embodies the essence of the character he portrays. Most importantly, both Bruno S. and Hauser embody human creativity that emerges on the margins of civilized society. They were both isolated from and abused by humanity, but must enter into a process of assimilation. Yet their integration does not have a positive outcome: Hauser ends up murdered, and Bruno S. lives in poverty until his death.⁵⁴ As such they offer alternative takes on the negative effects of society's civilizing process. One important element that emphasizes perspectivism in the film is the fact that Herzog casts a middle-aged man to play a role that is usually seen as that of a child or youth. How are we to understand this mismatch in age and what does it say about "childhood," or the notions of time and memory? The casting affects "perception" in this regard. The mismatch in age further solidifies

⁵³ There is another Herzog film in which the emigrant story is made explicit. Herzog casts Bruno S. again in *Stroszek* (1976), a film he wrote exclusively for this actor. It is a story of a man for whom there is no place in West German society. He is constantly beaten, insulted, and humiliated by pimps of his girlfriend, so they attempt to find a better life in America. However, upon reaching the promised land he always dreamed about, Stroszek finds that he is not better off there than he was in Germany. Instead of the freedom and liberation he was seeking, he encounters more cruelty and corruption. At the end of the film, alone and defeated, Stroszek commits suicide.

⁵⁴ Two films by Miron Zownir illustrate Bruno S.'s struggle in life, namely, a documentary entitled *Bruno S. - Der Fremde ist der Tod* (2003), and a feature film *Phantomanie* (2009). I visited the graveyard in Berlin where Bruno S. is buried. One had to look long and hard to discover Bruno S.'s grave, for there is no headstone to identify or to commemorate his legacy, but rather a piece of plastic bearing his full name, similar to plastic strips commonly found in potted plants.

Hauser's sense of displacement. He does not fit into this role, the same way he does not fit into the clothes he wears in the beginning of the film, or into a dinner jacket he is later forced to wear, and ultimately he does not fit into society. On one hand then the casting choice reflects the life of Bruno S. himself, on the other it tells us something more about Hauser and his inner constitution. Hauser's life does not begin at birth, as is commonly the case, but at the moment he is discovered at the town's square, without language and thus without personal history. He operates outside our preconceived notions of time, for he cannot separate past from present or comprehend the future. He only knows the present because he did not have language at the time to experience and record the past. It is precisely this lack of history and memory that sets him apart from civilized society. As is evident from Freud's essay, the uncanny is anything we experience in adulthood that reminds us of our earlier psychic stages, or of the primitive experience of the human species. Hauser himself has no past, and for that reason it would be difficult for him to experience events as uncanny. On the other hand, he *represents* the uncanny (the primitive, pre-verbal past) for 19th-century society. From the perspective of the civilized world, Hauser is thus a hybrid, our pre-civilized self in a form of a revenant. Yet he is incapable of seeing himself in this manner—and that is what separates him from the rest.

Hauser's assimilation process reveals the constructedness of human knowledge and perception. As part of the civilizing process, Hauser undergoes instructions in language, music, religion, logic, etc., and while he fails in all these subjects, in many instances his perspective proves far more convincing than that of his teachers. As Hauser learns the customs of the nineteenth century, we see how meaningless many of them are. For example, in an episode in which Hauser is tested on his ability to think logically, the

professor of logic presents him with the following problem: Hauser is standing on a crossroad facing two paths, one leading to the village of liars, the other to the village of truth-tellers. He meets a wanderer and, according to the professor, only one question would allow him to determine which village he is from, because the ultimate goal is to get to the village of truth-tellers. The professor, convinced that Hauser's simple mind cannot comprehend such a complex problem, continues by solving his own riddle and demonstrating that the only question that will lead him to truth contains a double negative. Hauser, however, has an alternative question; he would simply ask the wanderer, "Bist du ein Laubfrosch?" His creative solution, however absurd, makes more sense than the professor's use of the double negative, but the latter cannot accept an answer that is based on performance and not logic. He maintains: "Das Verständnis ist doch nicht das Ausschlaggebende, der Schluss ist doch das Wesentliche. Als Professor der Logik und Mathematik hab ich nicht Verstehen gelernt, sondern da hab ich Schließen gelernt. Ich kann diese Frage nicht anerkennen." Hauser's way of seeing the world offers us an alternative view that goes beyond polarizing concepts such as right or wrong, truth or lie. Hauser can think outside the box, and thus can provide alternative views on the complex intersections between language, identity, and memory. In other words, Hauser's alternative question breaks the pattern of thinking established by the logic professor and points to imagination as an unused human potential. Hauser calls essentially for a performative act that forces the questioner either to lie or tell the truth. Herzog is stressing performative over logical conclusions because they lead to a multiplicity of possible answers and advocate imagination and creativity, rather than reduction, based on the principles of deductive logic.

That Hauser embodies the notion of creativity can further be demonstrated by the final sequence in the film, in which scientists attempt one last time to discover the mystery that surrounds him. After Hauser's death, he becomes an object of medical experiment because this society depends on rationality and analysis to arrive at answers, and more importantly, it needs conclusions in order to function. In this case, the problem is the cause of death.⁵⁵ The town's scribe concludes the examination with the following words, "Ein schönes Protokoll, ein genaues Protokoll. Ich werde zu Protokoll geben, dass man an Hauser Deformationen entdeckt hat. Wir haben endlich für diesen befremdlichen Menschen eine Erklärung, wie man sie besser nicht finden tun kann." As is well known today, scientists did not solve the mystery of Kaspar Hauser. What the coroners discover is that Hauser's "deformation" lies in the fact that his left-brain hemisphere is undersized. In the anatomical discourse, the left hemisphere stands for attempts to rationalize and generalize new information it receives in order to relate the past and the present. While the left hemisphere is responsible for the acquisition of grammar, the right performs the embellishment of speech, such as intonation and accentuation. This suggests that Hauser's brain can only be considered "deformed" from the perspective of a hyper-rationalist society. In fact, his comprehension of the world was far too creative and exploded the confines of common logic. This sequence indicates that Herzog advocates for the employment of both rational and imaginative faculties to arrive at possible solutions. It seems that depending on logical conclusions at all costs is a new kind of deformity that the film exposes. Herzog's cinematic technique points to precisely this "deformity," and it does so by itself eschewing grammar so as to highlight visual

⁵⁵ To extend the impression of authenticity, Herzog used a real human brain and real coroners while shooting this scene, as he explains in the audio commentary.

associations. In other words, it “performs” cinematically the mode of non-logical, non-reductive comprehension for which it advocates. This is the precise parallel to Hauser’s test of truth and falsehood, whereby he forces the person to perform the role of truth teller or liar. Herzog’s film itself exploits a “performative” structure to launch its criticism of reductive rational thinking. In that sense Hauser’s example is a mini-lesson for how Herzog’s film itself wants to operate.

Herzog’s emphasis on imaginative seeing can best be detected on the structural level. The film’s “grammar” or “syntax” dissolves for the sake of free visual associations. This is evident not only in Hauser’s three dream visions (which will be discussed subsequently), but also in the opening shots. The film begins with blurry, dream-like images. The camera movement and our perspective suggest that we are floating down a river, and along the way we see a man in a boat, a woman’s face behind tall blades of grass, and an elderly woman washing clothes at the riverbank, all looking directly at the camera as if startled by what they see. An aria from Act I, scene IV of *Die Zauberflöte* complements these strange images, creating a rupture between music and images. While Tamino’s aria advocates love, as in many ways *Die Zauberflöte* does, Kaspar Hauser’s story is one of human cruelty and suffering. The following lines can be heard: “Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön/ Wie noch kein Auge je gesehen!/Ich fühl es, Ich fühl es/Wie dies Götterbild/mein Herz mit neuer Regung füllt.” The aria thus stands as an ironic commentary on Hauser’s struggle. This rupture between sound and image is then further emphasized with the next image that appears on the screen: a text that provides the viewers with general historical information about Kaspar Hauser.⁵⁶ The interplay

⁵⁶ The text reads as follows: “Am Pfingstsonntag des Jahres 1828 wurde in der Stadt N. ein verwahrloster Findling aufgegriffen, den man später Kaspar Hauser nannte. Er konnte kaum gehen und sprach nur einen

between blurry images, music, and text creates more questions and as such substantiates the last sentence in the text: “Das Rätsel seiner Herkunft ist bis heute nicht gelöst.“ Herzog deviates from historical accounts on Hauser and embellishes his story with images and details that illuminate and reflect his struggle. He is not interested in solving the enigma of Kaspar Hauser, but rather in maintaining a certain atmosphere of uncertainty, whereby the mystery remains intact. The film in this way performs the surfeit of creativity that Hauser himself demonstrates.

Through Hauser’s perspective we learn more about the absurdity and cruelty of humanity than we do about Hauser himself. It is the wider society that emerges as truly monstrous. As Hauser learns how to speak, imagine, and dream, he also learns to suffer. In one sequence, Hauser holds a baby in his arms, while a tear rolls down his cheek and he laments: “Mutter, ich bin von Allem abgetan.” We see him crying again as he listens to piano music, and with great difficulty he describes his reaction to the sounds he hears: “Es fühlt mir stark in der Brust. Die Musik fühlt mir stark in der Brust. Ich bin so unversehens alt.” Hauser’s comment that he is “unversehens alt” stands as a reference to him representing the primitive self of civilization, that is, the embodiment of the uncanny. Beyond expressing his sense of displacement, these statements also justify the older actor. Even after some reassuring words from his teacher Daumer, Hauser still cannot comprehend his suffering. “Warum ist mir alles so schwer? Warum kann man das Klavierspielen nicht spielen so wie das Atmen?” He concludes with an irreconcilable

einzigsten Satz. Später, als er sprechen lernte, berichtete er, er sei Zeit seines Leben in einem dunklen Kellerloch eingesperrt gewesen, er habe keinerlei Begriff von der Welt gehabt und nicht gewusst, dass es außer ihm noch andere Menschen gäbe, weil man ihm das Essen hereinschob, während er schlief. Er habe nicht gewusst, was ein Haus, ein Baum, was Sprache sei. Erst ganz zuletzt sei ein Mann zu ihm hereingekommen. Das Rätsel seiner Herkunft ist bis heute nicht gelöst.“

view of humanity, “Die Menschen sind mir wie die Wölfe.” Herzog is picking up here on the *homo homini lupus* motif. While the more traditional formulation, (“Man is a wolf to his fellow human”) implies that every man is inherently a cruel creature, Hauser’s use of the pronoun “mir” corresponds with the notion of perspectivism that the film advocates. In other words, humans are not wolves per se, but rather they seem so to him. Indeed, Hauser has no place in this society, and feels that his existence is a mistake: “Ja, mir kommt es vor, dass mein Erscheinen auf dieser Welt ein harter Sturz gewesen ist.” This means that there was no one to catch him after his “fall,” and he is therefore in exile from the outset and until the end. Hauser’s proclamations express longing for a perspective uncontaminated by the civilizing process and suggest that he yearns for his pre-cultivated self.⁵⁷ At the same time Hauser is haunted by the past he either cannot remember or comprehend. His past thus alienates him from society. The only instances in which Hauser appears content are either in his teacher’s garden, or in the company of animals. We see him feeding two helpless birds on two separate occasions and displaying strong reactions against animal cruelty. For example, the villagers perform certain tests to determine Hauser’s response to danger, such as bringing in a swordsman who then threatens him with his weapon, or they place a burning candle in front of him, at which point Hauser touches the flame and experiences pain but remains largely unaffected. In both instances Hauser displays unconventional behavior, and the villagers assume that Hauser has no concept of fear. However, he appears terrified after a village prank that involves a hypnotized chicken. It seems that Hauser is not better off in the civilized world, which now begins to embody absurdity and cruelty, than he was locked away in

⁵⁷ In his book *The Cinema of Werner Herzog: Aesthetic Ecstasy and Truth*, Brad Prager also comes to the conclusion that Hauser’s ultimate wish is to return to “an existence prior to the acquisition of language, or before the damage incurred by Kaspar’s ‘terrible fall’” (63).

the dungeon. At least in the darkness of his cell he did not know that the light exists. He remains an alien figure, one who stands not only outside of society, but also outside of its very comprehension of divergence from the norm. He is, quite literally the a-nomalous.

The enigma of Kaspar Hauser becomes a self-reflective medium through which Herzog's work reveals itself under new light. More specifically, in Herzog's film Hauser appears as a dreamer and a visionary. Indeed, dream imagery plays an important role in the film. There are three instances in which Hauser assumes the role of the narrator and recounts three puzzling visions. Important to note is that all three are preceded by attacks on Hauser, and thus stand as his reactions to the violence committed against him. Furthermore, these dream visions testify to Hauser's creative development and to the act of artistic production in general. Hauser's creative awakening is marked by a dream of the Caucasus that functions as a portal into the world of imagination. From then on, Hauser is capable of imagining, which manifests itself in a vision of pilgrims climbing a mountain, and at the end in his ability to tell a story of a caravan in a desert.⁵⁸ All three visions involve travel and distant and exotic settings. Moreover, they are all derived from found footage filmed in various locations around the world (such as Burma, Ireland, and the Sahara desert) and they depict mysterious landscapes with flickering images. By employing found footage to illustrate fantastical elements of the story, Herzog re-blurs the boundary between dream and reality, documentary and fiction. The three dream visions represent the meta-filmic nature of Herzog's film because we are constantly made aware of the film's construction, which in turn raises more questions than it offers

⁵⁸ The visionary sequences also call up Herzog's *Fata Morgana* (1972), which is an important reference point for Herzog and the concept of "mirage" if not also for Sebald. In *Fata Morgana*, much of the footage consists of filmed mirages in the Sahara desert. Herzog combines the dream-like images of the desert with passages from the Mayan creation myth the Popol Vuh, on one hand, and images of human waste and decay, set to songs by Leonard Cohen, on the other.

answers. Leaving his viewers in a state of uncertainty is a dynamic stage for Herzog, because the viewers are also asked to participate by making associations between different layers of visual representations and in this sense they are invited to duplicate the process of Hauser's creative development.

Hauser's first dream vision is framed by an attack on his name. It occurs after he sows his name out of cress seed in his teacher's garden, only to find that someone has walked through the garden and stepped on his name. This incident produces an emotional response in Hauser, for he says: "Da habe ich lange geweint." During his narration of the incident we see footage of a stork roaming freely in the garden, and swallowing a helpless frog. On the ground, bloodstains are visible, as if to amplify the cruelty of nature. The sequence of the feeding stork has no direct relation to the storyline, other than to invite free visual associations or to foreshadow and reinforce the mystery that soon follows. The camera cuts from the stork to Daumer who joins Hauser on the garden bench, and behind them in the distance we see what we presume to be the same stork again, now perched in the middle of the field. The animal footage functions as an objective framework that is then punctured by an imaginary one. Hauser declares, "Es hat mich geträumt." Daumer is pleased with Hauser's progress, for only two weeks ago Hauser was convinced that his dreams were real. Daumer further wonders whether Hauser had dreamed during his imprisonment, or whether he had mistaken it for reality, not aware of the difference. The uncertainty between dream and reality is thus reinforced on a thematic level as well. According to Daumer, Hauser's first dream marks a significant moment in his development because not only can he finally separate dream from reality, but he can recount his vision as well. Once again he repeats the sentence:

“Ja, es hat mich geträumt. Mich hat von Kaukasus geträumt.” Hauser’s unconventional use of the grammatical object is telling here. The syntax of the sentence would suggest that Hauser is both the dreamer and the dreamt. It implies that the dream was imposed upon him from some external source, which might suggest that its categorization as dream is a direct result of his learned behavior. For Herzog this is a debilitating lesson. Hauser’s entry into civilization entails a disaggregation of dream and reality; what he learns is to discriminate between dream and reality, to recognize and accept their *distinction*. Herzog (and Sebald) tries to undo such discriminations. The notion of the “civilizing process” as the adherence to certain conceptual operations like logic stands in opposition to Hauser who represents a creative alternative that can serve as a model for Herzog’s own cinematic productions as well as for Sebald’s textual strategies—for a hybrid between documentary realism and imaginative fiction, where the two mutually inform and support one another. Most importantly, this alternative is based on inclusion rather than exclusion.

Another element that contributes to the uncanny nature of Hauser’s dream is its pure audio/visual representation. Herzog does not have Hauser recount the dream verbally. Instead, the camera frames Hauser’s face looking up to the skies,



and while Hauser remains speechless it presents his vision. This shift in perspective provides the viewer with a visual rendering of his dream. The film cuts to an unstable shot, a flickering 180-degree pan of a wide valley filled with green fields, trees, and numerous reddish-brown and white triangular structures adorned with towers pointing up to the sky. One might wonder if these images really depict the Caucasus, because the structures we see conjure up Indian or Eastern architecture, or whether Hauser has ever “seen” the Caucasus himself. The camera pans from right to left, at times slowly at times swiftly, as if to communicate the sense of bewilderment in the presence of such a vast landscape. Our gaze extends beyond the valley and into the background, where layered mountain ranges stretch back into great depths. The grainy quality of the images and unstable camera movement are reminiscent of a home movie or a travelogue that found its way into a feature film, thereby playing up the crossover between dream and reality. The images are further elevated to the point of abstraction by the sounds that complement them, solo violin that enters into dialogue with a bass. We hear a melodic, harmonious, and now famous composition, “Adagio,” that is based on a fragment attributed to the eighteenth-century composer Tomaso Albinoni, but rediscovered and completed only after WWII by musicologist Remo Giazotto. The composition does not belong to the historical time in which Hauser lived. Set against the flickering images of an exotic-looking plateau, the music contributes to the notion of displacement that dream itself communicates. After all, Hauser does not dream this dream, but the dream dreams him into existence.

The theme of displacement is evident on the structural level as well. The images that illustrate Hauser’s dream of the Caucasus are derived from found footage depicting

an actual landscape elsewhere in the world. From the audio commentary we learn that Lucki Stipetić, Herzog's brother, shot the scene in (then) Burma with an 8mm camera that shows a vast plain with hundreds of temples on it. While Stipetić had no use of this footage, Herzog was fascinated by it. He re-shot the Burma landscape through a semi-transparent screen from the other side, switching to a 35 mm camera and a different speed. This technique transforms documentary footage into blurry and flickering images suitable as an illustration of a dream-like world. By incorporating such embellished material into his film, Herzog creates a meta-filmic moment, a film within a film, indeed a film within a film as a dream. It is a self-referential gesture that presents a film as a commentary on the film's construction. Herzog's deliberate displacement and technical transformation of footage estranged from its original context, or his use of the images of Burma as a representation of the Caucasus, draws attention to the director's position and guidance, and ultimately records the process of seeing itself and not just the result. Our awareness of the production (and construction) of any film or text also leads to a more critical engagement with both textual and visual representations, as well as with the ways our histories are written and our memories remembered. It calls attention to the role of the medium itself. For Herzog, then, it is the journey that matters and not the destination.

There is no explanation why Hauser would dream about the Caucasus, or what significance this dream or this geographical region might have for him. Hauser dreams of a place he has never visited, yet he sees it very distinctly. We are left to speculate as to what Hauser is really referring to, whether he has the Great Caucasus Mountains in mind, or the region that separates Europe from Asia. The dream's content, namely two sentences, the flickering images, and musical accompaniment, do not convey what really

happens in the dream. It remains open-ended, marked by uncertainty. The film provides us with a narrative frame for a story yet to be told. Important to note is that in Hauser's nineteenth century, the significance of the Caucasus is manifold. In the anthropological discourse at the time there was a prominent belief that the Caucasus was a geographical origin of the West European people, and as such the origin of a race-based theory of humanity.⁵⁹ From the imperialist perspective of the Russian and Ottoman Empires, the region was characterized as wild, uncontrollable, and unruly. On one hand, the Caucasus dream then represents Hauser's initiation into the world of Western Civilization—i.e. the world of linearity; and on the other it manifests his wild and unruly self. Considering that the understanding of the Caucasus depends on one's perspective, whether imperial, scientific, religious, or anthropological, this particular geographic location thus reinforces the mystery that to this day surrounds Hauser, as well as the sense of perspectivism that this film seeks to advocate. The Caucasus is precisely a traditional representation of the liminal, of the "rupture" that divides, since it is a geographical feature that draws a kind of border between Europe and Asia, a "crack" that marks the separation of West and East.

The second act of violence against Hauser manifests an increase in cruelty as well as in Hauser's capacity to reflect on it. Responding to an open attack on his life, Hauser experiences a second vision that, as he claims, has nothing to do with the man who attacked him. When asked if he has anything to say, Hauser proclaims: "Ja, da gibt es noch etwas, was ich zu erwähnen habe, das mit dem Attentat nichts zu tun hat und ich sehe es noch ganz klar vor Augen." While one might expect Hauser to provide details

⁵⁹ See H.F. Augstein, "From the Land of the Bible to the Caucasus and Beyond: The Shifting Ideas of the Geographical Origin of Humankind" (58-80).

about the attempt on his life, he chooses to share his vision instead. Herzog is not interested in the attacker or the criminal case behind the incident, but rather in Hauser's reaction to it (however unrelated). Before Hauser begins his story, he takes a deep breath and then the camera once again assumes his perspective and we see mysterious footage of people engulfed by fog while climbing a rocky hill. At first we are not told what these images represent, because Hauser remains silent for a moment longer. After this visual interlude, Hauser's voice sets in, accompanied by sounds of melodic violins, "Da habe ich das Meer gesehen, ich habe einen Berg gesehen, und viele Menschen, die sind auf dem Berg aufgestiegen, wie in einer Prozession. Da war viel Nebel. Ich konnte es nicht ganz klar sehen, und oben, da war der Tod." Hauser's speech is framed by two contradictory declarations, "Ich sehe es noch klar vor Augen," and "Ich konnte es nicht ganz klar sehen." Important here is the emphasis on the limitation of vision. The viewer is also denied full access to his vision. Although we see the people climbing the rocky slope, the sea and the mountaintop Hauser speaks of are nowhere to be located. Similar to his first dream vision, the music does not complement the images, because it is far too harmonious to accompany what looks like a strenuous upward journey that ultimately leads to death. His vision, like his dream of the Caucasus, remains open-ended; he sees only the journey but not the destination, for he cannot tell for certain what awaits them at the top. The reason he does not see clearly towards the end of his story is because he cannot comprehend the future, and ultimately his death, because the anticipation of death is neither entirely imaginary nor yet fully realized. The future is like a mirage; it remains out of reach, or disappears as one approaches it.

The sequence that accompanies Hauser's second vision does not fit to the space and time of the dream, but happens to be from another time and location in Europe. The images were really shot in Ireland and show pilgrims climbing a mountain where they believe St. Patrick fasted for forty days and wrestled with an angel (explains Herzog in the audio commentary). The footage has no temporal relation to the story line of the film, for a closer look reveals that the people are wearing modern clothing (such as suits and ties) and belong to a different historical period than Hauser. This episode serves two functions: first, it intertwines past and present, documentary and fiction, whereby an actual event is used to illustrate a dream vision; and second, it exemplifies how film deviates from the traditional laws of storytelling characterized by linearity and stability of meaning. It remains unfinished and thus open to play and chance. Much like Hauser, who does not belong to the "civilized" world, these are images that do not immediately fit into the narrative. This is also evident when the film opens with enigmatic landscape shots and curious inhabitants who are gazing directly at the camera. These images shift perspectives to examine what a world might look like from Hauser's point of view, or from the point of view of someone who is looking at the world for the very first time. Similar to Hauser, who never finds his place among civilized society, these images allow the viewer to experience the mystery of Hauser as he himself might have experienced life. What they offer is an examination of alternative ways of seeing the world, and they belong neither to dream nor reality, but occupy a liminal space that exists between them. This liminality is marked by the temporal-spatial displacement inherent in the juxtaposition of the found footage with its filmic context.

Hauser's third dream vision, the story about a caravan and the desert, exemplifies another such liminal space. Similar to the other two visions, the last one is also a product of Hauser's reaction to the third attack that ultimately results in his death. However, unlike the other two dream visions, whose origins remain an enigma, the third story has a source, as Hauser explains while sitting with the house-keeper, "[Herr Daumer] hat mir von der Wüste Sahara erzählt, und das geht mir nicht mehr aus dem Kopf." Hauser conceives the beginning of a story that might have meaning, but he cannot get past the beginning: "Ich habe mir nämlich eine Geschichte von der Wüste ausgedacht, aber ich weiß nur den Anfang." It is telling that Hauser dreams about a desert, that is, of a desolate landscape in which life cannot thrive. The desert can be understood as a metaphor for forgetting, which then further underlines Hauser's longing for his pre-civilized self. The house-keeper reminds Hauser that he should wait until the story has an ending and then share it, "du sollst die Geschichte erst dann erzählen, wenn du sie ganz weißt, und nicht nur den Anfang. Ja, er [Daumer] nimmt's mit seiner Erziehung sehr genau und er will, dass du richtig erzählen lernst." Daumer's conception of storytelling is conventional, that is, he follows the established norms and expectations of listeners. A story should have a beginning, middle, and end, and a trajectory towards that end. Even though Hauser does not tell his story at this time, he cannot be disciplined in this way, and like the film itself, he does not follow the laws of storytelling. On his deathbed, Hauser is granted a wish to tell the unfinished story and for the last time he assumes the role of narrator:

Ich sehe eine große Karawane durch die Wüste kommen, durch den Sand. Und diese Karawane wird von einem alten Berber geführt, und dieser alte Mann ist blind. Die Karawane hält jetzt an, weil einige glauben, sie hätten sich verirrt, weil

sie Berge vor sich sehen. Sie messen mit dem Kompass und wissen nicht weiter. Dann nimmt der blinde Führer eine Hand voll Sand, und schmeckt ihn ab wie ein Essen. "Sohn," sagt der Blinde, "ihr irrt euch, das vor uns sind gar keine Berge, es ist nur eure Einbildung. Wir ziehen weiter nach Norden." Ja, und dann ziehen sie ohne Widerspruch weiter und sie erreichen die Stadt im Norden. Und da spielt die Geschichte. Aber die eigentliche Geschichte in dieser Stadt weiß ich nicht.

It is noteworthy that Hauser pauses for a moment after the second sentence, which ends with the adjective "blind," at which point the camera takes over while we witness flickering, slow-motion images of a caravan sweeping through the desert. At first we see the desert procession from the distance, then the camera assumes a frontal position and cuts to the caravan, which now appears as if it is coming directly at its beholder. We see various low-angle shots of camels and natives who appear as strange creatures populating an unrecognizable landscape. Indeed, camels and their owners appear like ghosts who can walk through the screen and enter into a third dimension, or migrate from dreams into reality, from their world into ours. Suddenly the camera switches perspective and cuts to the wide angle of the caravan congregated in a circle. Then Hauser's voice sets in as a way to remind us that this is his story. From this moment on, his narration and the images correspond directly: as the caravan stops, the camera cuts back to the crowd and we see a hand holding a compass, the blind guide tasting a handful of sand and communicating with the fellow travellers, and finally we see the caravan slowly disappearing behind a sand dune. Hauser's vision leaves the viewer with a sense of uncertainty. The story implies that only the blind cannot be misled because they do not rely on technical instruments (represented here by the compass) but on the sense of taste or on alternative

modes of understanding. Of particular importance here is how one finds *real* orientation in a world where the majority is subject to a mirage (imaginative fantasy). The blind man rejects technology in favor of other forms of perception: taste (although that seems illogical and improbable). The blind man uses other senses to supplement vision, rather than relying on technology. Important to recognize here is that there are life-and-death situations in which it is critical to be able to tell the difference between reality and imagination or fantasy.

Hauser's vision is characterized by uncertainty because his story, like the vision of the Caucasus and of pilgrims ascending a mountain, remains unfinished. Although he recounts the journey and the arrival of the caravan at the northern city, which in itself is a story, he cannot identify the central story that is supposed to play there. His dream constitutes a narrative frame for an untold or untellable tale and as such points to the limitations of conventional, linear forms of storytelling. A caravan stands for a continual journey toward and away from reality, at once a part of this world and apart from it, a form of aimless wandering in which one remains suspended between the past and present. The desert caravan also represents a journey to "death," repeating the previous dream of pilgrims climbing the mountain where death awaits. While Hauser lies on his deathbed, his caravan continues through the desert, or better yet, the caravan along with Hauser continues passing through the desert. The open-ended nature of his story leaves it up to the viewer to speculate about the significance of this vision, or where the caravan might lead us.

Similar to the filmic construction of Hauser's other two dream sequences, the footage that accompanies his last vision was originally shot under different

circumstances. In the audio commentary, Herzog explains how he filmed the desert caravan footage with the experimental filmmaker Klaus Wyborny in the Sahara desert. On the first day of the shooting a war broke out between Polisario natives and Moroccan occupying armies. However, the images we see in the film show no signs of the war, or of circumstances commonly associated with a war zone. Herzog also reveals that the story itself, like the story of Hauser, is really of his own invention, and that he cannot bring it to an end but wishes he could finish it. As he says in the audio commentary, it was a “mean trick” to get this into the film. Hauser’s story is thus a visual playground for Herzog to portray his own unfinished stories. This is another meta-filmic moment that draws attention to the director’s personal involvement, or even his conscious manipulation of the material. At the end we have more questions than answers, and we are asked to fill in the gaps of these unfinished stories.

In Herzog’s film, Hauser’s creative acts are always preceded by acts of violence, at least to the extent that they are triangulated with the act of socializing a new member into the community. The same society that teaches Hauser how to separate dream from reality, past from present, memory from imagination, as well as how to tell linear stories, is also responsible for his demise. The visions that emerge from this violent socialization take on the quality of something uncanny, mirage-like – not quite real but not fully imaginary either. And finally, this mode of creative production holds true not only within the diegetic world of the film but for the filmmaking process as well. What Herzog’s film seems to advocate are alternative views. He revisits history through its counter-narratives, which is ultimately a consideration on multiple perspectives; it represents a negotiation and transformation of new realities by presenting alternative perspectives. Most

importantly, as we have seen with Hauser's dream visions, the emphasis lies on the open-ended nature of these visions. At the end, there is no end and no narrative trajectory, but rather many associations and many possibilities.

Of particular importance to Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten* is Herzog's obsession with hybrid figures, and his employment of the motifs of the mirage, the windmills, and the desert caravan. As we will see, Sebald draws from his knowledge of Herzog and incorporates these images into his own narrative. They are, in a sense, Sebald's equivalent of the "found footage" that Herzog splices into his own film. Furthermore, the instances of the uncanny that are most strongly expressed through Hauser's visions also find textual expression in Sebald's book. In what follows, the discussion will first focus on Sebald's emigrants as liminal or hybrid figures, and then on the uncertainty of documenting their past lives and memories. Finally, the chapter turns to the way Sebald employs mirages and desert caravans to advance his stories and reinforce the connection between dream and reality, memory and imagination.

Alternative Visions in *Die Ausgewanderten*

The four long stories in *Die Ausgewanderten* present different accounts of the struggle of emigrants in exile. All four characters are in some way connected to the narrator: we are introduced to his landlord, his schoolteacher, his great-uncle, and an acquaintance. The nature of their relationship is based on both the narrator's desire to learn more about these mysterious men, and on his inability to adequately represent their lives. Regardless of how much information he gathers, they remain elusive figures. The first story begins with the narrator and his partner Clara searching for a place to live near

Norwich. They find a room in the house owned by Dr. Henry Selwyn's estranged wife. Dr. Selwyn is a retired doctor who lives like a hermit in her house, which along with its surrounding garden appear in the narrator's mind to be neglected. "Es war nicht, als ob irgend jemand hier wohnte," he remarks (9). When the narrator first meets Dr. Selwyn he finds him in his overgrown garden counting the blades of grass, which becomes an "irritating" hobby of his (11). The run-down appearance of the estate, as well as the way Dr. Selwyn spends his time, suggest that he lives in the past and that his present is overgrown with memories. Dr. Selwyn changes his name from Hersch to Henry and Seweryn to Selwyn, and for most of his life he conceals that he is of Jewish origin and born in Lithuania. When he finally reveals his true identity to his wife many years after their marriage, he believes it to be the reason for her detachment and his isolation. Later in life, he turns his attention to cultivating overgrown gardens and taking care of three neglected horses, Herschel, Humphrey, and Hippolytus, as he calls them. This is a subtle interconnection with Herzog's Hauser film. In the beginning, Hauser is associated with horses, which suggest that society treats him like an animal, but later in the film Hauser's perspectives become more human than human. His only consolation is his teacher's garden and he feels safest in the company of animals. Similarly, Dr. Selwyn's only companions are plants and animals, for he claims: "Als ich 1960 meine Praxis und meine Patienten aufgeben musste, löste ich meine letzten Kontakte mit der sogenannten wirklichen Welt. Seither habe ich in den Pflanzen und in den Tieren fast meine einzige Ansprache" (35). The implication here is that the neglected gardens and animals represent screens for his suppressed memories. Dr. Selwyn had a relatively restless life, suggesting that he was running from his past: he studied in England, then left for

Switzerland, found work in India, later returned to London and travelled through Europe on his motorcycle. The past eventually catches up with him, and he complains that “das Heimweh ihn im Verlauf der letzten Jahre mehr und mehr angekommen sei,” and the childhood memories of his Lithuanian homeland “melden sich wieder und kommen zurück” (30, 31). However, the return of the past is followed by Dr. Selwyn’s incapacity to confront it: “Die Jahre des zweiten Kriegs und die nachfolgenden Jahrzehnte waren für mich eine blinde und böse Zeit, über die ich, selbst wenn ich wollte, nichts zu erzählen vermöchte” (35). Similar to Kaspar Hauser, who yearns for his pre-civilized self, Dr. Selwyn longs for a life uncontaminated by his confession, because this revelation also resulted in a confrontation with his past self. At the end, unable to reconcile his past with present he takes his own life with a hunting rifle.

The ending of the first story merges with the opening of the second one, which begins with a report of the suicide of the narrator’s primary school teacher Paul Bereyter. Similar to the conclusion of “Dr. Henry Selwyn,” the termination of life does not mark the end but rather a new beginning. It prompts the narrator to learn more about this mysterious figure. Paul Bereyter was a “three-quarter Aryan,” and therefore not allowed to teach in Nazi Germany. He moves to France and assumes a tutoring position. During his absence his father dies, his girlfriend is deported to Theresienstadt, and the persecution of Jews begins. It remains open as to why Bereyter returns to Germany, but one important factor is “dass er von Grund auf ein Deutscher gewesen ist, gebunden an dieses heimatliche Voralpenland und an dieses elende S., das er eigentlich hasste” (84). As we know from Freud’s essay, the most uncanny place is one’s home, because it is both familiar and strange, a place of comfort and of exile. The paradox in Bereyter’s life

is that he is in exile at home and only at home in exile. Bereyter is thus torn between his sense of belonging to Germany and his detachment from his origins. He even serves six years in the German military, during which he “wird mehr gesehen haben, als ein Herz oder Auge hält” (82). After the war he returns to his old profession, but “mochte an die von blinden Flecken durchsetzte Vergangenheit nicht rühren” and feels, “dass er zu den Exilierten und nicht nach S. gehörte” (80, 88). The city to which he returns is also where the narrator grows up. We find out that Bereyter spends his life regularly deviating from the syllabus in both the classroom and in his personal life, and that his interests lie in “die Vermittlung von Wissen, das im Lehrplan nicht vorgesehen war” (56). In other words, his pedagogy is based on experiential learning—that is, learning through *performance*. He becomes known for his tendency to improvise in the classroom, and “aus einem Nichts heraus die schönsten Schulstunden [zu] halten” (83). His passion for performative learning echoes episodes in which Hauser, through his alien perspective, challenges his teachers with questions and observations that do not fit the categorical perceptions of the world, yet prove more fruitful than those of his mentors. Another direct parallel between Sebald’s emigrants and Hauser is their passion for cultivating (neglected) gardens, an act that contains both therapeutic and destructive functions. In Hauser’s case, we find him in the garden as he for the first time discriminates dreams from reality, while moments earlier we witness the destruction of Hauser’s plants, bloodstained ground, and a stork swallowing a helpless frog. Similar to the concept of “home,” which embodies both familiar and foreign elements, the garden is also a safe haven and a place of danger, a place of birth and death. This holds true for Bereyter’s connection to the garden as well: “Jeden Nachmittag [...] ist Paul im Garten hineingeschaut. Ein ruhiges Sichversenken in

bewegte Blätter zur Schonung und Besserung seines Auges” (85). While these peaceful moments might benefit his sickly eyes, the noun “Sichversenken” implies isolation from society. He eventually loses his sight, “Bald sah er nunmehr zerbrochene oder zersprungene Bilder” (88). The connection to Hauser’s blind guide in the desert presents itself here. Parallel to the blind guide, who despite his blindness could lead the caravan to the destination, Bereyter too could see more clearly or more creatively than many others. Yet Bereyter cannot cope with his present self because he cannot comprehend his past. He commits suicide by ending his life on train tracks. However, his suicide remains a mystery, for the narrator admits that “es sei eben [...] letzten Endes schwer zu wissen, woran einer Sterbe.” Even Mme. Landau, a long-time friend of the teacher, confirms the uncertainty surrounding his demise, asserting: “Ja sehr schwer ist das, man weiß es wahrhaftig nicht” (91). Even though the narrator finds out more details concerning his former schoolteacher, the essence of his life and death will forever remain a mystery.

The third story concerns the narrator’s great-uncle, Ambros Adelwarth, whom the narrator claims to have seen only once in his life, and about whom he knows very little. Indeed, the very first sentence informs us that the story that follows is highly mediated, for he says: “Ich habe kaum eine eigene Erinnerung an meinen Großonkel Adelwarth” (97). He embarks on a quest for information and details, travels twice to America, and seeks out his relatives, uncle Kasimir and aunt Fini, who can fill in the gaps about Adelwarth’s life. His great uncle emigrates to the United States before WWI and works as a butler and later a travel companion for Cosmo Solomon, the young heir of a wealthy Jewish family. Adelwarth accompanies Solomon to casinos and on a desert-crossing trip to Jerusalem, during which the latter attempts suicide and lapses into

insanity, resulting ultimately in his internment in an asylum. After Solomon's death, Adelwarth wishes to erase his memory. There is a hint at a homosexual relationship between the two, as uncle Kasimir points out, "Er ist natürlich, wie jeder leicht sehen konnte, von der anderen Partei gewesen" (129). For many relatives Adelwarth presents a mystery. According to Kasimir: "Je älter der Adelwarth-Onkel geworden ist, desto hohler ist er mir vorgekommen" (129). The narrator himself expresses similar difficulties when trying to mentally follow in the footsteps of Solomon and Adelwarth during their many adventures. He writes: "Näherte ich mich ihnen, so lösten sie sich vor meinen Augen auf und hinterließen nichts als den leeren Platz, den sie soeben noch eingenommen hatten" (181). The idea of images dissolving at their edges recalls Sebald's description of the transient nature of silent film images that disappear at the moment they appear.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the quote encapsulates the properties of a mirage, of an image that occupies both empirical and imaginary worlds. Both the silent film and mirage are representatives of the notion of transience that Adelwarth embodies. At the end, Adelwarth commits himself to the same asylum where Solomon ended up, and where he receives shock therapy and dies without the capacity to think and remember. Even before his internment,

⁶⁰ The moments of uncertainty in Sebald's work are especially evident in his references to silent films. For example, in *Schwindel. Gefühle.*, the narrator attempts to escape two strange men who keep following him, he writes, "Ich aber sah die beiden Angreifer seltsam zappelnd, als seien sie einem der ersten Filme entsprungen, im Zwielficht zwischen den Kolonnaden verschwinden" (124). Then again in "Campo Santo," a similar dynamic of appearing and disappearing is used to describe the manifestation of ghosts: "auf den ersten Blick sehen sie aus wie normale Leute, aber sowie man genauer hinschaue, verwischen sich ihre Gesichter und flackerten an den Rändern, gerade wie die Gesichter der Schauspieler in einem alten Film." (34). Sebald's conceptualization of silent cinema in "Kafka in Kino" recalls the definition of an experience that is uncanny: "Gespenstisch überhaupt sind die frühen Kinofilme, nicht nur weil sie mit Vorliebe von Persönlichkeitsspaltung, Doppel—und Wiedergängern, außersinnlicher Wahrnehmung und anderen parapsychologischen Phänomenen handeln, sondern auch aufgrund der technischen Gegebenheit, dass die Schauspieler durch den noch völlig unbeweglichen Bildrahmen aus- und eingehen wie Geister durch eine Mauer" (201-02). All these instances emphasize the transient and ghostly nature of cinema; cinematic images disappear at the moment they appear, leaving their viewers in a state of uncertainty because the closer we get to them, the further they recede from us. This is also similar to the process of remembering, namely, to the way our memories suddenly come to the surface, but then vanish as we try to arrest them.

“über die Vergangenheit zu reden zeigte er damals keinerlei Neigung” (144). Although his memories eventually start unraveling, and his urge to recount the past takes over, we learn “dass er trotz offenbar größtem Bedürfnis, weitererzählen zu können, nichts mehr herausbrachte, keinen Satz, kein Wort, kaum einen Laut” (149). In a sense, he reverses the development of Hauser. From an adventurous and in many ways fantastic life, Adelwarth is reduced to a ghostly existence as someone who is alienated from his own past.

A similar process of slow disintegration characterizes Max Aurach, a figure loosely based on an actual painter and the subject of the last and longest story. The narrator accidentally meets Aurach while living in Manchester. Their friendship can be divided into two phases: when they first meet in the mid 1960s, and then again twenty years later in 1989.⁶¹ It is during the second phase that the narrator learns about Aurach’s suppressed past and his memories that begin to re-surface. The most painful memory is his journey on the *Kindertransport* to England at the age of 15, while his parents remained behind and were eventually killed by the Nazis. Aurach gives up his native language when he parts from his parents in 1939, never to speak it again. He believes that this is the reason he cannot recall memories of his childhood in Germany. This parallels Kaspar Hauser and his inability to remember the years he spent locked up in the dungeon because he did not have language at the time. During his initial years in England, Aurach decides not to follow his relatives to America, “weil ich von nichts und niemandem mehr an meine Herkunft gemahnt werden wollte” (286). Instead he moves to Manchester, where he spends the rest of his life. However Manchester, the city of immigrants,

⁶¹ The relationship between the narrator and Max Aurach is similar to the relationship between the narrator and Austerlitz. See Chapter III.

reminds him of everything he is trying to forget. Aurach later confesses to the narrator that the main reason he wishes to immunize himself against the past is because he never really processed the death of his parents (285). He even entrusts the narrator with some photographs and a diary written by his mother, which he managed to read only twice, and whose contents is transcribed and pictured in the text. Much like the other three figures, Aurach is also haunted by the past: “Es gibt weder eine Vergangenheit noch eine Zukunft. Jedenfalls nicht für mich. Die bruchstückhaften Erinnerungsbilder, von denen ich heimgesucht werde, haben den Charakter von Zwangsvorstellungen” (270). He cannot come to terms with his present environment in Manchester and lives in his dusty art studio as a hermit.

Although the lives of these emigrants are different, what unites them is their liminal status in society and their unwillingness to conform to the norm and come to terms with the ghosts of the past that invade their present. At the end, all they are left with are dreams and memories, and often they cannot distinguish between the two, or they cannot reconcile their past lives with their current existence and therefore cannot be fully integrated into the present. They appear like ghosts lingering between the dead and the living, between past and present. Both ghosts and emigrants are liminal figures that represent the past and our desire to know more about the past. This is also where another connection between Sebald’s emigrants and Herzog’s Hauser can be detected. Hauser is like a ghost who suddenly returns to the land of the living. Unlike Hauser, Sebald’s emigrants go from the land of the living to the land of ghosts, even before their actual deaths, and thus they remain suspended between the two worlds. Sebald’s emigrants emerge as inverted reflections of Hauser’s struggle, which is open-ended just as his

dream visions are. The stories of the emigrants, even when they end in death, remain unfinished because the fragments of their lives assembled by the narrator do not provide us with conclusions; rather, their stories continue after the writing is finished. This continuation is not only due to the open-ended nature of the narrative, but also due to the ghostly nature of these figures. As the narrator remarks in the first story, “So also kehren sie wieder, die Toten” (36). Sebald’s emigrants are revenants who keep returning.

Sebald’s and Herzog’s interest in exploring the theme of return can be demonstrated on a structural level as well, that is, through their strategic recontextualization of materials. They both transport motifs and characters between their respective works so as to emphasize the involvement of the narrator or director and the overlapping nature of the subject matter. Figures, motifs, and dialogues from other Herzog films are interwoven into *Kaspar Hauser* (and vice versa), as if all of them constitute one ongoing cinematic production. For example, figures who appear in the *Kaspar Hauser* film, such as Hombrecito, Walter Steiner, Herbert Achternbusch, and Little King are also directly or indirectly present in other Herzog films.⁶² The recognition factor for the audience occurs, for example, when they identify Walter Steiner as a farm boy in *Kaspar Hauser*, since Herzog produced a documentary film about this very person only one year earlier. The same also applies for Sebald’s narratives, in which different motives (emptiness, silence, ghosts, revenants, outsiders, facades, trees, etc.) and figures (such as Kafka, the Butterfly Man, the hunter Gracchus, and Wittgenstein) are present throughout his prose fictions. For both Herzog and Sebald, this is an aesthetic gesture that

⁶² For example, Hombrecito is based on a character who appears in Herzog’s *Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes*; Walter Steiner, whom he casts as a farm boy in the *Kaspar Hauser* film, is also a subject of a documentary film entitled *Die große Ekstase des Bildschnitzers Steiner* (1973); Achternbusch, who also appears as a farm boy in the *Kaspar Hauser* film, wrote a screenplay for Herzog’s *Herz aus Glas* (1976); Little King has the most prominent role in *Auch Zwerge haben klein angefangen* (1970).

points to the plurality of meanings, as each recontextualization reveals new and different facets of the same motives and figures. The act of recontextualization makes them ghostly motifs in the technical sense, for they are able to crossover into other “worlds.” Both Herzog and Sebald expose the process behind the production: they intertwine historical documents with imaginary details, thereby creating certain meta-filmic and meta-textual instances that lead to uncertainty about what is real and what is imaginary. This is an advantageous juncture for them, because it creates room for alternative views and invites speculation and fosters imaginative supplementations.

The way Herzog’s film is integrated into the first story in *Die Ausgewanderten* is perhaps the best example of an instance of intellectual uncertainty in the text. The narrator first describes an episode with Dr. Selwyn’s slide show, then claims to have entirely forgotten it until his encounter with Herzog’s film, which in turn has no direct geographical or visual connection to the slide show. Dr. Selwyn’s slide show thus functions to foreshadow Herzog’s film. The slide show episode serves as a film within a film that ends in a dream, and it requires closer analysis. On one occasion, Dr. Selwyn invites the narrator and his wife to dinner and to view a slide show that documents his and his friend Edward’s trip to Crete. After dinner an old slide-projector is wheeled in and the guests are shown slides of the trip. The narrator describes the atmosphere leading up to the slide show as a prelude to moving images, “Das leise Surren des Projektors setzte ein, und der sonst unsichtbare Zimmerstaub erglänzte zitternd im Kegel des Lichts als Vorspiel vor dem Erscheinen der Bilder” (26). The narrator is inviting us to experience the slide show as if we are in the movie theater. It is then significant that the images of the two men’s journey to Crete also correspond to the predominant structure of

narrative feature films. Sebald's narrator reports on: 1) lively pictures of landscapes with their flora and fauna, which act as a set-up; 2) images depicting Edward and Dr. Selwyn, which emerge as a complication; and 3) the very last image of the Lasithi plateau, which serves as a resolution of the film. The importance of this structure is not only that it imitates the temporal and narrative flow of "moving pictures," but also that it creates moments of rupture as a way to produce an unsettling effect on its viewers. During the colorful landscape images, Dr. Selwyn and Edward offer lively voice-over. However, neither is able to make any remarks about photos in which they themselves appear or about the last image of the Lasithi plateau. The narrator notes that "während sie [die Bilder] leicht auf der Leinwand zitterten," the room was engulfed by complete silence (28). The images are thus first set in motion by the narration that accompanies them, and then suddenly interrupted by the silence. The lack of voice-over during the second part of the slide show creates a disruption in the flow of the narrative and parallels the rupture between the audio and visual dimensions of Hauser's dream visions, in which his narration gives way to purely visual and audio renderings of his dreams, as if the film is asking us to complete his visions or to take a journey with the caravan through the desert and add our own associations.⁶³ More importantly, the slide show, much like Hauser's dream visions, remains open-ended. It presents the reader with a narrative frame for a story yet to be told.

This open space created by the atmosphere of silence prompts the narrator to offer his own vision. It becomes apparent that each category of images evokes different

⁶³ Mark McCulloh, in his book *Understanding W. G. Sebald*, also remarks that for Sebald open-ended stories are encouraged, he writes: "The incompleteness of unfinished stories is for Sebald a characteristic that is desirable, not a sign of insufficiency or imperfection. Even where his narratives end with crescendo, suggesting at least provisional or interim closure, there is nevertheless a sense that the story, like life, is still going on. We don't know the ending" (31).

reactions in Dr. Selwyn and Edward, who is also present for the screening. The narrator suspects that their “Rückkehr aus der Vergangenheit” is an occasion for emotion, because both Edward and Dr. Selwyn make a youthful impression on the photos, although they are in their late sixties at the time the slides are taken. Yet the next sentence informs us that the narrator’s observation of Dr. Selwyn’s and Edward’s perturbed reactions to the sudden invasion of their past into the present are merely his own projections. He writes: “Vielleicht ist es mir aber auch nur so vorgekommen” (28). This is a typical Sebaldian phrase that exemplifies his strategic insertion of moments of uncertainty into the narrative. The emphasis here is on the fluidity between the narrator’s observed and his imagined experiences, because we cannot determine where his sober narration ends and his projections begin. This is also evident throughout *Die Ausgewanderten*, where the narrator interrupts the accounts, inserting his own personal memories and reflections: “in meiner Vorstellung” (44), “soweit man wusste” (48), “wenn mich nicht alles täuscht” (51), “wie ich vermute” (57), “warum, weiß ich auch nicht” (57), “wie ich jetzt erst in der Rückschau erkenne” (61), “in meiner Erinnerung” (62), “schien es mir” (89). More importantly, these phrases mark moments of uncertainty and they exemplify how memories or documented facts alone do not as such offer us understanding of the past; but when coupled with imaginative details they open up a space that is both familiar and foreign, certain and uncertain: that is, uncanny. The suggestion here is that for Sebald’s narrator the effect is far more important than the content. Similar to the effect created by Hauser’s dream visions, in Sebald’s narrative, too, being open to contingency also implies being open to unfinished stories and therefore being free from predetermined notions of storytelling.

The slide show, along with its trembling images that are embedded in an atmosphere of silence and uncertainty, encapsulates certain qualities of silent films and recalls Sebald's remarks on the uncanny effects early technologies of representation generated in their audience.⁶⁴ In his short book review entitled "Kafka im Kino," Sebald claims that early cinematic images, much like photographs, produce an uncanny effect and as such are a true expression of a "transzendente[r] Blick, der gerichtet scheint auf ein Leben, an welchem der tragische Held keinen Anteil mehr hat" (202). This quote asserts the alienation of the protagonist from "life," and this is the connection to Selwyn and the other emigrants. The reason Dr. Selwyn and Edward cannot make any comments on the photos depicting them is because they are displaced in time, and their silence suggests that they cannot reconcile past with present. As a result, their feelings of security, commonly associated with consistency and continuity in the world, are replaced by uncertainty. Recollecting past events one has experienced is similar to remembering film: the images cannot be fully "grasped." Sebald investigates the ways in which our minds construct our experience of time itself, revealing continuity of time as an illusion.⁶⁵

The uncanny nature of the slide show is further amplified during the last picture of Dr. Selwyn's trip to Crete, when the narrator conjures up an image of a mirage, a concept that embodies the interplay between imagination and reality. The mountain that hovers above the Lasithi plateau reminds the narrator of an optical illusion:

⁶⁴ In reference to Kafka's experience with early photography, Sebald claims that while looking at old photographs one is often overcome by "Schrecken der sukzessiven Derealisation der eigenen Person und des sich annähernden Todes" ("Kafka im Kino" 201).

⁶⁵ In Sebald's *Austerlitz*, the protagonist is convinced that our linear conception of time is an illusion. He questions the metaphor of the "flow of time" feels that "sämtliche Zeitmomente gleichzeitig nebeneinander existierten, beziehungsweise dass nichts von dem, was die Geschichte erzählt, wahr wäre, das Geschehene noch gar nicht geschehen ist, sondern eben erst geschieht, in dem Augenblick, in dem wir es denken" (152). Most notably, he is convinced that, "Die Zeit [...] von allen unseren Erfindungen weitaus die künstlichste [sei]" (149).

Der im Süden die Ebene überragende, über zweitausend Meter hohe Berg Spathi wirkte wie eine Luftspiegelung hinter der Flut des Lichts. Auf dem weiten Talboden waren die Kartoffel- und Gemüsefelder, die Obsthaine, die anderen kleinen Baumgruppen und das unbestellte Land ein einziges Grün in Grün, das durchsetzt war von den Aberhunderten weißen Segeln der Windpumpen. (28)

The narrator sees the actual mountain, but due to certain light formations it reminds him of a mirage (“Luftspiegelung”), which suggests that this episode occupies a space that lies somewhere outside of our conception of time, between the empirically visible and the imagined. It inspires the narrator to add his own associations to the image. In fact, the narrator’s description of the last image depicting the Lasithi plateau calls into mind Herzog’s first feature film, *Lebenszeichen* (1968), which contains one such cinematic pan of a valley in Crete populated by trees, fields, and windmills.



Although this connection is not confirmed by the text, it nevertheless leaves a strong impression that Sebald’s dialogue with Herzog often remains unmarked. It is then appropriate that this passage contains a mental image of a mirage, a concept that connotes a deceptive appearance in which an image of some object occupies a world between the empirical and the imaginary. This is parallel to the meta-textual and meta-cinematic character of Sebald’s and Herzog’s respective works: they displace the original subject by

integrating it into a new context to reveal hidden correlations between seemingly contrary concepts such as memory and imagination. Herzog's films and Sebald's prose fictions thus blur the lines between "authentic" representations of historical figures and creative adaptations. It is precisely this notion of uncanny uncertainty between the polarities in their work, the way in which the documentary material is colored with fantastical elements, that allows them to explore how dream and reality productively collide to reach places that neither can reach alone.

One such place is the crack that punctures the narrator's mental image of a mirage hovering above the Lasithi plateau. The silent reception during the last image in the slide show intensifies and a new vision is created, "Auch vor diesem Bild saßen wir lange und schweigend, so lang sogar, dass zuletzt das Glas in dem Rähmchen zersprang und ein dunkler Riss über die Leinwand lief" (29). What are we to make of the crack that appears on the screen at the end?⁶⁶ One possibility is that the crack stands for vision in its own right, and embodies the structure of a narrative that is characterized by authorial interventions, or by the breach between present and past. Both the atmosphere of silence and the rupture at the end are open spaces for the narrator to intervene and invite supplementary associations, similar to the fault lines between the perspective of the narrator and that of his protagonists. The "crack" becomes representative of issues of memory and recollection, whereby the emphasis lies on the dichotomy between intentional and accidental recall. What this crack represents is precisely the divide that separates the past from the present, and the impossibility of predicting how transit from the past can emerge into the present. Herzog and Sebald try to operate artistically

⁶⁶ Claudia Öhlschläger discusses the significance of this crack in her book *Beschädigtes Leben: erzählte Risse. W. G. Sebalds poetische Ordnung des Unglückes* (37-53).

precisely in the “liminal” space of this breach itself: the cross-over terrain between past and present, real and imaginary, document and fiction, emphasizing how images themselves, like mirages, are the privileged expression of this hybridity.

Dr. Selwyn’s images of the Lasithi plateau make a deep impression on the narrator. Yet despite the fact that this moment, or as the narrator calls it, this “bis zum Zerspringen festgehaltene Anblick,” makes a strong impression on the narrator, “dennoch hatte [ich] ihn geraume Zeit hindurch vergessen gehabt” (29). The crack thus anticipates this moment of forgetting by alerting us to a certain danger of focusing on the past for too long. Images can be looked at for so long until they fade, similar to our memories. The crack suggests that our memories or our desire to arrest them is an illusion, just like the mirage the narrator imagines seeing. In other words, regardless of the effect created by certain images, episodes, or experiences, we cannot intentionally retain them as memories. As the narrator writes toward the end of his account of Dr. Selwyn, “Doch haben, wie mir in zunehmendem Maße auffällt, gewisse Dinge so eine Art wiederzukehren, unverhofft und unvermutet, oft nach einer sehr langen Zeit der Abwesenheit” (36). The narrator’s memories resurface unexpectedly, as a result of his confrontation with visual images, suggesting that visual associations can elicit memories that we fail to conjure up intentionally—i.e., their recollection cannot be freely controlled or willed.

The memory of Dr. Selwyn’s slide show returns to the narrator a few years later during an encounter with Herzog’s *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle* in a London cinema. One scene in particular triggers the narrator’s memories: the garden conversation between Kaspar Hauser and his teacher Daumer, whereby Hauser, significantly, “zum

ersten mal unterscheidet zwischen Traum und Wirklichkeit, indem er seine Erzählung einleitet mit den Worten: Ja, es hat mich geträumt. Mich hat von Kaukasus geträumt” (29). Carol Jacobs observes that Hauser’s phrasing suggests that he is “both dreamer and the dreamed,” and that this episode leaves us with the feeling that “we’ve been at the flicks.”⁶⁷ Indeed, the way the film is incorporated into the text allows for the preservation of the medial specificity of the flowing, moving images. The narrator’s description of Herzog’s found footage sequence further supports this sensation:

Die Kamera *bewegt sich* dann von rechts nach links in einem weiten Bogen und *zeigt* uns das Panorama einer von Bergzügen umgebenen, sehr indisch aussehenden Hochebene, auf der zwischen grünem Gebüsch und Waldungen pagodenartige Turm- oder Tempelbauten mit seltsam dreieckigen Fassaden *aufragen*, Follies, die in dem pulsierend das Bild überblendenden Licht mich stets von neuem *erinnern* an die Segel der Windpumpen von Lasithi, die ich in Wirklichkeit noch gar nicht gesehen habe. (29, emphasis added)

The scenery this passage evokes is rather dream-like, and as Mark McCulloh points out, it represents a typical Sebaldian landscape: “Such ‘follies’— gardens, monuments, temples, palaces — are perhaps both the natural creation of a subconscious utopian drive as well as a manifestation of man’s tendency to repress transience and mortality” (31). Of particular importance is the way the narrator’s description of the film is told in present tense, unlike the rest of the text that frames this passage. The present tense underlines the narrator’s comment that these images are still replaying in his mind, or that the past has uncannily come back to life in the present. His description of the film in the present tense parallels the invasion of his memories into the present. Like Kaspar Hauser in his dream

⁶⁷ See Carol Jacobs “What does it mean to Count?” (918)

vision of a desert caravan, Sebald's narrator sees what is yet to be realized in the last image of the Lasithi plateau, whereby the uncertainty between imaginary and real experiences comes to the foreground. In a sense, he projects his vision into the future, as he has yet to see the plateau with his own eyes. This is similar to the idea that films themselves are a kind of imaginative seeing, that is, when watching a film one is projected back into the past, or forward into the future. The narrator sees what he has never seen, and thus recalls an image that was stored in his memory but that is not based on any real experience or immediate perception. Herzog's *Hauser*, and perhaps *Lebenszeichen* as well, are interlaced here with the narrator's personal memories. The narrator's vision of Lasithi is based on second-hand experience; he has substituted Herzog's image for his own immediate perception. It is significant that this invocation of images is triggered by a film sequence that has no direct correlation to the long-forgotten photograph of the Lasithi plateau. The narrator's emphasis on the difference (or lack thereof) between memory and imagination conjures up images that remain forever out of reach. While in Herzog's film images of Burma stand in for Hauser's vision of the Caucasus, in Sebald's text the narrator is reminded of an image of Crete when confronted with images of the Caucasus (or Burma). Hauser's newly learned ability to differentiate dream from reality in Herzog's film inspires Sebald's narrator to re-blur the boundaries. In this particular instance, the narrator is adding to Hauser's imaginative and visual associations. This points out the ways in which Herzog's and Sebald's narrative techniques are both based on visual associations rather than logical conclusions.

Sebald exploits images of a mirage and a desert caravan throughout *Die Ausgewanderten*, employing it twice in the story "Ambros Adelwarth" and once again in

“Max Aurach.” The concept of the mirage appears when Adelwarth’s employer and friend, Cosmo Solomon, suffers a second nervous breakdown upon viewing Fritz Lang’s 1922 film *Dr. Mabuse der Spieler* (141). Lang’s Dr. Mabuse is the master of disguise, who can adapt to any environment: he appears as a gambler, the head of a criminal gang, the brain behind a forgery operation, a false revolutionary, and a hypnotist who can paralyze the will and destroy the mind. Aunt Fini tells the narrator how Adelwarth described Solomon’s reaction upon seeing the film, which captured him within its labyrinthine structure and mirror distortions, nearly driving him to insanity. One episode in particular greatly disturbs Solomon. Towards the end of the film, a hypnotist by the name of Sandor Weltmann induces a sort of collective hallucination in his audience and the image of a mirage appears:

Aus dem Bühnenhintergrund tauchte, so hat Cosmo es Ambros aufs neue stets wieder beschrieben, das Trugbild einer Oase auf. Eine Karawane kam aus einem Palmenhain hervor auf die Bühne und von dort in den Saal herunter, um mitten durch die voller Erstaunen ihre Köpfe wendenden Zuschauer hindurchzuziehen und so spukhaft, wie sie erschienen war, wieder zu verschwinden. (141)

The image of a desert caravan leaving the stage and entering the world of its audience recalls Herzog’s found-footage sequence in which the desert caravan moves towards the camera, as if it is coming directly at its viewers. The cross-over between dream and reality is further elevated in Sebald’s text when Solomon himself somehow leaves the theater together with the caravan and now can no longer discern where he is. Solomon enters the mirage so that it becomes his reality, that is, he confuses the film for reality, much like Kaspar Hauser initially cannot distinguish between dream and reality. In both

cases the implication is that there is a certain fluidity between dream and reality, past and present, living and dead. In Sebald's work more generally, the image of the desert caravan sweeping through the desert is an allusion to the Biblical exodus, and hence a general cipher for displacement and exile. Hauser's dream replicates this, since there is a goal (the city, the promised land), but the story that is supposed to emerge there remains unknown. This is because the story of redemption has not (yet) occurred.

The image of the desert caravan appears once more in the "Ambros Adelwarth" story, but this time it is connected with Adelwarth himself. After the narrator outlines the major events in Adelwarth's life, he still does not feel closer to him. The narrator then turns to Adelwarth's diary, which he inherits from his aunt Fini and presents as evidence, as testimony whose content is both transcribed and at times pictured in the text. From his aunt Fini, the narrator also learns that Adelwarth's adventures aroused in her a suspicion that he was suffering from Korsakov's syndrome, "bei dem [...] der Erinnerungsverlust durch phantastische Erfindungen ausgeglichen wird" (149). Since we cannot authenticate his accounts, we are left to speculate which stories may be true or which may be invented. This is similar to Sebald's narrator, who often intertwines facts with fictions, as well as to Herzog's mode of narration about Kaspar Hauser. Adelwarth's journal contains one telling passage about his dream that recalls Hauser's story of the desert caravan led by a blind man. While on his journey through Palestine with Solomon, Adelwarth dreams of a blind guide leading them through the desert. However, unlike in Herzog's film, Adelwarth's dream caravan reaches the city, and in this city the people have all they need because whatever they sow grows immediately (211). Such a dream is like a Fata Morgana, visible yet unattainable, remaining forever out of reach. More importantly, the

desert caravan continues its journey through the narrative, becoming a caravan of associations. Much like certain motifs and characters that reappear in Sebald's work, the image of a desert caravan travels from one story to another, it becomes a ghostly motif that keeps on returning.

Similar to the production behind Hauser's dream vision of the desert caravan, the recontextualization of found-footage that was originally shot under different pretenses, the production behind Adelwarth's diary is also a moment of authorial intervention. Sebald explains in an interview that Adelwarth's diary is an invention.⁶⁸ In fact, Sebald wrote it himself. Although it remains unclear whether all diary entries transcribed in the text have been fabricated, if we are aware of one fabrication all the evidence stands as suspect.⁶⁹ Just as Herzog uses Hauser as a medium for his own story of a caravan and the desert, so too does Sebald's narrator use Adelwarth's diary as a playground to visualize his own ending for Herzog's unfinished story.

In the last story of *Die Ausgewanderten* the narrator explicitly employs the concept of mirage and the image of a desert caravan as a way to describe the difficulty of representing Max Aurach. While channeling his memories, Sebald's narrator sees a mental image of Max Aurach sitting in front of a fresco, which depicts a desert caravan that looked as if it "von Dünen hinweg direkt auf den Betrachter zu sich bewegte" (243). This is a significant visual image because it not only evokes Fritz Lang's sequence

⁶⁸ When asked whether his great uncle really kept diaries, Sebald responds, "Yes, in several languages," yet admits that the physical journal itself is an invention and one entry written in English is not authentic: "Ah, that however, is falsification. I wrote it. What matters is all true. The big events-the schoolteacher putting his head on the railway line, for instance- you might think those were made up for dramatic effect. But on the contrary, they are all real. The invention comes in at the level of minor detail most of the time, to provide l'effet du reel" ("Who Is W. G. Sebald" by Carole Angier, 72).

⁶⁹ Michael Niehaus in his article "No Foothold. Institutions and Buildings in W. G. Sebald's Prose," explains how Adelwarth and Solomon's adventures are to some extent intertexts from Chateaubriand's journey. Similar to Adelwarth and Solomon, Chateaubriand also traveled from Venice to Jerusalem, and was a traveling writer *par excellence* (326).

discussed earlier, but it also echoes Herzog's experimental footage of the desert caravan moving towards the camera. Sebald's narrator continues with the ekphrastic description of the fresco:

Infolge der Ungeschicktheit des Malers und der schwierigen Perspektive, die er gewählt hatte, wirkten die menschlichen Figuren sowohl als die Lasttiere in ihren Umrissen leicht verzerrt, so dass es, wenn man die Lider halb senkte, tatsächlich war, als erblicke man eine in der Helligkeit und Hitze zitternde Fata Morgana. Und insbesondere an Tagen, an denen Aurach mit Kohle gearbeitet und der pudrig feine Staub seine Haut mit einem metallischen Glanz imprägniert hatte, schien es mir, als sei er soeben aus dem Wüstenbild herausgetreten oder als gehöre er in es hinein. (243)

The emphasis here lies on the alternative method this particular painter has chosen. The narrator is not criticizing the painter's lack of skill ("Ungeschicktheit") or his unconventional point of view ("die schwierige Perspektive"), but rather underlining that his method also reveals new ways of seeing. The fantastic moment of Aurach and the mirage-like caravan fresco invites the reader to imagine observing the fresco with half closed eyes, so that we can envision Aurach covered in charcoal as if he just appeared from the desert scene. Accordingly, the narrator experiences Aurach more as a mirage than as a tangible character. Both the narrator's description of the fresco and his perception of Aurach share traits Sebald associates with silent film images, "flickering" at the edges, like ghosts. On one hand, then, Aurach is an image, visible yet intangible, which is subject to the process of refraction and appears to us in its distorted form, while on the other hand, within the realm of poetic expression, he connotes an illusion of an

image, constantly receding out of reach before the approaching wanderer. This portrayal suggests that the narrator's mental image of Aurach is "fuzzy," and as such can never be corrected, for it always flickers like images of silent cinema, resisting any attempt to stabilize it. It is always a hybrid between empirical evidence and imaginary elaboration. The narrator functions as a refracting medium: his representations are filtered through his imagination and presented to us in fragmented, distorted form. Neither text nor image can ever capture the core of an experience because the immediacy and the authenticity of the event will forever remain inaccessible. The suggestion here is that an authentic representation is like a Fata Morgana, visible yet not tangible, reserved as a departure from the real, or as an imagined image.

The paradox inherent in the concept of the mirage is finally illustrated in Aurach's artistic method of production as well as in the narrator's inability to represent the painter. Aurach's painting process, "als auch das mit dem Zeichen verbundene andauernde Verwischen des Gezeichneten mit einem von Kohle völlig durchdrungenen Wollappen war in Wirklichkeit eine einzige, nur in den Stunden der Nacht zum Stillstand kommende Staubproduktion" (239). Aurach's "Staubproduktion," the production of dust that at the same time implies destruction, parallels the narrator's own process of writing about this painter, or rather, his inability to achieve adequate representation: "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" (345). In this instance Aurach's "Staubproduktion" is analogous to the narrator's "Skrupulantismus." This simultaneous process of documentation and disorientation is found in Aurach's drawing, which is reproduced in

the text, a portrait with disjointed and superimposed black strokes of charcoal, creating a background of chaos and foreground of interrupted contours of the face. Aurach's



drawing is left unfinished and remains ambiguous because we cannot discern whether the face is male or female, young or old. This is similar to Hauser's unfinished dream visions that provide us with frames for stories yet to be told. The drawing thus invokes the process of Aurach's artistic production, because we do not see the result but rather the process of artistic production itself. His constant layering and

un-layering is almost dream-like. The ecstatic blurring of lines, superimposed onto one surface, creates traces of the past that can never be accessed, but only lead to further associations and visions.

While constantly perfecting his work, and constantly creating more dust, Aurach is never satisfied with the outcome and thus remains unable to achieve the desired end. Aurach himself attributes his resulting state of mind to the process of his artistic technique, suggesting that it has indeed led to his collapse. It can be found in the center of Aurach's studio, where the dust has gathered to create Aurach's truest signature, a "verhärtete und verkrustete Masse" that extends the stroke of his signature to the point of abstraction, "die stellenweise einem Lavaausfluß gleicht und von der Aurach behauptet, dass sie das wahre Ergebnis darstelle seiner fortwährenden Bemühung und den offenkundigsten Beweis für sein Scheitern" (237-38). The sediment functions as evidence for the artistic representation of memory and becomes more telling of the process of

drawing, the act of documenting emotions and memories, than of the finished artistic product. In other words, it is not a particular painting that speaks for his downfall or success, but rather the accumulation of traces, whose origin, or whose beginning, is forever out of reach: like a Fata Morgana, it remains a vision, a memory of personal history.

Aurach encounters the ultimate crisis of representation when attempting to capture the figure of the man with a butterfly net, creating a direct correlation to the narrator's portrayal of Aurach. Aurach's attempts to depict and capture this image bring him, along with the surface of his canvas, to the point of destruction, causing him to seek refuge in "Betäubungsmitteln" that further result in hallucinations. The man with the butterfly net and references to butterflies haunts all four stories.⁷⁰ Chasing butterflies can be understood as a metaphor for a descent to madness, which would then suggest that Sebald's emigrants have not only physically migrated but mentally as well. It is not clear whether Aurach indeed encounters this figure or whether it is part of his drug-induced hallucination. Important to note is that the butterfly man intervenes at the moment when Aurach is contemplating suicide while standing at the pinnacle of Mount Grammont and observing what resembles the typical romantic landscape, "da sah ich von dort droben von neuem die Genfer Seelandschaft vor mir, vollkommen unverändert, [...] und reglos

⁷⁰ The narrator sees Dr. Selwyn wearing knee-length shorts, with a shoulder bag and a butterfly net during the slide show of the latter's trip to Crete (26). The images of the slide show are not reproduced in the text, but a photograph depicting a man who is standing at the mountaintop holding a butterfly net is. We are told that the narrator accidentally encountered this image in a Swiss magazine few days prior to witnessing the slide show, and that it depicts Nabokov, who was himself a butterfly catcher. Aunt Fini mentions a man holding a white net on a pole as she looks out the window with Adelwarth, and the latter says: "It's the butterfly man, you know. He comes round here quite often" (151). Adelwarth misses his last therapy session before dying and the reason he gives is, "It must have slipped my mind whilst I was waiting for the butterfly man" (170). In the last story there are two references to a Russian boy of about ten who chases butterflies (319, 321).

bis auf die wenigen auf dem tiefblauen Wasser drunten mit der unglaublichsten Langsamkeit ihre weiße Spur ziehenden winzigen Schiffchen” (258). Aurach explains that he would have indeed plummeted into the abyss if it was not for the butterfly man who appeared out of nowhere and reminded him that it was time to think about the “Abstieg,” and thus saved Aurach from falling into the realm of the dead. This fantastic episode can be understood as the intervention of contingency that forever alters Aurach’s life. From that point onward, Aurach is trying to recreate this contingency, yet what he is trying to represent is non-representable. The impossibility of reproducing this grey area, the transition between life and death, between falling and catching, is illustrated by the life-long process of remembering the face of the figure. Such memories always take him back to his studio and the “über nahezu ein Jahr sich hinziehenden schweren Arbeit an dem gesichtslosen Porträt *Man with a Butterfly Net*, das er für eines seiner verfehltesten Werke halte, weil es, seines Erachtens, keinen auch annähernd nur zureichenden Begriff gebe von der Seltsamkeit der Erscheinung, auf die es sich beziehe” (260). Neither the canvas nor Aurach himself can capture this intervention of contingency. Sebald’s narrator is then recreating a similar contingency by writing about this painter, a process that only leads to convoluted “Skrupulantismus” and confusion of the real and the imaginary. In a sense, just as Aurach can never capture the butterfly man, the narrator will never be able to capture the essence of his characters, whether through visual or narrative discourse, for the moments in which they seem the closest they will also be the furthest away. Thus, Aurach is to Sebald’s narrator as the butterfly man is to Aurach. Aurach’s portraits refuse to portray, just as the narrator’s narration refuses to narrate. The same effect is transposed onto the reader, who is asked to engage with the text by connecting associations and

forming an image out of fragments offered first by Aurach and then by the narrator. The elusive nature of Sebald's emigrants echoes Herzog's claim at the beginning of his Hauser film: "Das Rätsel seiner Herkunft ist bis heute nicht gelöst." This is precisely where both Sebald and Herzog want to leave their readers/viewers. All representation (of traumatic memory) is imperfect and we have to treat it with humility because such is the human condition. All we can do is push deeper and deeper into better approximations of an ever-evasive reality. The goal of complete understanding or absolute memory seems to recede as we approach it.

What both Herzog and Sebald document are not Kaspar Hauser and Henry Selwyn & co. as authentic representations, but rather, the very process of narrating about and documenting the lives of these characters. At the end, these characters convey much larger issues. They become representatives who exceed their personal lives. In this space of making there is a gap of uncertainty that becomes apparent. Sebald and Herzog explore the space between memory and imagination, a space conditioned by being free from predetermined "objective" parameters and open to the play of chance and authorial intervention. They set out to show the process of seeing, namely how both stories and images are constructed. Just as Herzog's work is meta-cinematic, Sebald's is meta-fictional. Herzog becomes a kind of cinematic model from which Sebald extracts certain meta-fictional practices. This makes Herzog and his film into much more than just another "intertext" in Sebald's repertory, and it also reinforces the importance of film more generally for his work.

Chapter 3

Mirroring of filmic settings in *Austerlitz* and the films of Alain Resnais

W. G. Sebald's last published prose fiction, *Austerlitz*, epitomizes the malleability of visual and textual representations in order to expose history and memory as perpetual systems of change. In so doing, it challenges not only the notions of grand, linear narratives, but also our chronological conception of time. The story concerns a Jewish exile, Jacques Austerlitz, who grows up with Welsh Calvinist foster parents while his true origins remain a mystery until his 50s, when he starts to recover puzzled memories of having arrived from Prague in Wales on the *Kindertransport* at the age of four.

Austerlitz's life begins to unfold in the course of time, much like a filmic sequence does. Of particular significance in this chapter are the moments in Austerlitz's process of recollection and in the development of the narrative that are directly triggered by or related to certain films, because these filmic instances, along with their architectural settings, also mark the decisive junctures in Austerlitz's life. What interests me is how Sebald uses the idiosyncrasies of the film medium to represent the mechanisms of memory in the text. This chapter thus seeks to explore new modes of reflection in a world in which perceptions of history and memory are neither static nor given, but rather dynamic, relational, and subject to change.

Unlike in Sebald's other three prose fictions, where film references tend to be more sporadic, the prominence of film in *Austerlitz* is evident from the outset and throughout the narrative. As Sebald's works develop, a general trend toward more

cinematic “intertexts” grows accordingly. In *Austerlitz* individual films or film characters often figure as motivators or descriptors of Austerlitz’s past and of his character. For example, when the narrator encounters Austerlitz for the first time, he is reminded of the hero Siegfried in Fritz Lang’s *Die Nibelungen* (1924), a film known to be one of Hitler’s favorites (114).⁷¹ Later, we learn that Austerlitz grows up going to the cinema to watch weekly newsreels instead of going to church on Sundays.⁷² When he first discovers that his real name is Austerlitz, the only association that comes to his mind is Fred Astaire, whose real name was also Austerlitz (103).⁷³ His childhood nanny Vera, whom he seeks out much later in his life, informs him that just before he boarded the *Kindertransport*, she bought him a “Chaplinheftchen,” which most likely refers to a series of comics published as promotional items for Chaplin’s films (253). Later Austerlitz attempts to visualize “die Titelzeichnung des Chaplin-Heftchens” (ibid.), as a way of vivifying and arresting that moment in the past, but this only leads him further away from it (316). These references indicate that Austerlitz is framed as a film figure and that the emphasis here lies on the ephemeral and the evanescent aspects of film. Austerlitz’s life is presented through a series of moving pictures (“bewegte Bilder”), in both its literal and metaphorical sense. As we will see, Austerlitz’s past (and memory) can only be attested to for a brief instant before they vanish, like the images on the cinematic screen.

⁷¹ Klaus Bonn, in his essay “W. G. Sebalds Laufende Bilder,” points to the ironic undertone of this association.

⁷² After the end of WWII, Austerlitz finally realizes that there exists a world outside of Wales when he for the first time encounters moving images. The new epoch “begann für mich damit, dass ich, verbotenerweise, zum erstenmal ins Kino ging und von da an jeden Sonntagvormittag aus dem Gehäuse des Filmvorführers Owen, der einer der drei Söhne des Geistersehers Evan war, die sogenannte tönende Wochenschau mir anschaute” (88-89).

⁷³ In an interview with Martin Doerry and Volker Hage (2001), Sebald reveals that the impulse for the book was the name Austerlitz, and that the name does not stand for the “Schlacht,” but primarily for Fred Astaire: “Ich habe einmal im Radio gehört, dass Astaire mit bürgerlichem Namen Austerlitz hieß, was mir zunächst unwahrscheinlich vorkam. Man kennt ja diese Fred-Astaire-Filme, wo man ihn herumsteppen sieht-der letzte Gedanke, der mir dabei gekommen wäre, ist der, dass er einer jüdischen Familie entstammte: Austerlitz ist ein jüdischer Name” (199).

That Sebald characterizes *Austerlitz* by an informed interest in cinema is most strongly evidenced by the juxtaposition of French New Wave and Nazi propaganda films. Austerlitz explicitly mentions having seen Alain Resnais's *Toute la mémoire du monde* (All the Memory of the World, 1956), and makes numerous allusions to another film by Resnais, *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (Last Year in Marienbad, 1961) (297-310). The titles of Resnais's films imply the workings of memory, the passing of time, and transience. This is important, because Sebald was careful in selecting films with evocative titles that connote the process of recollection. The references to Resnais's films stand in stark opposition to the two Nazi propaganda films that Austerlitz must reflect upon or examine while doing research on the fate of his parents. From Vera, Austerlitz learns that his father, Maximilian, saw Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (1935), and that the film had a profound impact on him. Furthermore, Austerlitz's search for his mother culminates in his confrontation with the Nazi pseudo-documentary film about Theresienstadt. The reason why Sebald references propaganda films is because this genre disguises real memory by creating an artificial representation, while Resnais's films explore the notion of memory. Sebald thus offers two unlikely pairs of film references that frame Austerlitz's process of recollection and situate the protagonist not only in history, but also in film history.⁷⁴ By deconstructing the notions of grand narrative, Resnais's films expose the inherent constructedness of the medium. Nazi propaganda films, by contrast, do not expose themselves as play, but rather mask and manipulate the content to assert political power. Although coming from two opposite directions, these films provide the narrator not only with thematic and structural threads but also with both

⁷⁴ Mathias Frey comes to a similar observation, see "Theorizing Cinema in Sebald and Sebald with Cinema."

the historical and the architectural setting onto which he can then project his own account.

The ways the four films appear in the text differ significantly. Resnais's films operate on a metadiegetic level where they are implemented by the narrator as tools for structuring the conflicts between memory and imagination in certain scenic sequences (*L'année dernière à Marienbad*), or as metacommentaries on the problems of the archive, protection of data, organizational strategies for maximizing access (or preventing it), and preserving the past for present and future generations (*Toute la mémoire du monde*). *Triumph des Willens* is retold through Vera, and there is no evidence to suggest that Austerlitz actually saw the film. He only stops in Nuremberg to attempt to re-live his father's experience there. The film thus operates on an intradiegetic level, in the discourse of the figure. The Theresienstadt film, by contrast, exists on a diegetic level of Austerlitz's narrative and is described in terms of his engagement with it. Considering that Sebald evokes films that stand in service to memory and history, the questions are: how does his writing explore the different ways in which film affects not only personal but also collective memories, and how does cinematic technique model certain forms of memory-writing?

The key characteristic shared by Resnais's films and Sebald's *Austerlitz* is the mechanism that engages issues of confinement and proliferation, most profoundly expressed through their persistent thematization of architecture, time, and memory. More specifically, Resnais's films that appear in *Austerlitz* employ architecture and time as metaphors of memory. This chapter explores how Sebald creates settings that mirror those invoked in the central films, so that Austerlitz's encounters with the three films

mentioned above are restaged in his personal life as well: he is an adamant researcher in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, he accompanies a woman to Marienbad, and his confrontation with the Theresienstadt film marks the moment in which Austerlitz himself becomes an amateur filmmaker. He not only visits Theresienstadt, but he also uses an existing Nazi propaganda film to construct a new film. These places and filmic settings, he believes, will tell him something about his hidden past. *Austerlitz* investigates how minds perceive, record, and ultimately construct an experience of time, whereby Resnais's cinematic technique becomes a kind of model for Sebald's narrative project. Resnais adopts unconventional narrative techniques, in particular associative editing coupled with a dialectic between close-up and wide angle shots to represent themes of architecture, time, and memory, whereby the interrelationship of consciousness, traumatic memory, and imagined pasts comes to the foreground.⁷⁵ This chapter explores how that nexus functions in Sebald's last book.

Before turning specifically to films in *Austerlitz*, this chapter takes two preliminary steps. In order to understand better the role of Resnais's films in Sebald's text, it is necessary to outline briefly his contribution to film history and to describe his films that appear in *Austerlitz*, so as to set up the visual and conceptual background against which Sebald's book will be analyzed. The second step focuses on Austerlitz himself to illustrate the complex terrain of his mind and how it parallels the labyrinthine

⁷⁵ The following two films from Resnais express the connectedness of consciousness, memory, and imagined pasts most clearly: *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) offers a series of conversations over a 36-hour period between a French woman (referred to as She) and a Japanese man (He) with the bombing of Hiroshima as a backdrop. The two muse on memory and forgetfulness, mostly consisting of Her narrating and His interjections accusing her of lying and contradicting. *Je t'aime Je t'aime* (1960) employs a science-fiction framework, and similar to Chris Marker's *La jette* (1962), a man is selected to participate in time travel experiments to his personal past. As a result of a technical error, he experiences these events out of chronological sequence.

structure of Resnais's films. Finally, the chapter explores the three filmic locations that pertain particularly to Austerlitz's inner development, and to the way the narrative itself is structured.

The Films of Alain Resnais

So why Resnais, and not some other film director? For Sebald, referencing Resnais has stylistic and historical implications. Resnais's filmic career begins in the late 1940s, in the aftermath of WWII, and during the amnesia that spread over Europe. Since Sebald himself concentrates on this period and its effects on literary production, Resnais's works present a suitable backdrop.⁷⁶ What separates Resnais from other filmmakers at the time is his opposition to escapist cinema that was a norm following the trauma of WWII. Resnais was one of the first filmmakers to document Nazi concentration camps, Auschwitz and Majdanek, in his short documentary *Nuit et brouillard* (Night and Fog, 1955).⁷⁷ He adopted new filming techniques as a means of approximating the tragedies of the Holocaust and Hiroshima-Nagasaki. His films, documentaries as well as features, all have strong connections to the literary tradition of the essay, where text, image, and sound enjoy equal status and where they correspond in a critical and self-reflexive approach. Films like *Nuit et brouillard*, *Toute la mémoire du*

⁷⁶ In his essays "Zwischen Geschichte und Naturgeschichte: Über die literarische Beschreibung totaler Zerstörung" (1982), and "Luftkrieg und Literatur" (1999), Sebald illustrates how postwar literature failed to react to the collective experience of the destruction of German cities. In the first essay, he mainly discusses Hans Erich Nossack's factual account *Der Untergang*, Hermann Kasack's novel *Die Stadt hinter dem Strom*, and Alexander Kluge's book *Neue Geschichten. Hefte 1-18*. In "Luftkrieg und Literatur" (1999), Sebald criticizes a wider range of German writers for their lack of reaction to the Allied bombing campaign, and especially to the total destruction that resulted from the Allied firebombing of German cities in the final years of the war. The main premise of both texts is Sebald's assessment on the one hand of the inability of postwar German writers to come to terms with the destruction of their cities, and on the other, their "rückhaltlose Fiktionalisierung des Themas der zerstörten Stadt" (63).

⁷⁷ Considering that the Holocaust looms over *Austerlitz*, it is curious that Sebald does not mention this film in particular. Perhaps it is referred to here by way of exclusion.

monde, *Hiroshima mon amour*, and *L'année dernière à Marienbad* are all products of a close collaboration between Nouveau Roman writers such as Marguerite Duras and Alain Robbe-Grillet and a Holocaust survivor, Jean Cayrol. For Resnais, a fragmentary form of narration that incorporates different media (film and literature) relies both on documentary and fictional material and emphasizes subjectivity—such a form seemed far more appropriate for documenting traumatic memories and histories than historical novels or biographies. Most importantly, Resnais moved away from narrative content and toward narrative form and its investigation. The two Resnais films that find expression in Sebald's text are also prime examples of Resnais's focus on form and technique.

Toute la mémoire du monde is a short documentary film about the setting and institutional preservation of history and memory in the Paris Bibliothèque Nationale. While engaging these themes, it highlights narrative form and experiments with it. The overarching premise of the film is human beings' attempts to organize and at the same time imprison history in an effort to extend the limits of our own memory. The library for Resnais represents a "model memory" with its various divisions operating as safeguards of this universal memory bank. The film explores all of the library's departments: Prints, Engravings, Medals and Antiques, Periodicals, Maps, and Manuscripts, all the while emphasizing that "those in charge of its treasures catalog them, they sort them, analyze them, classify them, and number them methodically." Just like the library, the film frequently generates lists in order to convey the sense of the library's operating system. This stringent categorization, both visually in Resnais's film and institutionally at the level of the library itself, creates dizzying effects in the viewer. The film conceives of memory as a labyrinth, foregrounding the deceptive nature of visual and textual

representations. Resnais characterizes the library's act of preservation by disorienting shots that juxtapose extreme close-ups with wide angle, camera movement that alternates between slow motion and fast-forward effect, and through the change of narrative perspective. The camera often moves up and down the stairways, in and out of rooms, and in two instances (in the beginning and towards the end of the film) it focuses on the upward and downward movements of the elevator. Moreover, there are many shots that depict endless corridors and the library's shelves, stairways, and stacks of manuscripts that look like imaginary cityscapes. At one point the narrator remarks that each new addition to the library finds its exact spot "in the maze of shelves over 60 miles long." The frame that follows this observation is one of an endless stairway as seen from the bird's eye perspective, so that it looks like a spiral or a labyrinth.



Depicting the library as a labyrinth further solidifies the idea that its organizational strategies for maximizing access also hinder access.

From the outset, the emphasis lies on the way the film (and the library) is constructed. *Toute la mémoire du monde* begins with a slow tracking shot depicting a

film camera enveloped in darkness, as if to make its viewers aware of the medium itself and to underline that the images that follow are mediated through the lens of the camera. In other words, the opening shot establishes the self-referential nature of the film and of the film medium itself. As the camera pans into the basement of the library, the narrator observes: “Because he has a short memory, man amasses countless memory aides.” The narrator then pauses, and we witness a visual rendering of the opening sentence: a shot traversing a dark room filled with dusty manuscripts stacked in irregular and unsteady towers, and more books crammed onto overloaded shelves. What we really observe is a space hidden from the human eye where documents undergo a process of slow deterioration. Resnais’s words and images suggest that humankind has created memory aids not in order to remember, but in order to forget. At the moment when the narrator refers to books as “memory aides,” we see this dark, inaccessible room filled with materials that will most likely forever remain obscure. The critical perspective is thus established from the outset, and the narrator only reinforces it with the comment that follows: “Faced with these bulging repositories, man fears being engulfed by this mass of words. To safeguard his freedom, he builds fortresses.” For Resnais, the library serves as a fortress of knowledge and as a guardian of history and memory. His film challenges humankind’s attempt to ensure direct access to the past and to history by means of categorizing and organizing knowledge.

The difficulty of containing the entire world’s memories can be further illuminated through Resnais’s depiction of the library’s special collections room. There, time is placed out of sequence, that is, the items are separated from their chronology, so that manuscripts of nineteenth century authors, such as Victor Hugo and Emile Zola,

become jumbled together, their particulars leveled when gathered together with the Medieval European map of the world (the Mappa Mundi) and with liturgical texts dating back to the seventh century. The narrator wonders: “Who is to say which treasure is most valuable?” The film’s emphasis on the leveling of difference as a result of the selection and categorization of knowledge not only points to the constructedness of history and memory, but also exposes how these very actions are subjective, and how documents and their organization and classification manipulate human perception. Resnais both underlines and challenges the criteria by which certain documents are organized.

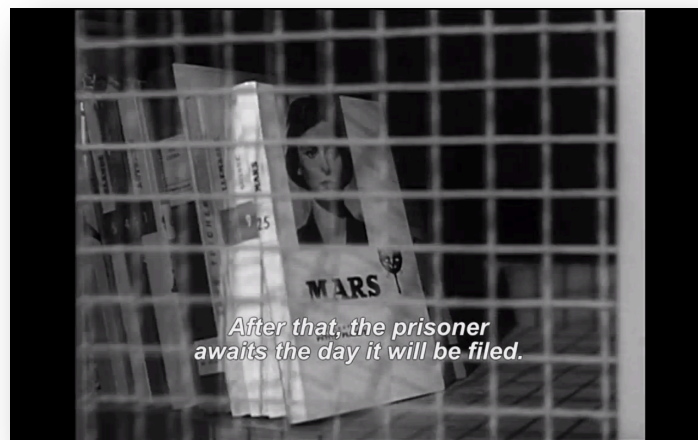
Indeed, the dialectic between the confinement and the expansion of knowledge figures centrally throughout the film. The long tracking shots of endless corridors and bookshelves give an impression of a static world, suggesting a sense of entrapment. Through a juxtaposition of indoor and outdoor shots the camera seeks to further problematize the library’s claim to preservation of memory. From the library’s reading room, the camera cuts to the outdoor shot of the dome of the library, which itself is under construction, tracks using a fast-motion effect along the stairway, and then suddenly cuts to a high angle interior shot that overlooks the reading room. “In Paris, words are imprisoned in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Everything printed in France is found here,” the narrator informs us. On one hand, the library provides access, adventure, and liberation, which are represented by the outdoor shots. On the other hand, the indoor shots portray the library as a place of containment. The montage of such associative editing blurs the boundary between inside and outside, between private and public, creating a sense of distance. In other words, the camera depicts the immensity of the library and the many challenges it faces to organize and preserve materials, leaving the

viewer with the sense of dis-orientation. How can one comprehend that the library “grows by three million volumes every century,” or that the periodicals department alone “must digest 440 pounds of paper every day”? The film presents the library as a meticulously organized system that imprisons memories in order to preserve the past for the present and the future. However, its promise to merely preserve memories could never be upheld.

The speed of the camera further establishes a sense of bewilderment in the viewer. At times the camera speed is hypnotically slow; at other times it is swift. At one point, the camera moves using a fast-motion effect through endless rows of books, then tracks in reverse through a succession of doorways, all lined and surrounded by books, creating disorienting and claustrophobic effects. Although Resnais does not use slow motion, he experiments with the speed of the camera. He manipulates the images by accelerating them or incorporating freeze frames, so that upon returning to normal speed, the images appear as if in slow motion. This occurs, for example, when the camera finally catches a movement of the library workers and focuses in on a single book. The speed changes, and the camera assumes a static position. The library does become accessible and it appears to fulfill its promise, but it also displays negative attributes: the library workers adopt mechanical movements, emerging as mannequins within the architectural frame. The worker’s cyclical gestures give an effect of alienation and point to the artificiality of history and memory because they reveal that history is composed of fragments that are then ordered together to make an illusory whole. Resnais contemplates the idea of a library as a collective memory aid, a safeguard against universal forgetting, with books and librarians performing as agents in the “slow battle against death.” The oscillations

between slow and swift camera speed and the resulting dizzying effects it generates in the viewer points to the futility of guarding and constructing the universal memory because death cannot be defeated.

From depicting the library as a network and a system in the first half of the film, the second half turns to the single book and its relationship to an individual. While archives and networks are suspect on an institutional level in Resnais's film, texts and persons in isolation present a promise. The film exposes the behind-the-scenes activities of the library, tracing a book from its admittance into the enormous institution to its placement on the shelf, and finally to the moment of its liberation. Resnais's depiction of the stringent categorization and classification of material comes closer to absurdity than it does to rationality. The book is referred to as a "prisoner" until it is checked out, and the camera frames the book as it is literally being locked behind a cage-like door.



Once an individual selects the book, its status changes:

And now the book marches on toward an imaginary boundary, more significant in its life than passing through the looking glass. It is no longer the same book.

Before, it was part of a universal, abstract, indifferent memory where all books were equal and together basked in attention as tenderly distant as that shown by God to men. Here it's been picked out, preferred over others. Here it's indispensable to its reader, torn from its galaxy to feed these paper-crunching pseudo-insects, irreparably different from true insects in that each is bound to its own distinct concern. Astrophysics, physiology, theology, taxonomy, philology, cosmology, mechanics, logic, poetics, technology. Here we glimpse a future in which all mysteries are solved...

It is ironic that the narrator compares humans to insects. While insects work to contribute to the common good, human beings work in isolation and on an individual level. Just as all the world's memories cannot be contained, so too all the world's mysteries cannot be solved, because isolated individuals cannot make a difference in all these matters. If any mysteries will be unraveled in the future, these illuminations will take place on a personal level. In other words, the only way this uniform mass of knowledge can be liberated from the confines of the library walls is through the act of individual selection, or through mental engagement with the material.⁷⁸ The way readers resurrect books from oblivion has certain parallels to the way we remember: we file away memories in our minds and some day we come back to them, like finding a book in a vast warehouse of rows and columns. The library, along with its architecture and inner organization and regulations, becomes a metaphor of the rational human mind and its workings, illustrating this urge to preserve and contain by means of classification and compartmentalization. This is why the narrator refers to the library's catalog as the brain without which "this fortress would

⁷⁸ This act of mental engagement with the material is parallel to what Sebald does with his characters.

be a pathless land.” The complex organization is necessary in order to facilitate access, so that readers can find what they are looking for.

While *Toute la mémoire du monde* deals with the material side of history and memory, *L'année dernière à Marienbad* approaches the representation of memory from a personal point of view. The story revolves around a nameless man who meets a nameless woman at a Baroque resort, named Marienbad, and attempts to convince her that they had already met as lovers last year in Marienbad and made plans to run away together.⁷⁹ Throughout the film, their encounters are both accidental and planned, and the man always continues where he left off, that is, he never gives up trying to convince her that they already met. The woman, however, does not remember (or pretends she does not), and maintains that she has never even been where he says they met. As the man recalls his memories of the last summer in Marienbad to the woman, the landscape around them transforms from shot to shot, while the memories he describes flood into the present moment. Each time he tells the story of how they met, he embellishes it with new details. The film explores the alternative possibilities of this loosely outlined story, leaving one important question up to the viewer: does it matter that one person's past is invented if he recounts it so convincingly that it triggers memories or other imagined thoughts? One possible answer is that one creates reality or memory for oneself, the same way the fantasy of the nameless man becomes reality for the woman.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Resnais's *Marienbad* does not allow its viewers to know with certainty which, if any scenes were filmed in Marienbad. In fact, no filming was done in the Czech spa town, but rather in gardens and castles in and around Munich.

⁸⁰ This is true for the memory theory of Maurice Halbwachs, e.g., with which Sebald was familiar. Halbwachs, a French philosopher and sociologist, is known for developing the concept of collective memory, which he described in his 1950 book *Mémoire collective* ("The Collective Memory").

Through frequent employment of flashbacks, flash-forwards, and freeze frames the film merges past, present, and future, and much like *Toute la mémoire du monde* creates disorienting temporal and spatial relationships in which past and present, memory and imagination become difficult to distinguish. Dis-orienting shots, which are present throughout the film, invite speculation and offer alternative perspectives. The film creates an ambiguity in the spatial and temporal aspects of what it shows through editing and freeze frames that depict impossible juxtapositions, or by repetition of events in different settings. The only temporal mark that makes sequencing possible are the elaborate costumes worn by the female character. At times her dresses are the only indication of change in time. The interweaving of past, present, and future events in a continuous flow also suggests that they are not that different. The evasiveness of time runs parallel to the uncertainty between memory and imagination. The man's repetitive narration foregrounds the subjectivity of memory when dealing with the past, that is, how memory and fantasy are woven together.

The uncertainty of time and the interplay of memory and imagination in *L'année dernière à Marienbad* develop further through the hotel's uncanny atmosphere. The hotel is characterized by empty corridors and salons sometimes peopled by frozen, silent figures that seem to exist in a static world where nothing ever changes. The film conveys a sense of alienation through the strange repose of silent figures that move about the hotel in a series of stylized poses: at times they appear locked in a freeze-frame, then some figures move while others remain frozen; there are figures who pose like statues that surround them, and there is a theater performance even more stylized than the acting in

the film. These figures occupy a space marked by seemingly endless hallways and mirrors that signal alternate meanings and perspectives, thus distorting our vision.



The story itself is uncertain and filled with perplexing details, with mirror images often substituting for reality. At times it is not clear whether we are looking at the mirror image of the character or the character himself. At other times, the narrator's descriptions do not correspond with the actions on the screen, or the narrator's voice blends with that of the actor in the theatrical performance, or minor characters repeat earlier speeches of the narrator verbatim. All these techniques draw attention to the film's construction. The emphasis here is on the form and the constructedness of time, memory, and of the filmic medium itself. Resnais emphasizes that our perceptions of the world are based on mediated accounts, and we have to be aware of this construction. His films therefore leave the viewer with more questions than answers. We are invited to participate in the creation of meaning and add our own associations and possible conclusions.

Of particular importance for Sebald's *Austerlitz* is Resnais's focus on form and architecture and how it comments not only on the inner workings of the characters, but also on ideologies and institutionalized memories. As we shall see, Sebald re-

functionalizes Resnais's conception of time through spatial figurations, while adopting the self-referential, non-linear form of filmic narration. The question is how these aspects appear in Sebald's text and how they govern his incorporation of three important filmic settings, namely the Bibliothèque Nationale, Marienbad, and Theresienstadt. Before discussing the significance of these locations, it is essential to describe the protagonist himself.

Austerlitz: The Battle Within

Sebald's last published prose fiction is also his most compelling work that embodies the paradoxical nature of the human being's capacity to remember. The book starts with the nameless, first-person narrator who approaches Austerlitz in the waiting room of the Antwerp Central Station in the late 1960s. The two engage in what becomes a thirty-year long friendship that is interrupted by a twenty-year span (1975-1997). Accordingly, their relationship can be divided into two stages: the first revolves around their musings on architecture, time, history, and the nature of memory, while in the second phase, Austerlitz tells of his former life as he recovers it. From the outset we learn that Austerlitz is an architectural historian obsessed with monuments of capitalism, especially military fortifications, train stations, archives, and libraries. His true identity, however, remains a mystery until much later in his life and in the narrative. Over the course of the narrative, the two men meet at times accidentally, at times as planned, in different cities in Europe, and they generally resume their conversation where they left

off.⁸¹ On one occasion, while waiting for the train at the Salon Bar of the Great Eastern Hotel in London, the narrator accidentally notices Austerlitz among the guests. Twenty years have passed since their last encounter, but Austerlitz appears not to have aged, and “hat [...] das Gespräch mehr oder weniger dort wieder aufgenommen, wo es einst abgebrochen war” (62, 64). This suggests that Austerlitz operates beyond our traditional understanding of time. He seems to be unaffected by time past and passing. What are we to make of the frequency of their meetings at train stations, especially considering that it is not until the early 1990s (and 200 pages later) that Austerlitz experiences a flashback while at the Liverpool Street Station in London (201). He recalls that he arrived here on the *Kindertransport* in 1939. After his flashback at the train station his forgotten past is gradually re-engaged. This self-realization, however, culminates in a nervous breakdown and a further dislocation of his already distant self. He cannot understand himself because he knows so little about his parents and his own past and heritage. Yet, as he goes in search of his lost origins, the past he never knew threatens to dissolve his present self.

From the beginning Austerlitz embodies a contradiction, why and how can his blocked memory with regard to his earlier life result in continuous conversations with the narrator? The improvisational ability of Austerlitz’s language as experienced by the narrator can illuminate this contradiction. The narrator is astonished how Austerlitz fabricates his thoughts while speaking, “wie er sozusagen aus der Zerstretheit heraus die ausgewogensten Sätze entwickeln konnte, und wie für ihn die erzählerische Vermittlung seiner Sachkenntnisse die schrittweise Annäherung an eine Art Metaphysik der Geschichte gewesen ist, in der das Erinnernte noch einmal lebendig wurde” (22-23). The intertextual reference in this passage can be traced back to Kleist’s essay entitled, “Über

⁸¹ This echoes the random, as well as planned encounters between the couple in Resnais’s *Marienbad*.

die allmähliche Verfertigungen der Gedanken beim Reden.” In the essay, Kleist advises a friend to engage in face-to-face interaction when solving problems that cannot be illuminated by any other means. “Die Idee kommt beim Sprechen,” writes Kleist (7). He believed that verbalizing one’s thoughts forces one to find an end to a beginning and provide structure to oncoming ideas. Kleist’s method of communication finds an echo in Sebald’s confessional model in *Austerlitz*, for it is only through the face-to-face interaction with the narrator that Austerlitz can begin to assemble the pieces of his past. This narrative situation underwrites the process by which Austerlitz gradually comes to terms with his own memories and is slowly able to “narrativize” the fragments he has compiled.

The narrator constructs chronological and geographical labyrinths that mirror the sense of dislocation that plagues Austerlitz his entire life. Austerlitz’s mental collapse is reflected in the text through the abandonment of linguistic conventions, such as the lack of paragraph breaks, and the employment of long sentences with countless modifiers. While Sebald’s other books are episodic in nature, composed of fragments of travel, biography, memoir, and natural history, *Austerlitz* is one long unfolding narrative, without numbered chapters or paragraph breaks. The story of Austerlitz’s life emerges from a sentence structure rich in subordinate clauses that further supply the reader with chains of associations on figures and topics that might or might not directly relate to the issue at hand. The structure of the text reflects both Austerlitz’s ability to put his ideas together in perfectly balanced sentences as he talks, and the difficulty in representing traumatic memories. In fact, the entire book can be seen as a continuous report consisting of the narrator’s recollections of the words of Austerlitz, who in turn often quotes his

conversation partners and other sources. The periscopic form of narration, exemplified by repeated formulations of “sagte mir,“ “sagte Austerlitz,” and an additional “sagte der Erzähler” inserted by the reader, creates a multi-dimensional structure of narration that at times estranges the reader from the content, shifting the focus of interest from what the text conveys to how the text is constructed.⁸² Sebald’s insistent use of reported speech underlines that these instances are mediated and that we as readers are even further removed from the identity than the narrator or Austerlitz himself. The text creates a labyrinth of unmarked quotations, stressing the need of face-to-face encounters between Austerlitz and his listener, while also asking how this citational structure bears on questions of memory and history in this text and beyond.

Another layer that adds to the puzzling nature of Austerlitz’s process of recollection is the incorporation of visual images. As is the case with Sebald’s other prose fictions as well, there are many black-and-white images scattered throughout *Austerlitz*. Uncaptioned and eighty-seven in count, they punctuate the narrative that is over 400 pages long. Compared to Sebald’s other books, *Austerlitz* is clearly a work of fiction and the one in which the status of images becomes the most debatable.⁸³ The visual material in *Austerlitz* comprises photographs of façades, people, places, paintings, drawings, architectural plans, maps, film stills, receipts, stamps, and images with an uncertain status. How they interact with the text varies: at times they interrupt single words, at

⁸² The periscopic form of narration refers to indirect speech, retelling of what is heard from others. As Sebald explains in an interview: "What [Bernhard] achieved, I think, was also to move away from the standard pattern of the standard novel. He only tells you in his books what he heard from others so he invented, as it were, a kind of periscopic form of narrative so you're always sure that what he tells you is related at one remove, at two removes, at two or three. And that appeals to me very much.... Bernhard single-handedly, I think, invented a new form of narrating which appealed to me from the start." Sebald's KCRW interview, December http://www.kcrw.com/etc/programs/bw/bw011206w_g_sebald.

⁸³ Austerlitz is known to be a composite of several real people. In an interview, Sebald explains that the cover photograph is a boyhood picture of a real architectural historian, one of his friends.

times they appear in the middle of a sentence, at times an entire page or two are taken up by an image or there is a sequence of images that span several pages. Their function within the text can be associative, illustrative, documentary, speculative, and contradictory. For example, the very first image we encounter is the book's cover, which depicts a boy dressed in a white cavalier's outfit. The reader rightfully assumes that this must be a picture of young Austerlitz, and indeed it reappears as such later in the text. However, if Austerlitz is an invented character, then this image must necessarily depict someone else. If we are aware of one contradiction, then all the other images stand to be questioned as well. Whether or not the status of images can be authenticated is left up to the reader to determine. Important to note is that these visual images affect our perception of the text, and at times they become analogous to the cinematic technique of freeze frames, where action is frozen as in a photograph or video frame. For Sebald, photographs represent filmic montage and manipulation of time, because they affect the reading process and thereby posit a space for reflection. Austerlitz's fragmented memories translate structurally as a process of fragmenting narrative perspective by the montage of photos.

Moreover, Austerlitz's complex process of recollection can be illustrated through his ambivalent relationship to photography. Austerlitz himself is always taking photographs, a habit he acquires during his school years, and eventually he passes on his photos to the narrator, who employs them to construct his account (414). After Austerlitz has a mental breakdown, some of his photographs help him restore his buried experiences (381). Photos then serve not only as a confirmation of identity or as healing agents in Austerlitz's case, but also as an organizing principle for the narrator to *narrate*. In other

words, for both Austerlitz and the narrator photos provide form that allows them to generate content. Yet photos do not always trigger memories or generate content; they also block them. For example, when Vera presents Austerlitz with a photo depicting him as a child (the photo we see on the cover), he cannot recall either when or where the photo was taken. He observes it like a camera would, first from the wide-angle perspective by examining the background and the framing of the photo, then by zooming in on the finest detail, yet without success: “jede Einzelheit habe ich mit dem Vergrößerungsglas untersucht, ohne je den geringsten Anhalt zu finden” (268). He does not feel moved or distressed, but rather “nur sprach- und begriffslos und zu keiner Denkbewegung imstande” (268). He experiences his past as composed of diverse fragments that do not fit together, “sowie ich eines dieser Fragmente festhalten oder [...] *schärfer einstellen* wollte, verschwand es in der über mir sich drehenden Leere” (316) (emphasis added). It is as if Austerlitz is describing a filmic procedure of fragmenting and focusing. For example, as John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* already established, film (and photography) can single out a scene, a character, a title, and thus remove the detail from a filmic whole so that its implications change. Removed from its context, the meaning becomes transmittable, that is, reproductions create alternative perspectives because their context is no longer attached to them. Austerlitz’s attempt to bring his past into *sharper focus* only *distorts* his perspective. Photographs confirm as much as they obscure Austerlitz’s identity, suggesting that the more he looks at the past (the photos), the more distant he becomes from his present self because he cannot recognize himself in these photos. The existence of his past life threatens his present life because he cannot balance the two. If he acknowledges his “former” self, is his present self annihilated?

Austerlitz's interest in form begins during his school years through photography, but his profession as an architectural historian shapes his understanding of form as means of control. "In der Hauptsache hat mich von Anfang an die Form und Verschlossenheit der Dinge beschäftigt [...]," he says (116). Austerlitz's proclamation points to his curiosity about how form functions as a mode of containment. It is then no coincidence that the majority of photos are architectural plans and images of architecture, such as fortresses, libraries, labyrinths, train stations, façades, hallways, rooms, doorways, and arched ceilings.⁸⁴ What are we to make of these details of architectural history and imagery that are scattered throughout the text? Why such persistence of images depicting form and structure? Even during his childhood, Austerlitz feels dislocated and he is never happy. His entire life is chaotic because of his inability to remember: "Ich merkte jetzt, wie wenig Übung ich in der Erinnerung hatte und wie sehr ich, im Gegenteil, immer bemüht gewesen sein musste, mich an möglichst gar nichts zu erinnern und allem aus dem Weg zu gehen, was sich auf die eine oder andere Weise auf meine mir unbekannte Herkunft bezog" (205). Instead, Austerlitz compensates for his repression of memory with the accumulation of formal knowledge, which in turn functions as a fortress that guards him against the past. In other words, the study of architecture establishes order and provides both stability and a diversion in his life. Indeed, both his academic pursuits and the search for his identity take place in architectural spaces (libraries, archives, train stations, fortresses). While his academic career is focused more on the form (architecture), his personal research is concerned with the content: that is, what occurred in these locations. In order to learn about his past, Austerlitz has to rely on libraries and

⁸⁴ The persistence of images of hallways and stairways recalls Resnais's architectural settings in both *Toute la mémoire du monde* and *Marienbad*.

archives, that is to say, on second-hand information. Yet the more he finds out about his origins, the more entrapped he becomes by archives. In other words, Austerlitz experiences memory and history as a library or a labyrinth devised to imprison him, and the images of architecture are a manifestation of the repressive and protective structure of his own psyche.

While the monolithic constructions of capitalism concretize Austerlitz's repression of the past, the image of a fortress in particular embodies not only the imprisonment through the past and through memories, but also the results thereof. Sebald explains in a 2001 interview with Jean-Pierre Rondes that "Der Festungsbau ist ja in seiner ganzen Anlage, also in den Plänen, die für die Festungen gemacht wurden, geradezu das Exempel für den rationalen menschlichen Geist" (*Auf ungeheuer dünnem Eis* 209). As we know from the scholarship, Sebald's critical perspective on instrumental reason pervades his prose fictions.⁸⁵ In *Austerlitz*, this critique comes in the form of the protagonist's musings about the rationality behind the construction of military fortifications. Most importantly, for Austerlitz these buildings have ideological functions. The fortresses of the eighteenth century are based on two opposing principles: they were built to protect cities from foreign invaders, but also to wage wars, because "die größten Festungen naturgemäß auch die größte Feindesmacht anziehen" (27). This is the reason why, as Austerlitz explains to the narrator, they are designed from the start with an eye for their later existence as ruins (32). Even though Austerlitz claims that his architectural studies end with the nineteenth century, there is an allusion to Albert Speer's "Ruinenwerttheorie" hidden in this remark. Speer pioneered the idea of constructing

⁸⁵ Claudia Öhlschläger writes, "Es geht Sebald wie Foucault um die Unsichtbarkeit der Macht, die sich, wenn man so will, lautlos in der ummauerten Leere der Institutionen entfaltet" (115).

buildings in such a way that after they collapse, they would leave behind aesthetically pleasing ruins. Hitler supported Speer's architectural designs because these ruins would be a testament and a symbol of the power of the Third Reich to later generations. The fortress becomes a metaphor for memory, suggesting that the repression of memories ultimately results in failure. In Austerlitz's case, his greatest enemy is his hidden past. For most of his adult life, Austerlitz is unconsciously haunted by those "memories" he cannot consciously recall. He has erected a fortress to protect himself from the unknown because he is haunted by those memories and stories he does not remember.

Austerlitz's interest in architecture is closely related to his obsession with time and its relationship to power. When the narrator meets Austerlitz for the first time at the Antwerp Station, the latter's musings on architecture culminate in his discussion of the Station's highest symbol: namely, the clock. The standardization of the railway timetables in the middle of the nineteenth century, Austerlitz points out, meant that time "unbestrittenermaßen die Welt [beherrsche]" (22). The clock occupies the central position in the station and thus surveys the movements of all the travellers, who must adjust their activities to its demands. Time is also of central importance in the narrative, and it ultimately connects Austerlitz's contemplations on photography, architecture, and memory. By emphasizing the power of time, thematically and structurally (through implementation of images and complex sentence structure), Austerlitz invites readers to experience a prolonged sense of time. The fact that Austerlitz uses a spatial metaphor ("die Welt") to render time indicates that he privileges space over time.

Austerlitz often muses on conceptions of time throughout the narrative. Most notably, he is convinced that, "Die Zeit [...] von allen unseren Erfindungen weitaus die

künstlichste [sei]" (149). That the concept of time plays a central role in the narrative is evidenced further by many instances in *Austerlitz* in which the term "im Lauf der Zeit" re-appears: "im Laufe der Jahre" (12, 406), "im Laufe der Zeit" (38, 173, 179, 272), "im Verlauf des nächstens Schuljahres" (104), "im Verlauf der vielen vergangenen Jahre" (202), "im Verlauf der Zeit" (225), "im Laufe der Jahrtausende" (405). The metaphors of "Lauf" and "Verlauf" emphasize the flow and succession of temporal moments, whereby time is represented as an "unrolling," as a cinematic sequence. The emphasis on time and transience underlines the constant process of development whereby our perceptions continuously evolve as we focus on times past or time passing as a flow of images. In Austerlitz's conception of time, past, present, and future are not distinguishable, but rather exist in a single dimension.

For Austerlitz, the only acceptable way to think about time is through spatial superimpositions. He feels that "sämtliche Zeitmomente gleichzeitig nebeneinander existierten, beziehungsweise dass nichts von dem, was die Geschichte erzählt, wahr wäre, das Geschehene noch gar nicht geschehen ist, sondern eben erst geschieht, in dem Augenblick, in dem wir es denken" (152). What Sebald's language indicates is that time is being translated into spatial terms, so that instead of the *nacheinander* of flow we have the *nebeneinander* of spatial proximity, and hence of simultaneity. In other words, history only comes alive when it enters into human consciousness in some form. The juxtaposition of transient and preserved time is precisely what Resnais is trying to accomplish in *Toute la mémoire du monde* and *L'année dernière à Marienbad* by depicting the library and the spa resort as if they stood outside of time. In the latter, there are no narrative marks between past, present, and future, but rather they seem to meet in a

single dimension. The characters complain that nothing ever changes in Marienbad, and that the last year blends in with the year before that, and the year before that. Marienbad's time is not measured by the clock, but rather through spatial figurations. As the male character tries to convince the female character of their previous romantic encounter, he does so by stressing the location of their meeting (salons, rooms, and gardens), and by pointing out different architectural details that surround them (statues, mirrors, and hallways). The Bibliothèque Nationale preserves all the world's memories for the present and future generations, because, as the narrator remarks, "who knows what will testify most cogently to our civilization tomorrow?" The library, much like its catalogue, is destined to forever be a work in progress, suggesting that time has not passed, but rather past, present, and future exist *nebeneinander*. In Marienbad and the Bibliothèque Nationale time is thus measured by space. Both Sebald and Resnais challenge the perception of time as "passing" and illustrate that, just like the library's claim to preservation of all the world's memories, our chronological perception of past, present, and future is also an illusion.

That Austerlitz conceives of time through spatial metaphors can also be illustrated by a dream that he recounts to the narrator. It involves Austerlitz returning to Prague after a long absence and then waiting for his parents to return from their vacation. When they finally appear in the apartment they are not in their nineties as Austerlitz expects, but rather in their mid-thirties. Just like Austerlitz appears not to have aged to the narrator, so too for his parents time seems to have stood still. His dream parents take no notice of him in the apartment as they go about their daily activities. Even though he cannot reach them in his dream, this encounter leaves a strong impact on him and further convinces him that

past and present are not distinguishable, that the past has not passed, but rather occupies a different spatial figuration:

doch ist es mir immer mehr, als gäbe es überhaupt keine Zeit, sondern nur verschiedene, nach einer höheren Stereometrie ineinander verschachtelte Räume, zwischen denen die Lebendigen und die Toten, je nachdem es ihnen zumute ist, hin und her gehen können, und je länger ich es bedenke, desto mehr kommt mir vor, dass wir, die wir uns noch am Leben befinden, in den Augen der Toten irreale und nur manchmal, unter bestimmten Lichtverhältnissen und atmosphärischen Bedingungen sichtbar werdende Wesen sind. (269)

Central to this passage is the sense of fluidity between the living (present) and the dead (past), which suggests that Austerlitz experiences time in terms of synchronicity. These nested rooms populated by the living and the dead also represent the movement of the narrative, with its complex sentence structure, episodic nature, and thematic oscillation between memory and forgetting, past and present. According to Austerlitz, we do not understand the laws governing the return of the past. What separates us from the past is not time passed and passing, but rather certain lights and atmospheric conditions. The past is not located back in time but rather in another space.

Austerlitz is obsessed with architectural spaces that suffocate him. Three locations—namely the Bibliothèque Nationale, Marienbad, and Theresienstadt—also mark three pivotal moments in the narrative. The architectural layout of each location is structured as a labyrinth, a reason to get lost in and travel through time and space. In these filmic and architectural settings, and through everything Austerlitz learns about them, he attempts to recapture his past. In the process, however, he becomes a prisoner of

architecture and thus of history. It is no coincidence that these locations are also filmic settings, which allow Austerlitz to reference history and memory from another perspective. Sebald appropriates these filmic settings and translates them into his own narrative, adding multiple layers of meaning and interpretation.

Bibliothèque Nationale: The Fortress of Knowledge

The first location that has a significant impact on Austerlitz is the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, which according to Resnais's film promises to preserve "all the world's memory." During Austerlitz's study years in Paris he decides, "den Blick nicht von den Gegenständen meines Studiums zu heben," and consequently spends most of his time in the library, the same library Resnais portrays in *Toute la mémoire du monde* (369). In fact, Austerlitz tells the narrator that several years after conducting daily research in the library he sees Resnais's film about it (370). Sebald seldom makes direct reference to films and film directors, so why here?

There is a certain ambivalence that frames Austerlitz's reference to *Toute la mémoire du monde*. Before even naming the film in question, Austerlitz offers his analysis of a particular sequence. Resnais's images of messages racing by pneumatic post from the reading room to the stacks represent for Austerlitz the library's nervous system, while the library itself emerges in his mind as a working organism ("Wesen"), an ever-developing system of information that feeds on words in order to generate more words (371). This act of perpetual movement of information functions as a metaphor for film and for history, which are inherently dynamic systems. After employing the metaphor, Austerlitz proceeds to name the film in question: "Ich glaube, dass dieser von mir ein

einziges Mal gesehene in meiner Vorstellung aber immer phantastischer und ungeheuerlicher gewordene Film den Titel *Toute la mémoire du monde* trug und dass er gemacht war von Alain Resnais“ (371-72). Although Austerlitz sees the film only one time, it takes hold of his imagination, where it assumes fantastic and monstrous dimensions. The reason why Resnais’s film acquires uncanny qualities for Austerlitz is because his memory of the film has become part of his personal memory, suggesting that we do not own our memories, for they are shaped by filmic images. Immediately after mentioning the film, Austerlitz continues: “Nicht selten beschäftigte mich damals die Frage, ob ich mich in dem von einem leisen Summen, Rascheln und Räuspern erfüllten Bibliothekssaal auf der Insel der Seligen oder, im Gegenteil, in einer Strafkolonie befand“ (372).⁸⁶ Just as in Resnais’s film a forgotten book on the library shelf awaits the moment to be freed from the confines of the library’s walls by individual selection, so too Austerlitz’s past awaits the day to reemerge, but it too requires selection, and that is where Austerlitz’s avoidance system comes into play. He can only focus on the architectural history of the nineteenth century, because going beyond that would mean confronting his own personal history, that is, the persecution of Jews by the Nazis. Austerlitz experiences the library as a prison as well as a safe place because he is both drawn and at the same time repulsed by history; it is painful for him to remember but even more painful not to know about his origin.

Austerlitz’s ambivalence towards the library system can be further illustrated by an episode that takes place in the new library in Paris. After a mental breakdown caused by a painful flashback into the past, Austerlitz puts off his research for some time. When

⁸⁶ Another parallel can be drawn to Kafka’s short story, “In der Strafkolonie, ” where writing is accomplished by a machine on a body. *Die Insel der Seligen* (1913) is a silent film by Max Reinhardt and a painting by Arnold Böcklin.

he resumes the quest for his identity, he learns that the old library has been closed and that all the world's memories have been moved to the new, now bigger and digitized library. Yet greater does not correspond to better in this case. The inaccessibility of the new Bibliothèque Nationale is evident right from the outset, as is Sebald's critique of the library as a representation of institutionalized knowledge. Similar to Resnais's film, the juxtaposition of the library's imprisonment (*Strafkolonie*) and preservation of knowledge (*Insel der Seligen*) figures prominently. The library itself is located in the eastern part of Paris and one has to rely on public transportation to reach this "in seiner ganzen äußeren Dimensionierung und inneren Konstitution menschenabwesenden und den Bedürfnissen jedes wahren Lesers von vornherein kompromislos entgegengesetzten Gebäude" (392). The absurdity of the library's architectural design for Austerlitz is that one has to climb a flight of steep stairs that surround the complex on which the library's four towers are located, only to find the entrance in the basement of the library. Austerlitz's movements recall Resnais's shots that depict the library as a labyrinth in which one must move up and down stairways and through corridors. This is also a *constant* motif on the diegetic level of Austerlitz's dreams, visions, hallucinations, etc. Dreams and visions of stair-climbing figure prominently throughout the narrative, but are perhaps most strikingly expressed in the Theresienstadt episode. When he visits the fortress of Terezin, Austerlitz is convinced that the ghetto inmates are still present, "als gingen sie pausenlos die Stiegen auf und ab" (289). Even his own experience while visiting Theresienstadt is characterized by constant upward and downward movement: "ein paar Straßen hinauf und hinunter," "Ich stieg die Stufen hinauf," "aus einem Raum in den nächsten und wieder zurück" (285, 287). This labyrinthine movement is a direct appropriation from

Resnais, one that stresses the fortress/prison/labyrinth superimposition. It is as if Austerlitz is describing his process of recollection, that is, the emergence of memory and his continuous attempts to repress it. On one hand, the dizzying movement of the narrator at the library and in Theresienstadt represents the difficulty of accessing the past, on the other, it points to the difficulty of comprehending the trauma of the war. More importantly, it suggests that some things evade representation, because we cannot find our way out of the maze. The library's four towers that house "all the world's memories" are still largely empty and no one has access to this vacant space reserved for the future. For now, the towers sometimes serve as death traps for birds that lose their way in the library forest and fly into the mirror images of the trees in the windows (398). The house of "all the world's memories" is not equally accessible to all. The paradoxical architectural design corresponds to the library's absurd inner regulations. Its obsession with organization and classification of memories at the cost of accessibility to the human users thus remains foregrounded and suspect.

Austerlitz describes the library in a manner reminiscent of the logic and ideology behind the construction of fortresses. He comes to the conclusion that the library operates on the same principles as any other monumental governmental structure:

das in jedem von uns entworfenen und entwickelten Projekt die Größendimensionierung und der Grad der Komplexität der ihm einbeschriebenen Informations- und Steuersysteme die ausschlaggebenden Faktoren sind und dass demzufolge die allumfassende, absolute Perfektion des Konzepts in der Praxis durchaus zusammenfallen kann, ja letztlich zusammenfallen muss mit einer chronischen Dysfunktion und mit konstitutioneller Labilität. (398-99)

In *Austerlitz* the library becomes a metaphor of a rational human mind that fails due to the over-proliferation and over-protection of information. Austerlitz's description of the library as an exceedingly rational and hence impenetrable universe is reminiscent of Jorge Luis Borges's story "Library of Babel," and Franz Kafka's novel *Der Process* where bureaucracy is labyrinthine. The implication is that behind this strict categorization and inner regulations, senselessness lurks. Just as the fortress built according to rational principles exists today as a ruin, so too is the rational human mind threatened by the other side it seeks to repress. In other words, relying on logic and rationality to protect oneself from the unknown world of emotions is doomed to fail. This is why despite the enormity of the institution, "hat sich diese neue Riesenbibliothek, die nach einem jetzt ständig verwendeten, hässlichen Begriff das Schatzhaus unseres gesamten Schriffterbes sein soll, als unbrauchbar erwiesen bei der Fahndung nach den Spuren meines in Paris verschollenen Vaters" (399). The traces that Austerlitz is looking for are not recorded in history, or if they are, they are lost in the maze. He cannot extend the limits of his own memory through documents and official records.

The notion that the library emerges as a fortress raises a question as to who the invaders are. Austerlitz meets a library worker who recognizes him from the old days, and the two begin a long conversation about the tension between expansion and confinement of information in the library, or as his conversation partner remarks, "die im Gleichmaß mit der Proliferation des Informationswesens fortschreitende Auflösung unserer Erinnerungsfähigkeit und über den bereits sich vollziehenden Zusammenbruch [...] der Bibliothèque Nationale" (404). In other words, memory aides become substitutes for personal memories. The proliferation and disintegration of information thus runs

parallel to our inability to recall and remember ourselves, since all our memories are packaged in material form and housed in institutions that are not as accessible as they appear to be:

Das neue Bibliotheksgebäude, das durch seine ganze Anlage ebenso wie durch seine ans Absurde grenzende innere Regulierung den Leser als einen potentiellen Feind auszuschließen suche, sei, so, sagte Austerlitz, sagte Lemoine, quasi die offizielle Manifestation des immer dringender sich anmeldenden Bedürfnisses, mit all dem ein Ende zu machen, was noch ein Leben habe an der Vergangenheit.

(404)

What separates the readers from the past is not only the library's geographic location along with its institutionalized regulations, but also—most importantly—this intrusive urge to categorize, organize, and subsequently imprison memories so that they may never leave the library's walls. This passage indicates that to operate under the banner of rationality implies masking humanity's biggest fear: namely, the fear of the future or the fear of death. Austerlitz's representation of the library as guardian of memories echoes Resnais's depiction of library workers and of books in general as soldiers in the battle against death. The inaccessibility of the library, moreover, corresponds to Austerlitz's inability to cope with his past. His repression of the past and his unwillingness to face the emergence of memory is based on the same principles of rationality under which the library operates. Austerlitz's obsession with archives and knowledge about architectural history is a screen for the unpursued examination of his own past. It is only in retrospect, after he has begun actively to search for his past, that Austerlitz grasps this.

Marienbad: Austerlitz's Threshold

The second key event in Austerlitz's process of recollection occurs during his second stay in Marienbad.⁸⁷ Austerlitz accompanies a woman named Marie, whom he meets during his archival research in the Bibliothèque Nationale, as she travels to Marienbad to research the development of European spa resorts. Austerlitz has no conscious recollection of his first visit to Marienbad when he was only four years old, "und vielleicht ist es deshalb gewesen, dass ich später, Ende August 1972, gerade dort, in Marienbad, mit nichts als blinder Angst vor der besseren Wendung gestanden bin, die sich damals anbahnen wollte in meinem Leben" (298). Marienbad for Austerlitz represents a missed turning point, one which he will not recognize until Vera makes a fleeting remark many years later: "Noch im vergangenen Sommer sind wir von hier aus nach Marienbad gefahren" (297). Although there is no direct reference to Resnais's film *L'année dernière à Marienbad*, the temporal indication ("im vergangenen Sommer"), coupled with thematic parallels, leave little doubt of its relevance. The film oscillates between past and present, memory and forgetting, in a similar way to Austerlitz's process of recollection, and it parallels his proclamations about the malleability of time and memory. Furthermore, the film serves as a formal background against which Austerlitz's story can develop. As will be shown, the Marienbad episode is of seminal importance for Austerlitz not only because his romantic relationship develops during this time, but also because it triggers the awakening of his lost memories and weakens his "seit Jahren aufrechterhaltenen Widerstand gegen das Aufkommen der Erinnerung" (308). Indeed, in retrospect the Marienbad episode triggers Austerlitz's mental engagement with his own

⁸⁷ Marienbad is a spa town in the Czech Republic. Its architecture comes from the second half of the nineteenth century, during which the rich and famous came to enjoy the carbon dioxide springs.

personal history after he learns about the first visit. His ultimate goal at the end of the narrative is to seek out Marie in Paris.

There are many parallels between Resnais's film and the Marienbad episode in *Austerlitz*, in particular the frozen atmosphere in the hotel, along with its ghostly guests and personnel. Vera's remark about their vacation in Marienbad prompts Austerlitz to call her on the phone that same evening and inquire about the details, even though he normally never uses the telephone. She begins her account with, "Es waren drei wunderbare, beinahe selige Wochen," and then proceeds to describe the hotel as populated with both overweight and weightless guests ("schwergewichtigen und allzu mageren"), who were moving especially slowly ("sonderbar langsam"), and who radiated a certain sense of calm ("strahlten [...] etwas ungemein Friedfertiges") (297). This gives an impression of stylized poses and describes the movement of the actors in Resnais's film. On his second visit, in 1972, Austerlitz arrives with Marie at Marienbad, and the two encounter a similar atmosphere in the hotel. As they enter the foyer, which looks double its size due to rows of mirrors that adorn its walls, it appears abandoned and silent except for the doorman, who takes his time greeting them. Austerlitz describes the doorman using almost the same language as Vera: "Dieser ungemein magere Mann [...] erledigte mit der größten Langsamkeit, beinahe so als bewegte er sich in einer dichteren Atmosphäre, ohne ein weiteres Wort die notwendigen Formalitäten [...]" (300). The emphasis here is on the "dichtere Atmosphäre," which alludes to a conception of time that is locked in and determined by space. The hotel itself appears to belong to another dimension and functions as a portal for Austerlitz to travel back into the past: a passenger elevator is "die längste Zeit schon außer Betrieb," the furniture pieces around their bed

“stammten aus einer vergangenen Zeit,” the writing desk is “seit Jahren nicht abgestaubt worden” (301-02). The slow-moving, almost speechless and/or largely absent guests, along with the signs of neglect in the hotel, portray Marienbad as if frozen in time and as such recall the atmosphere in Resnais’s film. It appears that Marienbad remained frozen in time since it has not changed since Austerlitz was there with his parents in 1938, and since Resnais made his film in 1961. It is as if Marienbad itself is a space that transcends all diachrony.

Another important parallel between *Austerlitz* and *L'année dernière à Marienbad* is how the atmosphere in Marienbad comments on the character’s inner disposition. On a walk through the “menschenleeren Ort,” Austerlitz senses the presence of a double, “als ginge jemand anderer neben mir.” The theme of the double is consistent throughout the text and represents Austerlitz’s “former” self. Every new architectural detail he encounters seems “zugleich bekannt und vollkommen fremd” (306). He feels that “überall um mich her Geheimnisse und Zeichen [seien],” and as if “wüssten die stummen Fassaden der Häuser etwas Ungutes über mich” (312). In all these instances, Marienbad evokes an atmosphere that is uncanny, which further manifests Austerlitz’s inner division. On the one hand he can sense the emergence of memory, and he wishes to be liberated from the burdens of his unknown past, but on the other hand it is too painful and he retreats into his fortress; that is, he repulses the advance of these memories. Although Austerlitz does not remember having spent three weeks in Marienbad with his parents, vague reminiscences haunt him during his second visit:

Ich glaube, sagte Austerlitz, ich habe versucht zu erklären, dass mir irgend etwas Unbekanntes hier in Marienbad das Herz umdrehe, etwas ganz Naheliegendes,

wie ein einfacher Name oder eine Bezeichnung, auf die man sich nicht besinnen kann, um nichts und niemanden auf der Welt. Es ist mir heute unmöglich, im einzelnen zurückzurufen, wie wir die paar Tage in Marienbad verbracht haben, sagte Austerlitz. (308)

Once he learns about his first visit, the second one becomes a memory bank. He is overcome by feelings of both presence and absence, familiar and foreign, memory and forgetting, and he is unable to overcome the uncertainty of his time spent at the spa town.

Austerlitz's inner division while in Marienbad and throughout the narrative manifests itself also when he employs metaphors of ruins and unused spaces to reflect on the nature of memory. It is through the description of architecture that Austerlitz describes his inner psyche. The emphasis on architecture as a metaphor of the inner workings of a human mind replicates Resnais's obsession with form and construction of meaning, because much like Resnais, Sebald reflects on ideologies via their material manifestations. Resnais's Marienbad film sets out to depict the architectural details of the hotel and then its guests, whereby the camera employs the same technique to represent people as it does architecture. In other words, the camera movement does not change when depicting objects and people. The camera alternates between close up and wide angle, between fast-forward and slow-motion effect, and between high and low angle. These techniques stress the involvement of the camera and the director in the creation of meaning, just as buildings and architecture in general tell us about the time and people who build them. *Austerlitz* also begins with architecture, and then the story about the protagonist develops. Architecture as a physical manifestation of Austerlitz's inner

disposition culminates when he compares his inner workings to the Marienbad building damaged by time:

Ich empfand den schlechten Zustand der einst herrschaftlichen Gebäude, die zerbrochenen Dachrinnen, die vom Regenwasser schwarzen Wände, den aufgebrochenen Verputz, das grobe Mauerwerk, das darunter zum Vorschein kam, die teilweise mit Brettern und Wellblech vernagelten Fenster als einen genauen Ausdruck meiner seelischen Verfassung. (306-07)

Important to note is that the ravages of time manifest themselves in material decline, thus again underlining that Austerlitz's understanding of time is based on spatial figurations. That Austerlitz associates his inner workings with architectural ruins suggests he is unable to live in the present once he learns about his other past.

The ruin becomes a metaphor for suppressed memories and corresponds to other structures, namely to the "Verlies" and "Oubliette" that Austerlitz will encounter in the narrative future when he experiences a flashback of having arrived from Prague at Liverpool Street station at the age of 4. When Austerlitz enters the Ladies' Waiting Room at the Liverpool Street Station, it appears to have been unused for many decades. Upon making his entrance, Austerlitz feels like an actor ("so wie ein Schauspieler") who forgets not only his well-rehearsed lines, but the very role he so often played. The suggestion is that the past, embodied here by the Waiting Room, threatens his present: can he still remain the same person once he acknowledges his "former" self, that is, once he steps onto the stage? His recollection of his experience in the Waiting Room is framed by two references to the suspension of time: "Es mögen Minuten oder Stunden vergangen sein" (197); and later "Ich habe keinerlei Begriff davon, wie lange ich im Wartesaal

gestanden bin” (203). The way the light beams penetrate this large room present for Austerlitz a sort of *Lichtspieltheater*. He witnesses curious light trajectories that result in him seeing spirals and eddies projected on the wall, and he envisions huge halls with rows of pillars and colonnades, with vaults and brickwork arches, with flights of stone steps, and with wooden stairways and ladders that extend far into the distance. His vision is also populated by tiny figures who appear to be prisoners escaping from their dungeon (“Verlies”), followed by an image of birds spreading their wings and flying away (198). This dream of imprisonment and liberation parallels his experience in the library and in Marienbad. All the architectural details mentioned above (such as vaults, arches, stairways) reappear throughout the narrative, but they have all been summoned here in a single vision. His experience in the Waiting Room is immediately followed by the never-ending dream in which he finds himself at the innermost heart of star-shaped fortress, “in einer von aller Welt abgeschnittenen Oublette, aus der ich versuchen musste, ins Freie zu finden” (204). The Waiting Room is an unused place where all his suppressed memories come back to him. Significantly, it is here that Austerlitz for the first time in passing mentions Marie de Verneuil but reassures the narrator that he will have to tell him more about her (“von der ich noch mehr werde erzählen müssen”) (199). He is overcome by memories that assume labyrinthine proportions: “Erinnerungen, hinter denen und in denen sich viel weiter noch zurückreichende Dinge verbargen, immer das eine im andern verschachtelt, gerade so wie die labyrinthischen Gewölbe, die ich in dem staubbraunen Licht zu erkennen glaubte, sich fortsetzten in unendlicher Folge” (200). For the first time he recollects himself as a small child, for he remembers that this must have been the same

Waiting Room he arrived at more than a half century ago. Similarly, these unused spaces and ruins in Marienbad represent places where memories remain intact.

Austerlitz's relationship with Marie perhaps best illustrates his inability to function in time and space. The first night with Marie in Marienbad is the only true moment of happiness in Austerlitz's life, as he feels "endlich erlöst zu sein" (305).⁸⁸ However, the next morning he wakes up with feelings of detachment, which he himself cannot comprehend. It is through Marie's involvement, or rather Austerlitz's recollection of her words, that we glimpse another perspective on Austerlitz's inner division. From the outset, Marie insists on an explanation for his detachment: "Warum, sagte sie, bist du, seit wir hierher gekommen sind, wie ein zugefrorener Teich? Warum sehe ich, wie deine Lippen sich öffnen, wie du etwas sagen, vielleicht sogar ausrufen willst, und dann höre ich nichts?" (311). At the time neither Austerlitz nor the reader can understand Marie's concerns, "aber heute, sagte Austerlitz, weiß ich, warum ich mich abwenden musste, wenn mir jemand zu nahe kam, und dass ich in diesem Michabwenden mich gerettet wähnte und zugleich mir vorkam wie ein zum Fürchten hässlicher, unberührbarer Mensch" (312). This passage suggests that the repression of his childhood memories has made him into an adult incapable of loving and being loved. This is why, according to Marie, Marienbad is a "Schwelle" that Austerlitz cannot cross (312). Just as the library functions both as a prison and a holy island, so too is Marienbad simultaneously a place

⁸⁸ Interesting to note is another parallel to Marienbad. In 1916 Kafka and Felice spent ten days together in Mareinbad. After Felice left, Kafka stayed 10 additional days, during which his condition improved steadily. The headaches and sleeplessness subsided. In a letter to Max Brod (12 zum 14 juli 1916) Kafka writes, "Es waren seit dem Tepler Vormittag so schöne und leichte Tage, wie ich nicht mehr geglaubt hätte, sie erleben zu können." In his diary Kafka writes: "Ich war noch niemals, außer in Zuckmantel, mit einer Frau vertraut"(Juli 1916) and again in a letter to Brod "Im Grunde war ich noch niemals mit einer Frau vertraut." Even in 1922 Kafka mentions that he was "in Marienbad vierzehn Tage glücklich" (Tagebücher 29. Januar).

of potential happiness in a future life with Marie and an uncanny reminiscence of the past he refuses to acknowledge and embrace.

The Marienbad episode ultimately reveals Austerlitz's inability to cope with romantic relationships as well as with his own self. Marie is convinced that Austerlitz is driven by fear when he claims that he longs for solitude: "Es ist nicht wahr, sagte Marie, daß wir die Abwesenheit und die Einsamkeit brauchen. Es ist nicht wahr. Nur du bist es, der sich ängstigt, ich weiß nicht, vor was" (312). As Martin Klebes points out, Austerlitz's language parallels the plea the man makes to the woman in Resnais's film.⁸⁹ It is interesting that Sebald aligns Austerlitz with the female character in the film. They both suffer from unexplainable emotions, that is, neither can remember their previous visits to Marienbad, and both must accept alternative versions of the past, which they themselves cannot recall. Austerlitz remains lost in time and space, much like the female character in Resnais's film. His attempts to protect himself from the past by employing rational faculties and constructing a fortress around himself only results in ruins. Finally, when Marie describes Austerlitz as a "Maschine, deren Mechanismus man nicht kennt," it crystallizes the notion that he is controlled by unconscious motivations that remain hidden (311). It is then appropriate that his relationship with Marie begins and ends with Resnais's films. He meets her in the Bibliothèque Nationale, the storehouse of all the worlds' memories, only to lose her in Marienbad, where his repressed past invades his present, and to seek her at the end of his narrative.

⁸⁹ Martin Klebes, in his article on the trope of the *Badereise* in Austerlitz, entitled, "If you Come to a Spa," points out that Sebald's narrator borrows the male character's lines from Resnais's Marienbad film, when the man pleads to the woman: "That's not true! It's not true that we need absence, loneliness, waiting forever. It's not true. But you're afraid" (135).

Theresienstadt: The Final Destination

Austerlitz's most painful confrontation with his personal history is his encounter with the Nazi propaganda film about Theresienstadt. Before Austerlitz's research on the fate of his mother leads him to Theresienstadt, he first hears from Vera about his father's encounter with Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (1935), which in turn establishes a historical context for his later discussion of Theresienstadt. Austerlitz's father, Maximilian, tells Vera about the "spektakulären Reichsparteitagsfilm" that he sees in a Munich cinema, a film that convinces him that the political current in Europe will take a different turn when he, a couple of months after seeing the film, hears the same shouting of the Viennese masses emanating from the radio (247-48). It is as if Riefenstahl's images marched into reality, or foretold what was to come. According to Vera, the film "bestätigte [ihn] in seinem Verdacht, dass die Deutschen, aus ihrer unverwundenen Erniedrigung heraus, nun eine Vorstellung entwickelten von sich als einem zur Messianisierung der Welt auserkorenen Volk" (247). According to Vera, Maximilian further describes the sequence from the film in which, from a bird-eye's perspective, we see a city of white tents from which "die Deutschen hervorkamen und sich in einem schweigsamen, immer enger sich schließenden Zug alle in dieselbe Richtung bewegten, als folgten sie einem höheren Ruf und seien, nach langen Jahren in der Wüste, nun endlich auf dem Weg ins Gelobte Land" (248).⁹⁰ It is peculiar that biblical terms are used to describe the ideology of the Nazis. Indeed, Maximilian's description of the film sounds like an account of the Jews fleeing Egypt.⁹¹ The association between Nazis and the desert

⁹⁰ Sebald also exploits the thematic of the caravan, the tents, and the flight across the desert on three separate occasions in *Die Ausgewanderten* (141, 211, 243).

⁹¹ Significantly, a similar account of the same sequence of events from the film can be found in Sebald's imaginative observation on the impossible encounter between Kafka and *Triumph des Willens* in his book

scene appears to be another reference to a film that remained in Sebald's memory, and found a strong enough foothold to constitute a memory in its own right. In *Austerlitz* then, Sebald aligns two different visions, the belief in the Third Reich as the leader who will bring glory to the nation, and the exodus of Jews to the Promised Land, suggesting that Jews function as estranged, uncanny doppelgängers to Germany, and that Germans appropriated their "story." Since the past reveals that the Nazis executed Austerlitz's parents, the films that his father sees are thus a manifestation of this persecution. In other words, *Triumph des Willens* exemplifies a confrontation with Jewish identity, first in a general historical sense, and second concretely in the case of Austerlitz. Austerlitz's predicament is that he does not feel like he belongs either to the Jews and their exodus to the Promised Land or to the Germans who became their persecutors.

The uncertainty of Austerlitz's identity is further emphasized when he reads H.G. Adler's seminal work about "die Einrichtung, Entwicklung und innere Organisation des Ghettos von Theresienstadt" (335). The Nazis established the forced labor camp during WWII in the fortress and garrison city of Terezin. Significant here is that a former fortress built under the pretense of rationality became a place where tens of thousands of Jews lost their lives at the hands of the Nazis. It then follows that Austerlitz's life-long study of the ideological dimensions of fortresses foreshadows his hidden past. Much like libraries and archives, fortresses are screens that allude to his hidden past as well as illude about it. Theresienstadt represents the ultimate fortress of memory, where Austerlitz's suspicion and critique of ideological components of architecture are most compellingly asserted. Austerlitz delivers a detailed report on the conditions in the concentration camp

review, entitled, "Kafka im Kino." He writes: "Nichtsdestoweniger bleibt einem das magische Bild von den weißen Zelten in der Erinnerung. Ein Volk zieht durch die Wüste. Am Horizont erscheint schon das gelobte Land. Gemeinsam wird man es erreichen" (208).

as described by Adler in one breath-taking sentence that spans over 10 pages and culminates in a reference to a film that was shot in Theresienstadt, entitled *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt* (1944). Russell J.R. Kilbourn, in his essay on architecture and cinema in *Austerlitz*, rightly remarks that “Of Austerlitz’s cinematic intertexts, [...], the most significant is a 1944 pseudo-documentary produced by the Nazis in the Theresienstadt ghetto outside Prague” (142). The film presents the camp as a model Jewish settlement in which Jews lived under the protection of the Third Reich. In an effort to conceal the true nature of the Nazi crime—i.e., the deportation policy—and to mislead the Red Cross inspection, Theresienstadt underwent a massive “cleansing” program. Many inmates were deported prior to the visit, to dispel ideas of overcrowding. The Nazis managed to convince the Red Cross representatives from Denmark and Switzerland that the Jews in the camp lived in productive harmony. In addition, the Nazis documented the ghetto in the film that was shot by the inmates themselves. The Jews were led to believe that the film’s completion would result in their release, but it only secured their swift deportation to Auschwitz. While the ten-page sentence structurally does not allow any pauses, thematically it seems impossible to comprehend without interrupting the text on several occasions. Sebald is inviting the reader to experience a prolonged sense of passing time, much like Resnais manipulates the speed of the camera. The ten-page sentence becomes a labyrinth of historical incomprehensibilities that are delivered in a factual account. This contradiction between form and content points to the difficulty of representing the un-representable—that is, life in the concentration camp in general, and in Austerlitz’s case in particular, because Theresienstadt is the place where his mother’s traces vanish.

Just as Austerlitz labors through Adler's book, so too the reader has to make her way through this carefully constructed sentence that is both thematically and structurally difficult to follow. For Austerlitz, "[war] die Lektüre, [...] beinahe so schwierig wie das Entziffern einer ägyptischen oder babylonischen Keil-oder Zeichenschrift" (338). The theme of "signs" here also corresponds to Austerlitz's experience at Marienbad, where he sees signs everywhere. Despite the fact that Adler describes life in Theresienstadt "bis in das letzte Detail und in seiner ganzen Tatsächlichkeit," the distortion of social life in the ghetto remains for Austerlitz futuristic and extraterritorial (339). In the ten pages that follow this proclamation, Austerlitz, remaining true to Adler, delivers an enormous amount of distressful information in a very compact space, which in effect prolongs the sense of time. How can one comprehend that 60, 000 human beings lived and worked in a camp measuring less than one square kilometer, and how can one imagine a personal space the size of about two square meters? How can one understand that between August 1942 and May 1943 the number of dead reached more than twenty thousand and that perhaps Austerlitz's mother might have been among them?

The ten-page sentence further manifests this historical incomprehensibility by employing many compound nouns that are difficult to pronounce, and then embedding them within a network of countless modifiers and dependent clauses. To convey this information, Austerlitz frequently generates lists and categories, as if to mimic the organizational network of the ghetto itself. He lists the workplaces of the inmates, whereby some of the nouns are difficult to decipher, for example: "in der Bandagistenwerkstatt, in der Taschnerei, in der Galanteriewarenproduktion, in der Holzsohlen- und Rindsledergaloschenerzeugung, auf dem Köhlereihof, [...] in der

Kaninchenhaarschererei, bei der Tintenstaubabfüllung, [...]” (341). We encounter inventories of the professions and the places of origin of those imprisoned, the names of factories where they were forced to work, the diseases they suffered from, and the numerous measures that were undertaken as part of the “Verschönerungsaktion.” In this regard, the text behaves much like a cinematic montage would: namely, by linking disparate elements and suggesting connections through the technique of editing. More importantly, it also echoes the organizational strategies depicted in the Bibliothèque Nationale and Austerlitz’s own experience in the New National Library in Paris. One cannot but associate the organizational networks created by the Nazis with that of the library system, as described in *Austerlitz* and in Resnais’s film as well.

Of particular significance are the two instances in the course of the extremely long sentence that connect Theresienstadt to Marienbad. The first one occurs when Austerlitz reports that the Nazis led elderly Jews to believe that Theresienstadt is really a pleasant resort in Bohemia called Theresienbad, complete with beautiful gardens, promenades, and villas (343). Sebald interrupts this very sentence that contains the words “Luftkurort” and “Theresienbad” with a postage stamp depicting a landscape with trees in the foreground and what appears to be a path winding behind the distant hills to the true destination printed on the stamp itself: namely, “THERESIENSTADT.” The alignment of the image that represents the false Theresienstadt with the word “Theresienbad” that appears in the text right below it evokes the uncanny atmosphere from Marienbad and further points to the manipulative nature of visual and textual representation. While reading about atrocities committed in the ghetto, the stamp manifests the deception that the Theresienstadt film generated. In other words, the

stamp's picturesque setting is misleading because behind those hills lies hidden the true nature of this place.

A parallel between the deceptive representation on the stamp and the image of Theresienstadt that the Nazis wanted to propagate becomes apparent, and it also brings us to the second parallel between Marienbad and Theresienstadt. While Marienbad appears to Austerlitz more like a prison, Theresienstadt emulates the illusion of a spa resort. The “Verschönerungsaktion” gave an impression of a normal life in the ghetto. The inmates, under the command of the SS, were responsible for this vast program: pathways were laid out, park benches were set up, rosebushes were planted, children's playgrounds installed. They converted the old cinema into a theater and a concert hall, opened shops, a bank, a post office, a library, even a coffeehouse complete with sun umbrellas and folding chairs—all to suggest, as Austerlitz says, the agreeable “Kuratmosphäre” (348). The allusions to the spa atmosphere are further underlined when Austerlitz refers to the inmates, who flocked to witness cultural events after the day's work was over, as if they were “Weltreisende auf einem Ozeandampfer” (349). The irony lies in the juxtaposition between the place of recovery and the place of death. Austerlitz uses the same terminology to describe his feelings while in Marienbad. After the first night with Marie, he feels like “ein Seekranker,” while the buildings in Marienbad emerge from the morning fog “wie Ozeandampfer auf einem dunklen Meer” (305, 306). The image of an ocean liner that sails through both locations suggests that his feelings in Marienbad approximate the inner disposition of the inmates in Theresienstadt. The gloomy atmosphere in Marienbad that troubles Austerlitz is reflected in his haunted memories of his visit as a child, but his inner turmoil can best be illuminated through the lens of the

Theresienstadt episode. Similar to Austerlitz, who only in retrospect can begin to approximate his personal history, the reader too must arrive at Theresienstadt to better understand Austerlitz's experiences while at the library and Marienbad.

However paradoxical it may seem, Austerlitz necessarily encounters signs of death while at the spa resort. Indeed, allusions to death and dying haunt the entire Marienbad episode. At one point Austerlitz sees a pigeonry, whose floor consists of animal waste and dead pigeons. The first night he dreams of a servant who brings him a "giftgrünes Getränk," and a French newspaper that consists largely of obituaries in "Briefmarkenformat" (305). This dream image of an obituary in form of a stamp directly corresponds to the stamp of a peaceful landscape in Theresienstadt that interrupts the text—together, these two images reveal perspectives that go beyond the text, pointing to the ways we construct our experience of time, memory, and history. As already indicated, while in Marienbad Austerlitz himself feels followed and persecuted by emotions and memories that are ultimately connected to death. All these instances of death and imprisonment suggest that his experience in Marienbad was a prophecy of a memory that will be triggered twenty years later by Vera's comment. Austerlitz spent "drei beinahe selige Wochen" with his parents in Marienbad and shortly thereafter they were forever separated. This brief moment of happiness corresponds to his second visit, because he then too experiences one night of happiness before he loses Marie "forever." The Marienbad episode signals the end of his romantic relationship, and the prevalence of death in Marienbad also functions as a foreshadowing of his experience with Theresienstadt and the film that captured it.

Austerlitz's confrontation with Theresienstadt best illustrates the inaccessibility of the past via visual and textual representation. Since neither Adler's documentation of life in Theresienstadt nor Austerlitz's visit to the ghostly town can bring him closer to his mother, Austerlitz invests all his efforts into obtaining a copy of the lost film. At first, Austerlitz is certain that he would recognize his mother in the film: "Immerzu dachte ich, wenn nur der Film wieder auftauchte, so würde ich vielleicht sehen oder erahnen können, wie es in Wirklichkeit war, und einmal ums andere malte ich mir aus, dass ich Agata [...] ohne jeden Zweifel erkannte [...]" (350). However, once he finally obtains a copy, he cannot discern anything in the images of fleeting faces (351-56). He is surprised that the videocassette copy of the film consists of a patchwork of scenes assembled together and lasting only 14 minutes, "nichts von all diesen Bildern ging mir zunächst in den Kopf, sondern sie flimmerten mir bloß vor den Augen in einer Art von kontinuierlicher Irritation [...]" (352). Sebald frequently associates words such as, flickering, fuzzy, dissolving at edges, with ghosts and the return of the "dead." The word "flimmern" also evokes flickering images of the silent era, and therefore emphasizes the ephemeral aspects of film and memory. Whether we associate "flimmern" with ghosts or with silent films, in both cases the emphasis lies on transience. The nature of the film medium is not characterized by remembrance but rather forgetting. Ghosts represent suppressed memories that haunt Austerlitz. Documents and images are similar to ghosts, because they too are fleeting, and on their own do not tell the story, they only present facts. Austerlitz's inability to assemble his past via documents suggests that a certain kind of mental engagement with the material is required.

One form of mental engagement with the past is when Austerlitz decides to alter the video and manipulate its format to see if it will reveal more pertinent information. The film's speed and the resulting difficulty in seeing anything more closely in those pictures of fleeting faces that dissolve as soon as they appear inspires Austerlitz to have a slow-motion copy of the fragment made, one that extends it to four times its original length. When Austerlitz creates the slow-motion film of the propaganda video he ends up transforming it into a film in the style of Resnais. In other words, he manipulates time much like Resnais. While at normal speed the film discloses nothing out of the ordinary, slow motion provides him with greater detail, "und tatsächlich sind in diesem um ein Vierfaches verlängerten Dokument, das ich seither immer wieder von neuem mir angesehen habe, Dinge und Personen sichtbar geworden, die mir bis dahin verborgen geblieben waren" (353). The deceleration of the material, coupled with repeated viewing, reveals aspects that would have otherwise remained hidden. The ten-page sentence follows a similar pattern, by forcing the reader to experience a prolonged sense of time. Slow motion as a cinematic procedure becomes in this instance a literary one too. What before appeared to be an agile working force now leaves the impression "als arbeiteten die Männer und Frauen in den Werkstattbetrieben im Schlaf," and "ihr Gehen glich nun einem Schweben als berührten die Füße den Boden nicht mehr. Die Körperformen waren unscharf geworden und hatten sich, besonders bei den draußen im hellen Tageslicht gedrehten Szenen, an ihren Rändern aufgelöst" (353). As already mentioned, words such as fuzzy, flickering, and dissolving at edges are the marks of ghosts. Furthermore, Austerlitz associates the blurring outlines of their bodies with Louis Darget's electrographs, namely the frayed outlines of the human hand. Darget believed that every

living being emanates rays, which are otherwise hidden to the human eye, onto the photographic plate. Similarly, a decelerated copy of the fragment reveals the ghost-like existence beyond the visible world. As Klaus Bonn rightly points out: “Der Propagandafilm, selbst schon verlogen, kommt durch die Manipulation der Zeitlupe auf eine Weise der Ungeheuerlichkeit des Wirklichen nah, die er gerade zu kaschieren suchte. Man könnte das die Ironie des manipuliert manipulierenden Mediums nennen” (174). In other words, the manipulation reveals what the Nazis attempted to hide and mask by means of their own manipulations. The nature of the film medium consists of two seemingly opposing principles: on the one hand, the manipulation of the medium results in propaganda, on the other hand, the manipulation also has the potential to subvert that same propaganda. Although the implications and motivations of each are different, the point is that the film medium is inherently manipulative, and we have to be aware of it. Sebald re-writes the notion of seeing equals believing, into construction delegates the meaning. In other words, there is no pure seeing or knowing. Just as the film medium is inherently manipulative, so too is Austerlitz’s capacity to remember: on one hand he is able to capture so many architectural and historical details, on the other hand he seems incapable of recalling his own history. This suggests that architectural history functions as the screen for his personal history.

As much as the slow-motion video reveals, some aspects will forever remain a mystery. The case in point is when Austerlitz discovers physical flaws in the film:

Die zahlreichen schadhaften Stellen des Streifens, die ich zuvor kaum bemerkt hatte, zerflossen jetzt mitten in einem Bild, löschten es aus und ließen hellweiße, von schwarzen Flecken durchsprinkelte Muster entstehen, die mich erinnerten an

Luftaufnahmen aus dem hohen Norden beziehungsweise an [two-page image interrupts the text] das, was man in einem Wassertropfen sieht unter dem Mikroskop. (353-56)

The image that interrupts this passage is indeed a two page still from the film. An entire page appears to be a heavily pixelated outline of a human head. This is only suggested because on the other page we see a close-up of two male profiles. The immediate assumption is that the one side was damaged by time and these physical flaws also hide a third or fourth figure. Perhaps precisely this damaged spot presents an outline of his mother. The physical flaws allow for creation of new patterns that in turn signal new associations. This highlights the limitation of the medium to convey reality, because his association of the image with extreme close-up or areal photography undermines any clear distinction between visible and invisible, present and absent, authentic and imagined. Images seen from great distances (“Luftaufnahmen”) or extreme close ups (“unter dem Mikroskop”) are still only images, fragments of the undocumented whole. Even when he believes he recognizes his mother in one of the frames toward the end of the film, when a woman’s face engulfed in a dark shadow appears in the corner of the screen, Austerlitz finds it both strange and familiar, and he can never know for sure. The slow motion not only clarifies, but also serves to distort and alter the images.

Austerlitz discovers history he did not immediately experience through films, images, libraries, archives, and wanderings, but at the same time he faces the deficiency of both his experience and his memory. His studies allude to his own history, but also mask its origin. Sebald uses film examples to point to a failure in Austerlitz’s search for identity, because film and other visual media refract and distort the subject matter in

particular and peculiar ways. Images (whether moving or still) and documents do not provide direct access to the past, nor do they bring us closer to our memories. On one hand, Austerlitz shares the fate of the Jewish people because he needs history to find or confirm his identity. On the other hand, he hesitates to identify with the Jews, because he suffers from survivor's guilt. Austerlitz might learn more details and gather more information about the fate of his parents, and consequently he might learn more about his childhood, but this knowledge does not bring him any closer either to his past or to his memories of his parents.

Conclusion

Sebald exploits and replicates in his own textual medium some of the strategies and techniques of the film medium so as to problematize questions of memory and history. Alain Resnais's thematic considerations, such as memory, trauma, and their representation, are prominent anchors in Sebald's work in general, and in *Austerlitz* in particular. *Toute la mémoire du monde* and *L'année dernière à Marienbad* in particular function as blueprints (in terms of technique, style, and structure) for what Sebald is trying to accomplish on the level of form in his own writing/reporting. Analyzing Sebald through the lens of Resnais's films tells us something more about Sebald's protagonist and the construction of the narrative. More specifically, Resnais's employment of flash-forward and slow-motion effect, as well as his use of associative editing and non-linear storytelling, models certain forms of memory-writing that find textual expressions in Austerlitz's process of remembering. *Austerlitz*, while meditating on the writing and filmmaking process, demonstrates how our memories and histories are framed and

constructed. The centrality of film in *Austerlitz* suggests that film's instability as a witness functions as a reflection of Sebald's prose. The implication here is that our perceptions of the world are not only based on the angle and our vantage point, but also on how the information is constructed. In the words of Austerlitz's history teacher, the truth lies in places yet to be recovered:

Unsere Beschäftigung mit der Geschichte, so habe Hilarys These gelautet, sei eine Beschäftigung mit immer schon vorgefertigten, in das Innere unserer Köpfe gravierten Bildern, auf die wir andauernd starrten, während die Wahrheit irgendwoanders, in einem von keinem Menschen noch entdeckten Abseits liegt. (109)

Our perceptions of history, time, and memory are subjective and highly structured.

Memories cannot be contained nor learned. The idea that we can go back to the past via documents and visual material is just another illusion.

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